

Major Suit Raises: Bergen, Modified Bergen and other Major Suit Raise Conventions

Paul Tobias, 9/2/2017

Let's start with "Standard" major raises. We assume 2/1 game forcing and 1NT forcing for most of the bids (unless otherwise noted). Also, no competitive opponent bids for now.

1. You have 4+ card support and a game force (13 – 15 points in support): bid 3M (*forcing to at least game in the major – Note: Few people still use this raise as forcing.*).
2. You have 3 card support and a game force (13 -15 points in support): Bid your best suit (but not 2H over 1S unless you have at least 5H!) and next jump in your partner's major (*forcing to at least game in the major*).
3. You have 3 or 4 card support and an invitational hand: Bid your best suit then bid the lowest level of your partner's suit.
4. You have less than an invitational hand (only 6 – 9 support points) and 3+ card support (and you are not very distributional with at least 5 card support) – raise to 2M.
5. You have a weak distributional hand with at least 5 card support: jump to 4M.

More Modern Approach: Partner opens 1M:

1. With 4+ support and an invitational hand (a good 10 to 12 support points) bid 3M – this is a *Limit Major Raise and is not forcing!*
2. With 4+ support and a game force bid 2NT (*Jacoby Convention – you must alert the bid and the responses*): Partner responds with:
 - (1) 3 of a suit when she has less than 2 in that suit (1 or 0)
 - (2) 4 of a suit when the second suit is good and also at least 5 cards in length
 - (3) 3 of the major for a good hand without a singleton or void – shows some slam interest
 - (4) 3NT with a sound opening (14 – 15 pts) without shortness
 - (5) 4 of the major for a minimum hand not interested in slam.
3. With 3 card support and a game going hand (13 – 15 points in support) bid your best suit and then bid game in the major.
4. With 3 card support and an invitational hand (a good 10 to 12 support points), bid your suit and then support major below game (*a jump support rebid is not forcing in this modern approach!*)
5. With 3 or 4 card support and less than an invitational hand, bid 2M.
6. With a weak distributional hand with at least 5 trump support, jump to 4M.
7. With 4+ trump support and game (possibly slam) values and a singleton or void, bid 4 in the short suit (or 3 spades after 1H) – this is a splinter bid (an unusual jump beyond the jump shift level) – and is alertable.

Can we improve over this modern standard approach?

Standard methods bid 2S on both hands below after partner opens 1S.

♠ A764

♥ QJT4

♦ 8

♣ T986

♠ A76

♥ QT42

♦ 82

♣ 5432

There's quite a difference between these two hands, and methods of raising should recognize this.

To further illustrate the power of 4 card support look at these 2 hands:

a) ♠ 9652	b) ♠ 952
♥ A8	♥ A84
♦ K4	♦ K4
♣ T9865	♣ T9865

If partner opens 1S holding

♠ AK984
♥ K62
♦ A83
♣ 72

Then holding hand a) you will often make 5S (losing only 2 clubs if trumps split 2-2) and you are a strong favorite to make at least 4S. Holding hand b) you will be held to 3S or even only make 2S if trumps do not split 3-2.

Bergen Raises remedy this failing of standard methods and are based on four principles that have proved to be as sound and effective as any general rules in Bridge could ever hope to be. These are

- 1) Following the "Law of Total Tricks" you should always strive to compete to a level equal to the total number of trumps your side possesses on hands where both sides have close to the same number of high card points (or especially when your side has considerably less points if the vulnerability isn't unfavorable). That means with a 9 card fit you want to get to the 3 – level, with a 10 card fit, the 4 level.
- 2) The weaker your combined strength is, the faster you want to get to your "Total Tricks" level. When your side has the balance of strength or game going values you can afford to go slowly. (But be cautious about bidding to the 3 – level when vulnerable! You may win and not be happy about it,)
- 3) In addition to showing how many trumps you have, you also want to define your strength as quickly as you can – in particular, whether you are weak (< 7 support points), have a constructive raise (7 – 9), have a limit raise (10 – 12) or are game forcing (13 – 15 or higher).
- 4) Showing singletons and voids is very useful for deciding whether to bid slams.

