

# Symmetric Major-Suit Raises

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*A better system of Bergen-style major suit raises*

by

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## References

1. **The Useful-Space Principle, I.** Jeff Rubens. *The Bridge World* Vol. 52 No. 2, November 1980.
2. **The Useful-Space Principle, II.** Jeff Rubens. *The Bridge World* Vol. 52 No. 3, December 1980.
3. **Bergen Raises.** Marty Bergen. *Bridge Today*. January/February 1994

## Background

Consider the usual unembellished Bergen-style raises of an opening bid of 1 of either major. Independent of the particular major opened, 1♥ or 1♠, 1M say, the Bergen method employs identical 4-card raises for both suits: 2N = game-forcing raise, 3♣ = constructive raise, 3♦ = limit raise, 3M = preemptive raise, etc.

A consequence of using identical bids for raises of both major suits is asymmetry: *there is more room available after the response to a 1♠ opening than there is after a 1♥ opening.* As an example, consider a Bergen-style limit raise of either major, 1♠ - 3♦ and 1♥ - 3♦; in the first case, there is room for a trial bid of 3♥ below 3 of the agreed major suit, but in the second case there is no room at all. This lack of symmetry is symptomatic of any convention or system that uses identical bids for responses in more than one suit. Perhaps the most familiar of these is the traditional 4N Roman keycard-ask; when the agreed trump suit is ♠, a Queen-ask of 5♥ is available following the 2nd step 5♦ response; when the trump suit is ♥, the 5♥ bid is not available as a simple Queen-ask.

The problem, as well as a theoretical basis for creating practical solutions, has been known for some time. Its solution has been espoused by Jeff Rubens in a series of articles in *The Bridge World* in late 1980 to early 1981 as *The Useful Space Principle (USP): Available bidding space should be assigned by a system to those devices that can best use it.* Rubens applied the USP in designing Kickback, a flavor of Roman keycard that allows an identical range of responses regardless of the agreed trump suit. The key to attaining the goal of always having a similar range of responses, independent of the agreed trump suit, is to define the conventional bid, and responses, as a fixed number of steps after the trump suit. In Kickback, the keycard-ask is always the next higher denomination after 4 of the trump suit (the first step). Thus, the Kickback ask is 4N only when the agreed suit is ♠. When the trump suit is ♥, ♦ or ♣, the Kickback ask is 4♠, 4♥ or 4♦ respectively, and a common set of responses can be defined in steps (not suits). 1<sup>st</sup> step – 0 or 3 keycards, 2<sup>nd</sup> step – 1 or 4 keycards, 3<sup>rd</sup> step – 2 or 5 keycards missing the trump Queen, 4<sup>th</sup> step – 2 or 5 keycards plus the trump Queen, etc. An identical strategy can be applied in designing a system of major-suit raises.

## Overview

When the agreed trump suit is ♠, our response structure, in part, resembles the reverse Bergen-style system of raises: 2N = game-forcing raise, 3♣ = limit raise, 3♦ = constructive raise, 3♠ = preemptive raise; each bid promises at least 4 trumps. When the trump suit is ♥, these responses are transposed one step lower in keeping with USP: 2♠ = game-forcing raise, 2N = limit raise, 3♣ = constructive raise, 3♥ = preemptive raise. We also assign a meaning to the bid of 3 of the suit just under the trump suit, 3♥ when ♠ is trumps, 3♦ when ♥ is trumps. It is employed as a universal splinter promising 4+ cards in the agreed major suit, and shortness (either singleton or void) in one of the three side suits. We hasten to add that neither agreement (reverse Bergen or universal splinter) is essential. What does matter is that bids with the same meaning are at the same level in relation to the agreed trump suit. Thus,

<b><u>1♠ Opened</u></b>	<b><u>1♥ Opened</u></b>	<b><u>Meaning</u></b>	<b><u>Space</u></b>
2N	2♠	Balanced Game-Forcing Raise	4
3♣	2N	Limit raise	3
3♦	3♣	Constructive raise	2
3♥	3♦	Splinter Game-Forcing Raise	1
3♠	3♥	Preemptive Raise	0

**TABLE 1: Symmetric Major-Suit Raises**

This system of raises is symmetric because the available space between a bid, and the next available bid of the trump suit, is the same for either major ♥ or ♠. It is this property that enables continuations to any of the conventional raises that are identical in meaning for either major suit, provided that the continuations are defined by steps (space) and not by name (suit). The limit raise continuations suggested below are perfect illustrations of the principle.

The system utilizes the USP by assigning the bids with the most available space to the functions (meanings) where the space is most likely to be useful. This is justification for the order of the game-force, limit and constructive raise bids.

Most important of all in applying a symmetric raise system is to think in steps, and not in terms of denomination. Thus the balanced game force is 1 step above a single raise, so 2N following a 1♠ opening, but 2♠ after 1♥, and so on.

## Specifics

In this section, we suggest continuations to all of the symmetric raises defined above. We make no claim that our suggestions are best, and certainly what works for one partnership will not be ideal for another.

