Learning Points – When 23 HCP Is Enough for Game

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Declarer Play Level: Basic/Intermediate

West Deals
Both Vul
MPs

```
              ♠
              ♥
              ♦
              ♣
♠ 753                    ♠ AKJ98
♥ 1075        N          ♥
♦ 864      W  20  E      ♦ AQ92
♣ AKQ5        S          ♣ 9732
              ♠
              ♥
              ♦
              ♣
```

West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	1♠[1]	Pass
2♠	Pass	3♣[2]	Pass
4♠	All Pass		

West leads ♥K

1= 11-15 HCP & 5+♠s
2= Help Suit Game Try

Thursday Night Club Game, October 14, 2010 Mrs. Annease Comer, Director. Cincinnati Bridge Association Bridge Center, 2860 Cooper Road, Cincinnati, OH 45241 (513) 631-8070 . Mike Purcell is my partner. We play a 2/1 version of Precision.
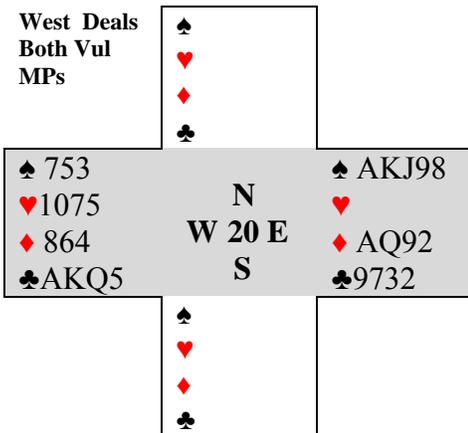
Whether you play Standard American, 2/1 Game Force, or Precision, *Help Suit Game Tries* are a great tool for your bidding arsenal. Point count mavens will notice that EW hold only 23 HCP. Newer players might wonder how game could even be considered. Working Point mavens will note that 23 Working HCP are enough for game when they span 3 of the 4 suits. Losing Trick Counters will see West's 9 losers and East's 5 losers should make for 10 tricks in ♠s 24-(9+5) = 10.

The Bidding

While the mechanics of the auction are the same in Standard American, 2/1 Game Force, or Precision, the inferences available to responder are different in Precision. West knows EW can hold no more than 24 HCP. Opener has asked for help in ♣s. Responder has extraordinary help in that suit. Bidding game is automatic.

The Play

The only question declarer faces is where to place the ♠Q. Partner guessed that South held this card and dropped it for a top board. Notice that while double dummy analysis says EW can make slams in ♣s and ♠s, these contracts are poor percentage goals. They require the ♦K onside and ♠Qx(x) onside or any ♠Qx.
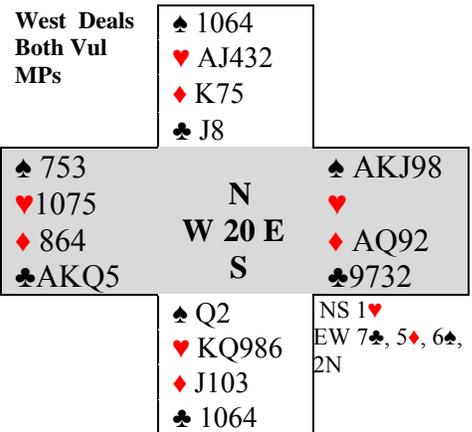
Declarer's choice of plays appears lucky – it's not. Declarer counts 6 winners and 2 or 3 losers. To ensure no ♥ loser, declarer knows he must ruff ♥s 3 times in hand. Playing off the ♠AK hopefully eliminates 4 trumps from defender's hands. If the ♠ finesse were working, declarer might be trading a ♠ trick for a ♥ trick (if ♦s don't break 3-3, a 64% likelihood).

West Deals
Both Vul
MPs

```
              ♠ 1064
              ♥ AJ432
              ♦ K75
              ♣ J8
♠ 753                    ♠ AKJ98
♥ 1075        N          ♥
♦ 864      W  20  E      ♦ AQ92
♣ AKQ5        S          ♣ 9732
              ♠ Q2
              ♥ KQ986      NS 1♥
              ♦ J103       EW 7♣, 5♦, 6♠,
              ♣ 1064       2N
```

The result 4♠ by East making 6 for +480 was worth 5 of 5 match points.

Pair	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
MPs	3	0	3	0.5	2	4.5	3	5	0.5	2	4.5	2
Score	650*	-680	650*	200*	-650	-200	650*	680*	200*	-650*	-200*	-650

*This match was played as a Howell or One-Winner movement, so the Press Report shows positive and negative scores based on the result and direction at the table. The * indicates EW scores.*

Post Mortem

A help suit game try is a natural bid looking to reach game. Partner asks *"do you have tricks for me in my suit? If you have 2 or more go to game. If you can hold my losers in that suit to one or fewer go to game. If you have 1 trick or 2 losers for me in the help suit, use your judgment."*

Help Suit Game Tries typically show a side suit of 3 or more cards and a hand that can play in game if partner's values or shape contribute importantly. Some play that the help suit game try looks for honor cards, others play that the game try asks about loser count in the suit. We prefer the latter – it is more flexible. Playing this way, a new suit by partner at the 3 level after a simple raise asks about your holding in that suit, and not about the overall strength of your initial raise:

- With **1 loser (or 2 cover cards)** bid game – yes, even if you are a bare minimum.
- If partner only has 3 cards in the suit you can be sure he has great values and distribution elsewhere.
- With **2 losers (or 1 cover card)**, evaluate the strength and shape of your hand before committing the side to game (4333 shape, or no outside ruffing values make for poor support hands).
- With **3 losers (or 0 cover cards)**, simply bid 3 of your suit and hope partner makes it!

Judgment here means go on with positive values (side distribution, good/extra trumps) and stop with negative values (4333 shapes, HCP in opponent's suits, poor trumps). Partner generally holds Hxxx in the help suit (where His A, K, or Q). Rarely players make this bid holding xxx or xxxx. This misrepresentation misstates the value of responder's holdings. However certain features in the asker's hand might justify this bid. Some use it tactically to avoid an opening lead in that suit – beware!

While West chose to leap to game on this hand in response to his partner's Help Suit Game Try, in hindsight a raise to 4♣ is more informative *("I have no losers or 3 cover cards for you")*…a rare case indeed.

The ♠ finesse is a practice finesse – one that you cannot benefit from if it wins. If declarer is to ruff 3 ♥s in hand, then a winning ♠ finesse will not stop the loss of either a trump trick or a ♥ trick. Try it with ♦s splitting 4-2 or worse…!

Learning Points
1. Plan your play – where will your winning tricks come from. Then play your plan.
2. Don't take practice finesses. When they fail you lose more tricks than you should.
3. Use Help Suit Game Tries –they are worth their weight in gold. Be sure you and your partner speak the same language.

Keywords: Help Suit Game Try, Plan the Play, Avoid Practice Finesses