Bergen raises satisfy these four principles and show the partnership just how many trumps they have as quickly as possible so that competitive bidding decisions based on the Law can be more accurately made. From principle 2) we want jump raises to be made on weak hands with the appropriate number of trumps. On other hands, we want to show both the number of trump we have and also our strength as quickly as possible. The Table below shows the basic bids that apply when partner has opened in 1st or 2nd position and there is no competition.

Basic Original Bergen

	Total Points	Trump	Response
1	5-7	3	1N (only if forcing), then bid 2 of major
2	8-9	3	2H/S (Constructive if 1NT forcing)
3	6-9	3	2H/S Single raise (use if 1NT is not forcing)
4	10-12	3	1N (if forcing), then Jump to 3 of major
5	13+	4+	2N - Use Jacoby 2NT if no singleton or void
6	7-10	4	3C (Note: Some exchange the meaning of 3C/3D (inverted Bergen
7	10-12	4	3D (Note: Some exchange the meaning of 3C/3D (inverted Bergen).
8	2-6	4	3H/S jump to 3 of major (preemptive)
9	13-15	3	The Bergen conventional variation uses 3N to show 3 trump with a flat 4-3-3-3 hand and honors among all suits. Opener can then make a choice of game.
10	2-5	5+	4H/S jump to 4 in major w/favorable Vulnerability (preemptive)
11	13-15	4+	Non-Bergen treatment (used by many players): 3S/1H,4C/D/H is short suit splinter (singleton/void). Use Jacoby 2NT with no shortness.

Original Bergen Replacement of Splinter Bids

12	13-15	4+ and a short suit	<p>3H or 3S (jump shift in other major). With slam interest, Opener can then make a artificial one step bid to discover responder's short suit (singleton or void) or make other appropriate bids:</p> <p>1H - 3S; 3N asks and 4C=Clubs, 4D=Diamonds, 4H=Spades 1S - 3H; 3S asks and 4C=Clubs, 4D=Diamonds, 4H = Hearts</p>
13	16-18	3	4C describes a hand better than a Bergen 3N response, thus 4C show a flat 16-18 points.
14	7-10	5+	4D describes a hand 1 trick better than jumping to 4H/S – usually equivalent to a 3C (7-10) Bergen raise with 5 or more trump.

Some Recommended Extensions or Modifications of Bergen Major Raises

1 – Changing the 3 – card limit raise sequence

The sequence shown in 4 (bidding 1NT and then 3 of the major to invite with only 3 card support) has several problems. Opponents can easily come in over 1NT making it difficult to show your hand. Or, partner can bid 2 of the major and your bid of 3 now could be made on 2 – card support and 11-12 points. Also, you cannot use this 1NT bid if you are not playing a 1NT response is forcing.

There is a way around these concerns used by many Austin “A” players. Play the following:

1M – 3C = 4 card support *and either a constructive raise or a limit raise*. Opener bids 3D if she would go to game opposite a limit raise and responder just bids 3M with the constructive raise and bids either a cue bid or 4M with the limit raise.

Play 1M – 3D to show the 3 card limit raise hand. Now you have no need for the 1NT bid followed by 3M auction (you can keep that bid if you want, but only use it on totally flat 3 – card support hands with almost all your 11 – 12 points in outside suits. Alternatively, use 1NT (forcing) to show either a weak, non-constructive, 3 card raise or less than 3 card support.

2 – Responses Showing Both Singletons and Voids

Over 1H, play a 2S response shows a singleton somewhere (2NT asks where). A 3S response shows a void somewhere (3NT asks where). Responses are now as specified in 12. **Note:** you do lose the preemptive jump response of 2S after partner opens 1H just like you lose the 3C or 3D preemptive jump responses when you use those bids as Bergen raises. But losing the ability to preempt your own partner is not a great loss.

Over 1S, play a 3H response shows either a singleton or a void. 3S asks which – responses are 3NT for a void somewhere, 4C for a club singleton, 4D for a diamond singleton, 4H for a heart singleton. After the 3NT void response, 4C asks where and 4D is a diamond void, 4H is a heart void and 4S is a club void.

