

Bergen Raises

In recent years competitive bridge players have become increasingly aware of the superior trick taking potential with a **5-4 (9 card) super trump fit** compared to the standard 5-3 (8 card) trump fit. Although this advantage exists at all combined strength levels, it is especially significant when both sides hold in the vicinity of 20 points and compete for a **Part score contract**. In such a situation the *Law of Total Tricks* holds sway, which predicts that:

- a. when a side holds an 8-card trump fit they are likely to make 8 tricks in their designated trump contract
- b. when a side holds a 9-card trump fit they are likely to make 9 tricks in their designated trump suit

The **Bergen Raises** (created by **Matty Bergen**) are specifically designed to distinguish between a 5-3 and a 5-4 trump fit after Partner opened 1♥ or 1♠ (showing a 5+card major suit). The Bergen Raises are:

1. 1♥ - 3♥ (or 1♠ - 3♠) = **4+ trump support and 2-6 HCP**
2. 1♥ or 1♠ - 3♣ = **4+ trump support and 7-9 HCP**
3. 1♥ or 1♠ - 3♦ = **4+ trump support and 10-12 HCP**

Note that after a 3♣ or 3♦ response – Opener with only 12-13 points can still sign off in three of his major suit, but whatever Opener decides, Responder's bid at the 3-level makes it hard for the Opponents to get into the auction. The above three responses complement the already existing 5-4 super trump fit responses of:

4. 1♥ - 4♥ (1♠ - 4♠) = Pre-emptive raise: **4+ trump support, 6-10 HCP and singleton or void**
5. 1♥ (1♠) - 4♣ = Splinter: **4+ support, 11+ HCP and singleton or void in the suit bid**

The **Jacoby 2NT convention** is commonly used in conjunction with the Bergen Raises. In its standard form it covers all Game force Responder hands which contain 13+ points and 4+card trump support. When the Responder holds 13+ points, the possibility of a Part-score dog fight with the Opponents has receded and the bidding strategy should instead be clearly focused on keeping the bidding low in order to investigating a Game or Slam contract.

As a consequence the pre-emptive use of the 5-4 trump fit has become superfluous, although its superior strength compared to a 5-3 fit of course remains. With this in mind I personally recommend the use of the **Jacoby 2NT** response as an all-purpose Game force showing **13+ points and 3+card** (rather than 4+card) **trump support**.

Also after the **Jacoby 2NT it is the Opener's task to describe his hand**, putting the Responder in charge of the investigation, and of course **it is the Responder** who knows whether the partnership holds a 5-4 or a 5-3 trump fit!

Using the **Jacoby 2NT** response in this way, greatly simplifies the bidding with response hands of 10+ points, and it avoids any possible ambiguity after Responder's first bid of a new suit.

Responses with 3-card trump support now become:

- 1♥ - Pass = **3-card trump support and 0-5 HCP**
- 1♥ - 2♥ = **3-card trump support and 6-10 HCP**
- 1♥ - 2♣ - next time jump raise: 3♥ = **3-card trump support and 10-12 HCP**
- 1♥ - 2NT = **3+card trump support and 13+ HCP**

- When Splinter raises are also used, the 2NT response also denies holding a void or singleton
- Response hands with only 3-card trump support and 10+ points – bid a new suit first, then raise Opener's major

Responses with 4-card trump support:

- 1♥ - 3♥ = Pre-emptive raise: **4+card trump support and 2-6 HCP**
- 1♥ - 3♣ = Bergen raise: **4+card trump support and 7-9 HCP**
- 1♥ - 3♦ = Bergen raise: **4+card trump support and 10-12 HCP**
- 1♥ - 2NT = **Jacoby: 4+card support, 13+ points and no singleton or void**
- 1♥ - 4♥ = Pre-emptive raise: **4+card support, 6-10 HCP and singleton or void**
- 1♥ - 4♣ = Splinter: **4+card support, 11+ HCP and singleton or void in the suit bid**