

Trial bids

THIS month we shall look at another way of judging whether your hand and partner fit well enough to bid low point-count games and slams. As with Splinters, this tool will be useful when seeking to evaluate unbalanced hands.

What is a Trial Bid?

A 'Trial Bid' is a length-showing bid which allows the partnership to assess whether holdings in a non-trump suit will positively affect the side's trick-taking potential. A player making a trial bid will have at least three cards in the suit bid and his partner will be expected to evaluate his holding in this suit for the purposes of bidding towards game or slam. This can be contrasted with 'Splinter' bids (see *February 2009*) which help the partnership to judge whether short-suit holdings are going to work to its advantage.

How can a Trial Bid be recognised?

A trial bid is defined as the first bid in a new suit following suit agreement, e.g. $1\heartsuit - 2\heartsuit - 3\clubsuit$. Unlike splinters, trial bids never involve a jump. Depending on the level at which you are bidding, a trial bid consults partner about the prospects of bidding game and/or slam. Thus, $1\heartsuit - 2\heartsuit - 3\clubsuit$ is initially assumed to be a trial bid for game, but can be the first move towards slam, while $1\heartsuit - 3\heartsuit - 4\clubsuit$ is a trial bid for slam, as the $4\clubsuit$ bid has already committed the partnership to bidding game.

How does one evaluate holdings in the Trial Bid suit?

When responding to a trial bid, the key is to evaluate the holding in the trial bid suit. A trial bidder will typically have length and some degree of weakness in the suit he has bid, e.g. $A-x-x-x$ or $K-J-x-x$. He

will be looking for his partner to either increase the number of winners or reduce the number of losers in that suit. Thus, an effective way to evaluate is for responder to assess how many 'losing tricks' are held in the trial bid suit. A holding such as $x-x-x$ will neither increase winners nor decrease losers and is therefore a very bad holding, while $A-x$ is bound to have a positive effect. In essence then, three losers is very bad (sign-off), while at most one loser is great (cooperate).

Trial Bidding for game

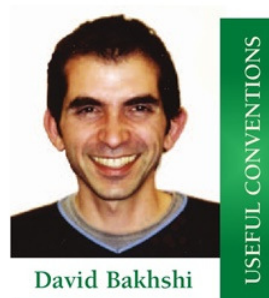
It should be noted that there are subtle differences between trial bidding for game and trial bidding for slam. Opposite the former, responder should either sign-off (three losers) or bid game (one loser). With two losers he should look at the additional factor of trump suit quality – the number of cards held relative to the number promised and also the possession of a top honour (A-K-Q).

Trial Bidding for slam

Opposite an explicit trial bid for slam, similar considerations apply, but high-card holdings are usually more valuable than shortages, as the key to low point-count slams with two-suited hands often lies in the ability to establish the second long suit. Hence $A-x$ is generally more powerful than a small singleton, and $Q-x$ is typically more useful than $x-x$ despite being equivalent holdings in terms of the number of losers.

With three losers, or two losers and bad trumps, the responder should sign-off. With one loser, or two losers and good trumps, he should be bold. Positive actions include jumping to slam, bidding 4NT (RKCB), or making an ace-showing cue-bid – a topic we shall explore next time.

Here is an example of trial bids in action:



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USEFUL CONVENTIONS

♠ K 6	♠ A 8
♥ A J 7 5	♥ K Q 10 6 3
♦ A 8 5 3 2	♦ 9
♣ K 8	♣ Q J 6 5 3

West	East
1♦	1♥
3♥	4♣ ¹
4NT ²	5♠ ³
6♥	Pass

¹ Trial bid

² Roman Key-Card Blackwood

³ Two key cards plus the ♥Q

With only 27 points, the partnership would usually expect to play in game, but assuming that no early club ruff is conceded, then the slam can be made due to the ability to make use of the club side suit.

In summary:

- A trial bid is the first bid in a new suit following suit agreement, and always occurs at the lowest level.
- A trial bidder shows length and a potential source of losers, effectively asking for help to increase winners or reduce losers in the suit bid.
- Opposite a trial bid for game, the responder should sign-off with three losers, or two losers with bad trumps. With one loser, or two losers and good trumps, he should bid game.
- Opposite a trial bid for slam, the responder should bid towards slam with one loser, or two losers and good trumps. Bear in mind that high-card holdings are generally more useful than shortages. □



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