

## "Bergen Limit Raises"

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As players advance in experience and expertise, they quite appropriately place a *progressively greater* emphasis on bidding and responding in ways that communicate with greater and greater precision both (1) HCPs and (2) card counts. One response system for responding to Partner's opening of a 1-level Major is "**Bergen Limit Raises**".

Bergen Limit Raises were invented by Marty Bergen, the same person who invented the "Rule of 20". Bergen is famous for his admonition, like Yoda's admonition "Points are for No Trump!", Points Schmoints!, and More Points Schmoints!, which actually are the titles of two of his most popular duplicate bridge books!

Experienced bridge players playing suit contracts place great emphasis on the all-important "Law of Total Tricks", which says that about 85% of the time **in a suit contract you can safely bid to a contract level equaling the number of trump cards your partnership holds, minus 6**, pretty much independent of point counts! This is why Bergen places so much emphasis on precise card counts in his bidding advice, such as the "Rule of 5", and his "Bergen Limit Raises".

Bergen Limit Raises involve a response system in which 2 conditions have both been met: (1) Partner opens either **1H** or **1S**, and (2) you as Responder hold **exactly 4** of Partner's bid major. Your Bergen Limit Raises response tells Partner *both* that (1) I have 4 of your bid Major, and also (2) immediately communicates your high card point count within a *very narrow range*. Bergen Limit Raise responses are generally artificial (e.g., a **3C!** response does not say you have Clubs, and indeed you may have zero Clubs!), and therefore when the bids are artificial must be Alerted (**! = "Alert!"**).

BTW, you should **never leave your Partner in a contract involving a suit in which Partner may have none of the Partner's bid suit!** There are more complex variations on the simplified system described here, but some players may find even this simplified convention quite helpful.

### Responses to Partner's 1H Open

**3C!** = "I have a '**constructive**' raise with 4 Hearts and 7-10 HCPs. (I may have even 0 Clubs!)"

**3D!** = "I have a '**limit**' raise with 4 Hearts and 10-12 HCPs. (I may have even 0 Diamonds!)"

**3H** = "I have a '**preemptive**' raise with 4 Hearts and 0-6 HCPs. (I actually have Hearts, and 4 of them!)"

Jeff Tang on the very good "Bridge Bum" website

[https://bridgebum.com/bergen\\_raises.php](https://bridgebum.com/bergen_raises.php)

*cleverly* recommends using the "**C.L.A.P.**" acronym to

remember this bidding sequence: "**C**" = "Constructive", "**L**" = "Limit", "**A**"nd "**P**" = "Preemptive"!

**3S!** = "I have a '**game-forcing**' raise with (1) 4 Hearts, (2) 12+ HCPs, and (3) an undisclosed Singleton or Void. If I lacked a singleton or void, I would instead bid '**Jacoby 2NT**', and partners playing both '**Jacoby 2NT**' and '**Bergen Limit Raises**' know that Responder lacks a Singleton or Void when Responder bids **2NT!** rather than **3S!**." (I may have even only 2 Spades!)"

### Responses to Partner's 1S Open

**3C!** = "I have a '**constructive**' raise with 4 Spades and 7-10 HCPs. (I may have even 0 Clubs!)"

**3D!** = "I have a '**limit**' raise with 4 Spades and 10-12 HCPs. (I may have even 0 Diamonds!)"

**3H!** = "I have a '**game-forcing**' raise with (1) 4 Spades, (2) 12+ HCPs, and (3) an undisclosed Singleton or Void. If I lacked a singleton or void, I would instead bid '**Jacoby 2NT**'." (I may have even only 2 Hearts!)"

**3S** = "I have a "**preemptive**" raise with 4 Spades and 0-6 HCPs. (I actually have Spades, and 4 of them!)"

## Opener's Responses to Responder

Once Responder makes a Bergen Limited Raise response to Opener, Responder has "limited" Responder's hand, by providing very specific information to Opener regarding both (1) trump count and (2) point count. A basic principle of bridge is that **a player who has "limited" a hand never bids again unless then required to do so by Partner**. Here, the Opener confronting a Bergen Limit Raise response is the "Captain" who then sets the final contract.

1. Opener's rebid of the opened Major at the 3 level is a "signoff" bid, and the contract will then be played at that level.
2. Opener's rebid of the opened Major at the 4 level is a "signoff" bid, and the contract will then be played at that level.

## An Extension to Ask Responder for More Information

When the bidding sequence is 1**H**-3**S**!, or 1**S**-3**H**!, Opener knows that Responder has a Singleton or Void. Some (not all) Partners then play a system of inquiry with artificial responses in which Opener can ask Responder to reveal the undisclosed suit in which the Responder holds the Singleton or Void, so that a Slam bid can be considered.

Following a 1**S**-3**H**! sequence, Opener can then trigger an "artificial relay" by bidding 3**S**!. The Responder's artificial response answers, each of which **must** be Alerted!, are:

1. 3**NT**! = "My Singleton or Void is in **Clubs**."
2. 4**C**! = "My Singleton or Void is in **Diamonds**."
3. 4**D**! = "My Singleton or Void is in **Hearts**."

Following a 1**H**-3**S**! sequence, Opener can then trigger an "artificial relay" by bidding 3**NT**!. The Responder's artificial response answers, each of which **must** be Alerted!, are:

4. 4**C**! = "My Singleton or Void is in **Clubs**."
5. 4**D**! = "My Singleton or Void is in **Diamonds**."
6. 4**H**! = "My Singleton or Void is in **Spades**."