

Bergen Raises – Introduction

Without Bergen Raises, the “standard” method of supporting Partner’s major suit opening is as follows (take the HCP ranges with a grain of salt, as always there is scope for hand evaluation as well as point counting):

1♠	1NT	
2♣	2♠	4-9 HCPs, 2-card support or weak 3-card support
1♠	2♠	4-9 HCPs, 3- or 4-card support
1♠	4♠	4-9 HCPs, 5-card support (preemptive)
1♠	1NT	
2♣	3♠	10-12 HCPs, 3-card support
1♠	3♠	10-12 HCPs, 4-card support
1♠	2NT	13+ HCPs, 4-card support

Additional to the above, some partnerships play that 3NT is a conventional major suit raise of some sort or other, and then, of course we also have Splinter sequences, such as 1♠ 4♦ showing shortness in Diamonds. That’s a lot of ways with which to raise Partner, but apparently it’s not enough!

The major defects of the above schema are as follows:

- It provides no way of preempting the auction when Responder holds 4-card support and a very weak hand. The options with that hand-type are to bid 4♠ which is one level too high, according to Total Trick analysis, or to bid 2♠ which lies about our HCPs and is one below our Total Trick level, or to just pass which is rarely a good idea holding 4-card support for Partner’s major.
- Hands with 4-card support and 4-9 HCPs can be shown with that 2♠ raise, but wouldn’t it be better if we could go straight to the 3-level on such hands (again based on Total Trick analysis);
- That 2♠ raise is seriously overworked, and is used for *both* of these hands:

♠ A764	♠ A76
♥ QJT4	♥ QT42
♦ 8	♦ 82
♣ T986	♣ 5432

There’s quite a difference between these two hands, too great perhaps to be categorized together under the same 2♠ raise.

Yes, Bergen raises are largely about the Law of Total Tricks ... if we have a 9-card fit, we want to get to the 3-level as quickly as possible (for preemptive purposes) and, of course, as descriptively as possible.

Bergen Responses

To achieve the goal of more descriptive raises and fast arrival at the 3-level, Marty Bergen hijacked the 3♣ and 3♦ responses (nobody was using them for very much anyway), and came up with the following set of responses when holding 4-card support for Partner:

1♠	3♣	Constructive 4-card raise, 7-9 HCPs
1♠	3♦	Limit 4-card raise, 10-12 HCPs
1♠	3♠	Preemptive 4-card raise, 0-6 HCPs

It's important to realize that there is a common variation on these responses, namely the switching of the 3♣ and 3♦ bids. In system discussions with a new partner, when the subject of Bergen Raises comes up, the first question to be asked is "Which flavor do you play?" It's moot as to which is better, but of course it's vital that both partners play the same way.

Examples

Partner opens 1♥ and you hold the following hands ... plan your method of raising.

♠ A3
♥ KQ6
♦ T765
♣ 5432

A simple 2♥ bid ... it's "constructive" in strength, but the 3♣ raise is reserved for hands with 4-card support. This raise shows exactly 3-card support.

♠ A3
♥ KQ63
♦ T765
♣ 543

This one does qualify as a constructive 3♣ raise.

♠ A3
♥ KQJ3
♦ T765
♣ 543

That extra Jack pushes this one into limit raise territory, so bid 3♦.

♠ 32
♥ 9653
♦ 7653
♣ AJ6

A preemptive raise to 3♠ ... take away that Ace and it's *still* worth a 3♠ bid, it doesn't matter how weak the hand is ... in fact, some would say "The weaker the better!"

An awkward hand! In terms of HCPs it's on the cusp of a preemptive raise and a constructive raise, but, notwithstanding the 4-card support, the hand is more defensive than offensive. We would bid 2♥ here, ostensibly showing a 3-card raise. Some purists might say that you "never" bid 2♥ here with 4-card support, we beg to differ and suggest that very occasionally it's the right thing to do.

♠ QJ7
♥ 8542
♦ QT6
♣ QT7

Bergen Raises – Finer Points

Follow-Up

After a Bergen Raise of 3♣ or 3♦, a 3-level bid below 3 of the agreed major (such as 1♠ 3♦, 3♥) is a game try, asking Partner if he is at the top of his bid. Non-game bids above 3 of the major are slam tries, of course.

By a Passed Hand

Because of the tendency of many players to open light in 3rd seat, most partnerships nowadays use some version of Drury, a convention which uses 2♣ (and sometimes 2♦ also) as a device for checking the soundness of that 3rd seat opening. Therefore, it's customary *not* to use Bergen Raises by a passed hand, instead a direct raise or a Drury raise is used.

In Competition

Suppose that Partner opens 1♥ and RHO overcalls 1♠. Are Bergen Raises still on? We don't see any reason why they should not be, but whether you play them as on or off in this situation, make sure that Partner is playing it the same way. Similarly, if RHO doubles.

Defense to Bergen

LHO *Pard* *RHO* *You*
1♥ Pass 3♣ Dbl

What does Double show here? There are two obvious treatments, both of them eminently reasonable:

Double is Lead-Directing: Based on probabilities, this is more likely to come up in actual play.

Double is Take-Out: Less likely to come up (especially against a Bergen Limit Raise), but useful when it does ... it's a "free" Double in the sense that it does not commit our side to playing in a contract (the opponents cannot punish an ill-timed Double unless they are also prepared to play in 3♣ or 3♦ doubled).

Our own preference is to use the Double as lead-directing, just based on frequency considerations. When we have a hand that would like to make a take-out Double, we must pass and then, if the auction has not got above our level of comfort, we Double next time around.

LHO *Pard* *RHO* *You*
1♥ Pass 3♣ 3♥

What does that 3♥ cue-bid show? We'd suggest that it asks Partner to bid 3NT if he has a Heart stopper ... the bid would normally be based on a source of tricks, presumably a running minor suit.