### Balanced Game-forcing Raise: 1♠ - 2N or 1♥ - 2♠

Although not our preferred continuation, the Jacoby 2N system of responses can be adopted. When ♥ is agreed, the responses are adjusted 1 denomination lower:

<u>Jacoby Responses When ♠ Agreed</u>	<u>Jacoby Responses When ♥ Agreed</u>
1♠ 2N	1♥ 2♠
3♣ ♣ shortness	2N ♠ shortness
3♦ ♦ shortness	3♣ ♣ shortness
3♥ ♥ shortness	3♦ ♦ shortness
3♠ extra values, extra length	3♥ extra values, extra length
3N extra values, balanced	3♠ extra values, balanced
4♣ good 5-card ♣ suit	3N 5 ♠'s and 6+ ♥'s
4♦ good 5-card ♦ suit	4♣ good 5-card ♣ suit
4♥ good 5-card ♥ suit	4♦ good 5-card ♦ suit
4♠ minimum, no shortness	4♥ minimum, no shortness

**TABLE 2: Jacoby 2N-like Balanced Game-Force Responses**

The responses when the trump suit is ♥ illustrate the surrogate principle: *When the denomination of the conventional raise is ♠, No-Trump is used as a surrogate or substitute bid to show ♠.* In the table, 2N shows ♠ shortness. This surrogacy (substitution) is typical of symmetric response systems. In Kickback, when a bid of 5♠ is employed as the specific King-ask, the surrogate 5N response shows the K♠.

Another primarily relay-based response structure is summarized here:

<u>Alleyne 2N Continuations (♠ Agreed)</u>	<u>Alleyne 2♠ Continuations (♥ Agreed)</u>
1♠ 2N	1♥ 2♠
3♣ Shape Relay	2N Shape Relay
3♦ Control Ask	3♣ Control Ask
3♥ Shortness / Self-Splinter	3♦ Shortness / Self-Splinter
3♠ Trump Ask	3♥ Trump Ask

**TABLE 3: Alleyne Continuations to the Balanced Game-force**

- The Shape Relay is a system of responses that allows responder to define his exact distribution while keeping the bidding level below 4 of the agreed major. Its advantages include a) concealing opener's shape, b) locating playable secondary 4-4 and 5-5 fits, and c) facilitating 6-Ace Keycard asks.
- The Control Ask is employed only when opener has strong slam interest, but with an unprotected side suit. Responder is asked to locate their unprotected suit(s), or otherwise to describe the locations of first and second round controls in the side (non-trump) suits.
- The Self-Splinter is a slam try which allows opener to describe the location and type of shortness (singleton or void) while transferring captaincy to responder.
- The Trump Ask slam try is a precursor to a Keycard-ask when opener's controls are concentrated in the side suits; then, safety at the 5-level may depend on the combined holding in the trump suit.

A complete documentation of the Alleyne responses is available separately.

Limit Raise: 1♠ - 3♣ or 1♥ - 2N

A significant feature is that after a limit raise there are always 2 steps available below 3 of the agreed major. The 1st step is a shortness-ask slam try (similar to a Mathe Asking Bid); the 2nd step may be used as an unspecified game try.

<b>Limit-Raise Continuations (♠ Agreed)</b>		<b>Limit-Raise Continuations (♥ Agreed)</b>	
1♠	3♣	1♥	2N
3♦	Shortness Ask, Slam Try	3♣	Shortness Ask, Slam Try
3♥	Unspecified Game Try	3♦	Unspecified Game Try
3♠	Sign-off	3♥	Sign-off
4♠	Sign-off	4♥	Sign-off

**TABLE 4: Suggested Continuations to the Limit-Raise**

Following the 2<sup>nd</sup> step unspecified game try, responder accepts or declines the try based solely on the strength of his hand. The 1<sup>st</sup> step slam try recognizes that some limit raises include shortness; when opener has no wasted values opposite shortness, slam may be possible. Conversely, lacking shortness, a limit raise will be based on high cards that may include as many as 5 controls (2 Aces, 1 King). In answering the slam try, responder first denies or confirms shortness, and may subsequently locate the shortness, if any; with no shortness, responder may show the number and/or type of controls held - all below the level of game. Consider the following examples—

	<u>Example 1</u>	<u>Example 2</u>	<u>Example 3</u>
<b>Opener</b>	<b>Responder</b>	<b>Responder</b>	<b>Responder</b>
♠ A K 9 8 4	♠ Q 7 6 5	♠ Q 7 6 5	♠ T 7 6 5
♥ K Q J 3	♥ A 9 4 2	♥ 6	♥ A 9 4
♦ 9 8 5	♦ 6	♦ A 9 4 2	♦ A K 6
♣ A	♣ K 4 3 2	♣ K 4 3 2	♣ 8 4 3

A complete description of this response structure is available separately.

Constructive Raise: 1♠ - 3♦ or 1♥ - 3♣

In this treatment, there is always exactly one available level below 3 of the trump suit. In the simplest alternative, the available bid may be used as an unspecified game try asking responder to bid game with a maximum constructive raise, otherwise to bid 3 of the agreed trump suit.

<b>Constructive-Raise (♠ Agreed)</b>		<b>Constructive-Raise (♥ Agreed)</b>	
1♠	3♦	1♥	3♣
3♥	Unspecified Game Try	3♦	Unspecified Game Try
3♠	Sign-off	3♥	Sign-off
4♠	Sign-off	4♥	Sign-off

**TABLE 5: Suggested Continuations to the Constructive-Raise**

Splinter Game-Force Raise: 1♠ - 3♥ or 1♥ - 3♦

By using a single bid to indicate a 4-card splinter raise of opener's major, the more usual double-jump (Jacoby) continuations are available for other purposes, most profitably picture bids such as fit-showing jumps. In the splinter continuations, a partnership may choose to conceal the specific location of the shortness, or may employ a relay structure to uncover the suit and type (singleton or void) of the shortness. A complete description of this response structure is available separately.

Preemptive Raise: 1♠ - 3♠ or 1♥ - 3♥

These bids retain their original meanings defined in the Bergen Raise system.

Other bids between 3M and 4M

These bids are intentionally left undefined. Various treatments are possible and should be defined by the partnership. Possibilities include differentiation between serious/courtesy slam tries, picture bids (e.g. fit-showing jumps), and so on.