Summary: Modified Bergen Major Raises (Unpassed Hands No Competition)

- Partner opens **1♥** or **1♠** – you bid **3♣** with **4+** card support and either a constructive raise or a game invitational raise. Partner asks which with **3♦** if he is willing to go to game opposite an invitational hand. You sign off at **3** of the major with just a constructive **4** card raise
- Partner opens **1♥** or **1♠** and you have a **3** card game invitational hand – you bid **3♦**.
- Partner opens **1♥** or **1♠** and you have a weak hand with 4 trumps – bid **3** of the major. With **5+** card support and a weak hand bid **4** of the major.
- When you have a game forcing raise use **Jacoby 2NT** or some other forcing-to-game sequence of bids.

Modified Bergen Bids After Partner Opens 1H/S (No Competition, Unpassed Hand)

	Total Points	Trump	Response
1	5-7	3	1N (only if forcing), then bid 2 of major
2	8-9	3	2H/S (Constructive if 1NT forcing)
3	5-9	3	2H/S Single raise (use if 1NT is not forcing)
4	10-12	3	1N (if forcing), then Jump to 3 of major (only use with totally flat hand shape).
5	13+	4+	2N - Use Jacoby 2NT if no singleton or void
6	7 - 9 or 10 - 12	4	3C Partner can ask with 3D which range you are – respond 3M with constructive range.
7	10-12	3	3D
8	2-6	4	3H/S jump to 3 of major (preemptive)
9	13-15	3	The Bergen conventional variation uses 3N to show 3 trump with a flat 4-3-3-3 hand and honors spread among all suits. Opener can then make a choice of game.
10	2-5	5+	4H/S jump to 4 in major w/favorable Vulnerability (preemptive)
11	13-15	4+	Non-Bergen treatment (used by many players):3S/1H, 4C/D/H is short suit splinter (singleton/void). With no shortness, use Jacoby 2NT.

Modified Bergen Replacement of Splinter Bids

12	13-15	4+ and a short suit	2S, 3H or 3S (jump shift in other major). Opener makes an artificial one step asking bid to discover if the short suit is a void or singleton and where it is. 1H – 2S; 2NT asks and 3C=Club singleton, 3D=Diamond singleton, 3H=Spade singleton. 1H - 3S; 3N asks and 4C=Club void, 4D=Diamond void, 4H=Spade void. 1S - 3H; 3S asks and 3NT says “Void” and 4C=asks with 4D=Diamonds, 4H = Hearts, 4S = Clubs 1S - 3H; 3S asks and 4C = Club singleton, 4D=Diamond singleton, 4H = Heart singleton
13	16-18	3	4C describes a hand better than a Bergen 3N response, thus 4C show a flat 16-18 points.
14	7-10	5+	4D describes a hand 1 trick better than jumping to 4H/S –equivalent to a 3C Bergen raise with 5+ trump.

What about Passed Hands and in Competition?

One way to maintain much of Bergen Style Major Raises in competition and by passed hands is to incorporate several useful conventions:

1. **Bromad (Modified, 2-way)**
2. **Drury (Modified, 2-way)**
3. **Agreements with partner about which, if any, basic Bergen bids are still “on” in these situations.**

Modified Drury

Partner opens **1** of a major in **3rd** or **4th** position and you are a passed hand with no competing bids by opponents.

1. You bid **2 ♣** to show 4+ card support and either a constructive raise or a game invitational raise. Partner bids **2 ♦** to ask. You sign off at **2** of the major with the constructive raise hand.
2. You bid **2 ♦** with a 3 card game invitational hand. Partner now can sign off at **2** of the major, bid a help suit game try or bid game.
3. Bids of **3 ♣** or **3 ♦** are natural with less than 3 card support and less than invitational values (non-forcing with a long suit).
4. A bid of **2** of the major shows about **6-9** points and **3** card support
5. Bids of **3** of the major or **4** of the major are the same as normal Bergen.

