

Bergen Raises

The Law of Total Tricks (LOTT) is an intriguing and useful treatment of the bidding system, while still staying within the confines provided by SAYC¹. Bergen raises are based on the theory behind LOTT and since the bids are conventional they must be **Alerted**. Briefly (we have a whole chapter devoted to it), LOTT suggests that you can bid to the level determined by the total number of trump cards held by your side, thus if your side has a known 8-card fit you can safely (and safely is the operative word) compete to the 2-level. That is the basis of our 1♠ – 2♣ minimum raise. With 9 trumps the 3-level should be achievable and with 10 trumps LOTT tells us that the 4-level is probably OK. These are just suggestions but they have been backed up with some good theory and years of experience. “The Law’s” primary advantage is in its preemptive nature and Bergen raises share that feature. When we speak of preempts we generally think of opening bids, Bergen raises, based on LOTT, are preemptive responses to an opening bid, but they contain even more information and information passing is the purpose of our bidding systems. Recall the purpose of preempts: use up bidding space so as to interfere with opponents, who might have better hands, ability to compete and/or exchange information. So how do Bergen Raises work?

First, Bergen raises are only used when partner opens in a Major suit. Secondly there has been an acronym invented to help us remember the meanings of the 4 bids that constitute the Bergen raise system – **CLAP**. We all know what a limit raise is, don’t we? That’s the ‘L’, and we also know what preemptive means – that’s the ‘P’. The ‘A’ and ‘C’ stand for Ambiguous Splinter and Constructive, respectively. A Constructive bid means “I can help in that suit but you still have to do most of the heavy lifting”. More on the ‘A’ a little later.

Thirdly, Bergen raises always show 4-card support, that is why we might consider all Bergen raises preemptive in nature: Opener’s bid promised 5-cards and with responder’s 4-cards we have a 9-card fit. LOTT tells us that when holding 9 Trump the 3-level is a safe bid so why not just go there. Bergen raises do that while providing additional information:

3♣ is ‘C’ showing **7-10 HCP and 4-card support**. Constructive, here, means I’ve got the Trump, but not many HCPs

3♦ is ‘L’ showing **10-12 HCP and 4-card support**. Same meaning as the standard Limit raise.

4♠/4♥ is the ‘P’ shows **0-6 HCP and 5-card support**. It is purely preemptive; a LOTT 10-card fit.

3♥/3♠ (the opposite Major) is the ‘A’mbiguous Splinter showing up to **12 HCP** the standard Bergen 4-card support and a undisclosed singleton or void. In other words an unbalanced hand; with 13+ playing points (with a balanced hand we would use **Strong Jacoby Trump Raise**). After this splinter bid Partner can bid 3NT asking for the location of the singleton or void. BEWARE: The 3NT bid is not “to play” it is an asking bid.

Some players reverse the meanings of the two minor suit responses, this is referred to as **reverse Bergen**. This reverses the sonorous acronym but so does our ordered explanations. Does it matter if it’s **CLAP, LCAP, LCPA** or **CLPA**? The bids work their magic once partnerships agree on the meaning of:

1♠-P-3♣ C

1♠-P-3♦ L

1♠-P-3♥ A

1♠-P-3♠ P and 1♠-P-4♠ (This is the standard weak jump to game showing 5-card support).

There are, after-all, only 5 meaningful, information-packed bids to remember. 1♠-P-2♣ still shows 3-Card support and 6-9/10 HCP. 3-Card support and 10+ HCP is, as always, shown by bidding a second suit (at the 2-level) and then delayed support for Partner’s Major.

You might have noted that when one combines Bergen Raises, Jacoby Trump Raise and Splinters together with the standard meanings of other bids you have the ability to describe practically any hand you might hold – in just one bid.

1 SAYC is another way of saying “Standard American”

You might want ask: "Are Bergen raises are ON or OFF if the intervening opponent bids?" The answer is that they are OFF! The reason is simple: The interference can only be (a) a suit bid, (b) a Dbl (X), or (c) a Conventional bid. Conventional bids (Michaels and UNT) are more complicated and treated separately so lets look at (a) and (b).

- (a) Any suit bid: We can Cue bid opponents suit to show Limit+ raise (3+Card) or Raise to 3-level for **P** (4-Card support).
- (b) Takeout Double: we use a Convention called Jordan 2NT for our **L**; the 2NT response after a TOD indicates a Limit+ raise with 3+ Card support. Note: JORDAN ONLY PROMISES 3-Card support. Also a Re-Double (XX) shows 10+HCP with less than 3-Card support. 1♠-X--2♠ still shows 3-Card support and 6-9/10 HCP.

After interference (a) & (b) plus the the Splinter bid remain available to show 10+ HCP and singleton or void.