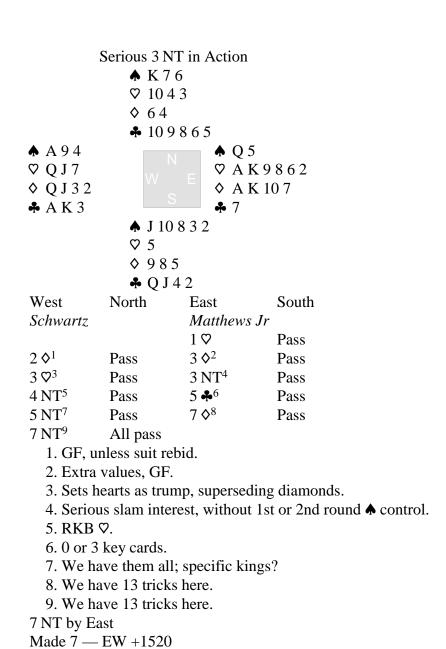
Board 2 East Deals N-S Vul

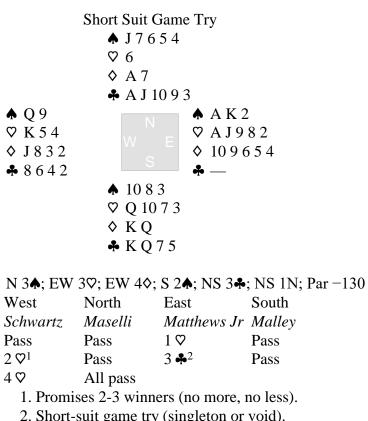


This auction had several highlights, starting with 3 NT. Was my hand good enough to go serious? Maybe, maybe not. But serious without a spade control? Definitely.

Gary could tell that I had strong holdings in the red suits, so with both black suits under control, he took charge. In spite of queen-high holdings in the reds, he was required to bid 5 NT to tell me we had all 5+1 key cards, even though he would probably not bid a grand slam himself. (It's best to bid grand slams that you expect to make at least 75% of the time - too much risk opponents won't even find the small slam.)

From my side, I could tell that Gary must have the red queens to be taking charge. I counted six hearts, four diamonds, two black aces, and one ruff (13 tricks), so I bid $7 \diamondsuit$. Gary could tell my jump was based on a sixth heart or fifth diamond and the undisclosed \diamondsuit K. With ten red tricks plus three black tricks, he converted to 7 NT, for a matchpoint top.

Board 4 West Deals Both Vul



2. Short-suit game try (singleton or void).

4 ♥ by East

Gary and I play 3-way game tries. The next step (2 ♠ here) would be a nondescript game try: responder decides the issue immediately with scattered values - clearly a rejection on this West hand - or bids a secondary value such as Kxx or Qxx. A new suit (2 NT for spades) shows a singleton or void in the bid suit. We tend to use this only when holding six trumps, to avoid tipping a forcing defense (see below). The re-raise asks for trumps and aces.

When trying for game, we first decide whether the hand is indeed worth a game try. This time for East, not so much; but the hand has only six losers, and we were vulnerable at IMPs. The SSGT is by far the most accurate, so I used it, even though I knew it would tip the defense. (With 5 losers, I would have jumped to game.)

Gary promised me two to three winners, and he clearly has only two (∇K and Φ O). However, he figured out almost exactly what I had, and decided to take a shot at game - basically counting ♦ J832 as a winner. The standard rule is to strain to invite, and accept normally, when vulnerable at IMPs, so the normal action would be to sign off in $3 \, \nabla$.

John Malley, one of the top players in New England, was thrilled to be told how to defend. I ruffed the ♣ K and led a diamond. I ruffed the next club, and led another diamond, splitting the suit. After ruffing the third club, I cashed the \heartsuit A, and led my last trump to the \heartsuit K. I tried to claim ten tricks on a heart split. Not so fast! As John puts it, I was two in the glue.

If all that were required were a 2-2 diamond split, game would be 40%, a worthy target when vulnerable at IMPs. However, the need for a trump split reduces that chance to less than 30%. (In $3 \, \heartsuit$, nine tricks can be made by ruffing out the fourth club.)