Bergen Style Raises in Competition

After partner opens one of a major and the next hand makes a suit overcall

- A cue bid is used for all hands that are invitational or better with at least **3** card support.
- Raises to **3** or **4** of partner's major have the usual Bergen meanings.
- Other Bergen raises are off, including splinter bids (unless the partnership discusses and agrees to still play them).
- Some partnerships may also agree to play the usual Modified Bergen Raises are still on if partner opens **1 ♥** and is overcalled **1 ♠**.

BROMAD: Bergen Raise of Major After a Double

The bids in the table below may be used by both passed hands and unpassed hands.

Partner	Opponent	Responder	Meaning
1♥ or 1♠ ♠	Double	2♣	8 or 9 support points and 4+ card support or 10 – 12 with 4+ card support (partner asks with a 2♦ bid – you respond the same as in Modified Drury)
1♥ or 1♠ ♠	Double	2♦	8 or 9 support points and 3 card support (Constructive Raise values)
1♥ or 1♠ ♠	Double	2NT	10 – 12 support points with 3 card support (Jordan)
1♥ or 1♠ ♠	Double	3♣ or 3♦	Less than 10 points and a long suit (non-forcing)
1♥ or 1♠ ♠	Double	Redouble	10+ points and (usually) less than 3 card support
1♥ or 1♠ ♠	Double	2 of partner's major	Less than 8 support points and 3 card support (could be honor doubleton)
1♥ or 1♠ ♠	Double	3 or 4 of partner's major	Usual Bergen jump raises

Notes:

- Alert all these bids except cue bids, natural raises, redoubles and natural suit bids.
- The modification suggested in the table where **2♣** can be either 4+ card constructive or 4+ card game invitational is a new treatment but totally consistent with Modified Basic Bergen and Modified Drury (already played by many local players). There is no downside but if the partner of the doubler bids you need further agreements given next.
- Suggested Agreements: If the partner of the doubler bids after your **BROMAD 2♣** (2-way) bid, any bid of the major by opener is to play (not interested in game opposite a limit raise). A double by opener shows cards and asks the **2♣** bidder to bid game if she has a limit raise. A new suit by opener is a help suit game try opposite a constructive raise. A pass by opener asks partner to show a limit raise by bidding anything other than 2 or a non-jump 3 of the major (bid a suit you would accept a help suit game try in or bid 2NT with a max limit raise or a jump to 3 of the major with a minimum limit raise).

A Few 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 and is constructive if playing 1NT forcing.

♠ A3
♥ KQJ3
♦ T765
♣ 543

That extra Jack pushes this one into limit raise territory, so bid 3♦ if playing the original version, 3C if playing the extension version. If partner asks with 3D after 3C, bid 3S (cue-bid below game) or 4H.

♠ 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!" (But I wouldn't do this at unfavorable vul!)

♠ J74
♥ J5
♦ K62
♣ AQ964

Partner opens 1S – you show your invitational hand with 3 trump by bidding 3D. Partner accepts (holding a good 14 point hand) and you are in game. See if you can make it!

♠ J74
♥ J5
♦ K62
♣ AQ964

♠ KQ1063
♥ K6
♦ AQ9
♣ 752

The lead is the diamond 8. You win in hand with the ♦Q and lead the ♠K, losing to East's ♠A. East leads a low heart and you guess correctly by ducking to West's ♥A. Hearts are continued and you win and draw the remaining trumps (they split with 3 in East's hand). What now?

Answer: You have to lose at least one club and want to find the best way to avoid losing 2 clubs. Start by going to dummy's ♠A planning to return to your hand with a diamond and lead towards the club Queen. If the K is on-sides, there is no need for an immediate finesse and, who knows, maybe the King will drop singleton. On the actual deal, played in August at the BCA, East played the ♣10 under the ♠A and, when declarer led towards the club Queen and West played low, declarer recognized *Restricted Choice* was in play and that means it is right to play West for the ♣J and put in the ♣9. Declarer made the contract when East was forced to win with the King (holding ♣K10 doubleton). Note that declarer would go down if he finessed the club Q on the first round of clubs. Also note that if the K of clubs was on-sides and declarer finessed successfully, there would still be 1 club loser so playing the ♠A first cannot hurt, but, as shown in this example, can definitely help.