

Bergen Raises

Why?

When we started this discussion, I tried to emphasize the importance of *consistency*. Bridge is not a game that can be played in a vacuum. In all aspects of the game, decisions must be made based on the available information. In the bidding, we can't be expected to come up with the right answer if we can't accurately predict what we will find in partner's hand. Back when we looked at Jacoby Transfers, I proposed that it would be advantageous, in the long run, (especially against stronger opposition) to super-accept with *all* four card holdings when responder transferred into a major. I explained at that time, that even when we go down at the 3-level with a nine card or greater fit, that the score would invariably be above average. This same principle will hold true when we are responding to a five-card major opening from partner. Any time we hold 4 card support, we *will* compete to the 3-level, and generally, (our old friend – the principle of fast arrival), it will be right to get there as soon as possible. We compete to the three level for three extremely good reasons:

1. We will usually be able to take 9 tricks
2. The opponents will often be able to take nine tricks in their suit if allowed to play there
3. If we go down, the negative score will usually be less than the score the opponents would have made if we had allowed them to play the hand.

Obviously, there are vulnerability considerations, but the opponents will be hesitant to double without trumps, and your nine card fit will offer tremendous protection at the 3-level. In fact, it turns out that the weaker our hand as responder, the quicker we would like to get to our maximum contract, thus depriving the opponents of the room to investigate where *their* best contract might lie. Suppose partner opens 1S, RHO passes, and you hold:

♠ 9642 ♥ 5 ♦ Q8743 ♣ 752

Most players would pass; breathing a sigh of relief that partner hadn't opened a round suit. This is very short-sighted. The player behind you has a bid. What's more, he has a good hand and short spades. *He isn't going to pass!* He is going to come into the auction and the opponents might even find a game. If your plan was to pass initially, and then keep raising spades as much as necessary later, you have fallen into the classic fallacy of standard bidding. The opponents aren't going to have any problems. They know you are broke, and furthermore, they are going to have enough room to determine *exactly* how high they wish to bid. If you bid higher than that level, they are going to double you, secure in the knowledge that they hold the majority of high cards, and that you are going down. Guess what? They will be right. Finally, if LHO *does* pass, it will be because *partner* has the big hand! Your 4 trumps and ruffing value might be just what partner needed to make game – *and you passed it out*. Since you knew you were willing to compete as high as 3 spades once partner opened, why would you want to do anything other than go there immediately?

With Bergen Raises, an immediate jump raise of Opener's major by Responder is pre-emptive

Most likely, you were playing that a jump raise indicates a limit raise. This is a waste of preemption. When partner opens, and you have a limit raise, 90% of the time the hand will be yours. There is no need to preempt the auction because the opponents will not hold enough high cards to enter the auction safely. It's when you have a poor hand that you reap the maximum benefits of the jump raise. Partner is warned immediately that you have a weak hand, and the opponents, who know it as well, are ill-placed to make accurate decisions without getting too high. 4th chair may elect to enter the auction, but opener could have a big hand and it could be dangerous. Without a good suit of his own, 4th chair will often be powerless to do anything other than make a takeout double, and that could have disastrous consequences as well. Even if the opponents can make a game (or even a slam, it will be hard for them to gauge their assets accurately, and may go wrong.

Since we choose to treat a jump raise as pre-emptive, we need a call to show a limit raise when we have one.

With Bergen Raises, a jump to 3D over an opening bid in either major promises a (4+ piece) limit raise.

This turns out to be a very useful treatment. Suppose partner opens 1H and we hold:

♠ A94 ♥ KQ85 ♦ Q8 ♣ J752

We have terrific support and limit raise values. Our minor suit holdings may not be pulling their full weight, so I would be reluctant to make a game forcing 2NT bid with this hand. This is the hand that previously we would have bid 3H. Now we bid 3D. If partner accepts the limit raise, he bids 4H, otherwise he signs off in 3H, declining the

invitation. If the opponents compete over 3H, you are strong enough to double anything they bid. Change your hand slightly to:

