

# What is the value of a fourth trump? #2

By Mike Lawrence

In other publications I have talked about the importance of having an eight card fit as opposed to a seven card fit. A basic rule of bidding is that you do not look for a seven card fit. You may end up in one, but you do not try to do so. With that in mind, you should be conscious not to raise with three trumps WHEN YOU KNOW YOUR PARTNER HAS JUST FOUR. How can you tell when partner has four and not five? Or for that matter, three?

On many sequences, you just can not tell. When you can't tell how many partner has, it is OK to raise with three in the hope that he has five. But, on sequences where partner's bidding shows exactly a four card suit, your raise must show four.

Here are some auctions. How many cards does North have in his suit and how many can South have for the raise?

|      |       |      |       |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| West | North | East | South |
|      | 1C    | 1H   | 2C    |

North can have a three card suit. But he can have four or five or six clubs. South is entitled to raise clubs with just three card support. It is unlikely that you will raise a minor suit with three trumps, but it can happen.

♠A 6  
♥7 6 5 2  
♦10 8 4 2  
♣K J 8

This hand, for example, might bid two clubs over the one heart overcall. It has eight nice points and no other decent bid. I know if I held the South hand, I would feel more guilty passing than I would feel guilty raising.

|      |       |      |       |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| West | North | East | South |
|      |       |      | 1C    |
| Pass | 1H    | Pass | 2H    |

North can have four hearts, but he can also have five or six or seven. When your partner's length is unknown, it is OK for South to raise with just three cards. For example:

♠7 3  
♥A Q 9  
♦Q 6 3  
♣A J 10 8 6

The important goal of bidding is to find a fit. Raising hearts with the AQ9 gives partner better information than rebidding two clubs. One notrump is poor since you have a terrible spade holding.

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

With two unstopped suits, raising makes more sense than bidding one notrump. If notrump is right, partner will get another chance to bid it.

|      |       |      |       |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| West | North | East | South |
|      | 1C    | Pass | 1H    |
| Pass | 1S    | Pass | 2S    |

Here, you know for a 99.9% certainty that North has four spades. Since you know he has four and not five, you don't raise without four trumps. (See the discussion at the end of the example hands.) For example, South would raise with:

♠A 8 7 3  
 ♥J 7 6 4 3  
 ♦4 3  
 ♣J 10

But not with:

♠A 10 5  
 ♥J 8 7 6 3  
 ♦K 6 3  
 ♣7 4

With this, rebid one notrump. Raising partner's second suit shows four card support.

|      |       |      |       |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| West | North | East | South |
|      |       |      | 1H    |
| Pass | 2C    | Pass | 3C    |

A two over one response usually shows five or more cards. Partner will be happy to hear about three card support.

|      |       |      |       |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| West | North | East | South |
|      | 1H    | Pass | 2C    |
| Pass | 2D    | Pass | 3D    |

This raise shows four card support. North is expected to have only four diamonds. If he has five of them, he will rebid them and you can then raise with three if you wish.

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|-------|
|      |       |      | 1C    |
| Pass | 1D    | Pass | 1H    |
| Pass | 1S    | Pass | 2S    |

Another example of the raise promising four trumps. Partner bid diamonds first and then spades. This implies four of them.

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|-------|
|      |       |      | 1H    |
| Pass | 2C    | Pass | 2H    |
| Pass | 2S    | Pass | 3S    |

North has four spades and five or more clubs. A spade raise here guarantees four. For example:

♠Q 8 7 3  
 ♥A K J 8 7  
 ♦K 3 2  
 ♣3

♠K J 7  
 ♥A K J 8 6  
 ♦6 5 4  
 ♣Q 9

With the second of these hands, you must make a very good bid. Bid three clubs. Raising spades would show four. If partner bids three diamonds or hearts over three clubs, you can show your spade support then.

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|-------|
|      |       |      | 1S    |
| Pass | 2C    | Pass | 2D    |
| Pass | 2H    | Pass | 3H    |

How many hearts does South show here? The rule says he needs four to raise responder's second suit. But, logic says South has only three hearts because, with four, he would have bid two hearts instead of two diamonds. For example:

♠A J 8 7 3  
 ♥A J 4  
 ♦Q J 8 7  
 ♣3

|      |       |      |       |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| West | North | East | South |
| 1C   | 1H    | 2C   | 3H    |

Can South do this with three trumps? Answer below.

|      |       |      |       |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| West | North | East | South |
| Pass | 1H    | 1D   | Dbl   |
|      |       | Pass | 2H    |

This raise is an exception. A very important exception. North can have four or five hearts, but South's raise still promises four. The reason is that South has already promised heart support by the double. When South raises, he is putting the final nail in his description, confirming that he has four trumps and not three.

Why is this stuff important? It is important because you need to know as soon as possible that the fit is adequate. If the auction becomes competitive, you may wish to compete if you know you have eight trumps, but not otherwise. It may help you with your game bidding. For instance:

|      |       |      |       |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| West | North | East | South |
|      |       |      | 1C    |
| Pass | 1H    | Pass | 1S    |
| Pass | 2S    | Pass | ?     |

♠10 7 6 2  
 ♥A K  
 ♦2  
 ♣A K J 10 9 6

As long as you can count on partner having four trumps, you can jump to game without wasting time doing other things.

|      |       |      |       |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| West | North | East | South |
| 1C   | 1H    | 2C   | 3H    |

Can South do this with three trumps? In my opinion, the answer is NO. More on this in the future.