

WHEN TO MAKE A GAME TRY

Your partner dealt this hand and passed. Two passes to you.

S	South
♠	AJ653
♥	AK6
♦	Q4
♣	Q104

You have a balanced 16 HCP. Some would open this with 1NT; some would open the 5-card spade suit with 1♠. The advantage of opening 1NT is that it tells partner almost exactly how strong you are so he can place the contract level with some accuracy. It also relieves you of a rebid, should partner not support your spades. The advantage of a 1♠ opening is that it will be easier to find a spade fit. If partner has only 3 spades he will not bid them and the suit can get lost. It is usually higher scoring and safer playing in a suit contract than in a notrump strain. Of course, there are methods like kickback and Puppet Stayman conventions to help find those major suit fits over a 1NT opening, but we aren't using them here.

Say you choose to open 1♠ and partner raises you to 2♠. The opponents are silent for once. What do you do now? You can pass or bid on to game. How do you make that decision? There are two determining factors. Your HCP's are one guide. A minimum hand of 12-15 points should always pass. Partner has at most only 10 points and you don't have enough to support a game. If you have 19 or more points, you should just jump to game. Partner is promising you 6 points and will most times, have more points. So it is with 16 to 18 points, like the hand here, that you aren't sure if you have a game. These are the hands that make game tries. A game try is a bid that asks for some help from partner such that you can make your major suit game.

There are long suit game tries where you have a 3 or 4 card suit that is missing some honors (e.g. ♣AJxx). You bid 3♣ and if partner has 1 or 2 honors to fill in, he jumps to game; otherwise he bids to the 3 level to deny help.

There are short suit game tries that tells partner of your short suit and says that if his values are in the other suits and there are no duplicating values in the two hands, he should bid game; otherwise return to the 3-level.

There is a third kind of game try. I call it the “ambiguous game try.” A rebid of 2NT is not natural. It says you are making a game try and if partner has anything special in his hand that can contribute extra tricks, he should bid that suit that contains them; otherwise return to 3 of the major.

Since you have neither a long suit nor a short suit, it is this third type of game try you should use here.

However, there is second determinate you should use to make the decision of whether or not to make a game try. This is based on Losing Trick Count (LTC).

Let’s review the LTC concept. You count any missing ace, king or queen in each suit. You can’t have more losers than cards in the suit. So a hand like yours above, has a 7 LTC: two spades (♣KQ), 1 heart (♥Q), 2 diamonds (♦AK) and 2 clubs (♣AK). Now a minimum opening hand has 7 to 8 LTC. These hands should pass the single raise. A maximum hand has 4 or few LTC. These hands should jump to game. With 5 or 6 LTC, you should make one of the game tries described above.

As opposed to HCP analysis, your LTC puts your hand in the minimum category. Now your HCP and LTC analysis conflict with each other. You should then consider the texture of the hand. You have a flat hand and two of your suits are headed by queens. This should influence your decision to the conservative side. Pass your partner’s 2♠.

West leads the ♥Q, and this is the full deal:

D 9	N North ♠ K87 ♥ 9874 ♦ J7 ♣ K862	W N E S P P P 1♠ P 2♠ P P P
W West ♠ 942 ♥ QJ103 ♦ K98 ♣ AJ5		E East ♠ Q10 ♥ 52 ♦ A106532 ♣ 973
	S South ♠ AJ653 ♥ AK6 ♦ Q4 ♣ Q104	2♠ S NS: 0 EW: 0

You win the first trick and clear the trump in 3 rounds. There is no way to ruff any of your 4 minor suit losers nor your heart loser. You try the the club finesse, but the ♣AJ are badly placed. You end with 8 tricks, justifying your decision to pass partner's single raise. Notice that if you had rebid 2NT, partner would have declined the invitation and rebid 3♠. This would have resulted in a 1 trick set.

You can see how this hand should be played by clicking on this link:

<http://tinyurl.com/jt7whg3> or copy and paste it into your browser. Click on the "Next" button on the bottom to advance through each trick. Alternatively, by clicking on "Play" you can play all four hands and see if you can make the hand on your own