♠ A94 ♥KJ85 ♦ 8 ♣ QJ752

This hand is one high card point weaker, but tremendously stronger in playing strength. Playing standard methods you would be forced to bid either 2NT, 4D (splinter), or 4H. Both of the first two options overstate your values, and risk getting too high when partner has a decent hand. You are far too strong for 4H and risk missing a slam when partner's hand is too good. Bergen Raises solve this problem. You would begin with 3D. If partner makes a slam try (by cue-bidding), you are more than happy to cooperate. If partner jumps to game, he will be delighted with your dummy. If he signs off in 3H, you are going to raise him to game anyway, confident that he will not go further, expecting your hand to be better. Once again, Bergen Raises prove superior to standard methods.

♠ J94 ♥KJ85 ♦ 8 ♣ QT752

Here, we have a very nice minimum hand for partner. Once again, we know it will be right to compete to the 3-level, but we don't want to send the wrong message.

With Bergen Raises, a jump to 3C over a major suit opening bid promises a (4+ piece) constructive raise.

A constructive raise is a simple raise with maximum values (usually 8-9 hcp). Above we have a hand just short of a limit raise with excellent trump support. In this sequence, partner has only 1 game try available: 3D. (If he had opened 1S, and our major suits were reversed, he would have two game tries available: 3D, and 3H). Over this *general* game try, I'd probably guess to bid game, and hope that my values would be helpful. When we are bidding spades and partner has two game tries, you have a little more information on which to base your decision.

Naturally, not all 6-7 point hands are equal. My general rule of thumb is that with 0-6 hcp, I make the preemptive jump raise. With 8-9 hcp, I make the constructive raise. Therefore when I make a simple raise to 2H, it shows *either* a 3 card raise or a 7 point hand with 4 trumps. When it's the latter, I will raise again later if pushed.

Assume you are playing Bergen Raises and partner opens 1S. What do you bid with the following hands?

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|----|---------|--------|--------|--------|
| A. | ♠ K964 | ♥ AT95 | ♦ QT3 | ♣ 74 |
| B. | ♠ KT94 | ♥ J63 | ♦ A4 | ♣ A963 |
| C. | ♠ QT87 | ♥ K98 | ♦ K4 | ♣ J963 |
| D. | ♠ KJ942 | ♥ 965 | ♦ 4 | ♣ 8742 |
| E. | ♠ KQ8 | ♥ A953 | ♦ 84 | ♣ A972 |
| F: | ♠ KQ8 | ♥ AJ93 | ♦ 84 | ♣ AJ92 |
| G: | ♠ KQ8 | ♥ J853 | ♦ 84 | ♣ AJ92 |
| H: | ♠ K964 | ♥ AT95 | ♦ KT83 | ♣ 4 |

(A): 3D. Your good intermediates and short clubs boost this hand just enough to make it worth a limit raise. (B): 2NT (Jacoby). Your controls are too strong to do anything other than insist on game. If partner shows a singleton heart, you will investigate a slam. (C): 3C. A solid, constructive 4 piece raise. (D): 4S. Promises long spades, a weak hand, and shortness somewhere. Partner will probably go down for a top score. (E): 2C. Bergen raises don't change other standard systems. Start this with a 2C game forcing bid, then jump to 4S next (fast arrival) to show the 3 card support with no extra values. (F): 2C. Same as last time, but this time you will raise spades to the cheapest possible level to show a little extra if partner has slam interest. (G): 1NT. You have a limit raise, but only 3 spades. Playing Standard American, you would start with 2C, then bid spades cheaply – like hand (F). Playing 2/1, 1NT is forcing, and you jump to 3S at your next opportunity to show the 3 card limit raise nature of your hand. (H): 3D. Make no mistake, you are going to game on this hand, but you don't want to unnecessarily encourage or discourage partner about your strength. 3D is forcing and whether or not partner accepts game, you are going to get there. If partner makes a move toward slam, (probably with 3H), you have enough to Blackwood the hand. You could instead simply cooperate with 3H, but why suggest there may be a problem suit when you know that all suits are covered? This would qualify under commandment #1. If partner thinks there may be a slam, the first one who knows that the partnership is not off two cashing tricks in any suit should take control.