

Raising partner's 1M on a three-card suit

Send your questions to the Editor, or e-mail David Bakhshi directly at DavidBakhshi@aol.com

Mark Hubbard from Birmingham writes:

Playing in a one-day Swiss Teams, I raised my partner's opening bid of 1♠ to 2♠ holding just three cards in spades. My partner jumped straight to 4♠ (which was defeated), and then rebuked me for holding just three card support. Was I wrong to raise holding just three spades? Could we still have reached the superior contract of 3NT? The full deal was as follows.

♠ K 9 5		♠ 6 2
♥ 8 4		♥ K Q J 7 3
♦ K J 8 5 3		♦ 9 7 4 2
♣ 9 6 2		♣ J 10
♠ J 10 4 3	♠ N	
♥ 10 9 5	♥ S	
♦ 10 6	♦ W	
♣ A Q 7 4	♣ E	
		♠ A Q 8 7
		♥ A 6 2
		♦ A Q
		♣ K 8 5 3

Dear Mark,

The majority of bridge players worldwide readily raise one-of-a-major (1M) with three cards, where an opening bid of 1M shows at least five cards. However, even amongst four-card-major bidders, it is considered to be good practice to raise with three cards for several reasons. It should be noted, though, that one should only support with three cards when holding a relatively weak hand (in the 6-9 point range). Whenever the responder has 10+ points, he will be strong enough to introduce another suit before showing delayed support for opener's major. Thus responder tends to choose a raise to 2M when the alternative would be to bid 1NT.

The decision to raise with three cards leads to two issues: why is it a good idea to support with just three cards, and how should the auction continue?

1. Why support with three cards?

Assuming that the partnership adopt

a Standard English approach of four-card majors with a weak NT, then supporting with three cards will rarely inconvenience the opener, and will often make the decision process much more straightforward. This is because a player who opens 1♥ or 1♠ will either hold an unbalanced hand (in which case he will have at least five cards unless he is 4-4-4-1), or a balanced hand with 15+ points (given the failure to open 1NT). Thus, whenever the opener has at least five cards in his major, he will be in a good position to judge whether to bid towards game.

A second benefit to supporting with three cards occurs in 'false-preference' auctions. For example, consider the following auction:

Opener	Responder
1♥	1NT
2♣	2♥

If the partnership tends to support directly with three cards, then the responder can typically be assumed to hold just two hearts.

2. How should the auction proceed?

Following a raise to 2M, the opener also has two issues to resolve: does the partnership have eight trumps, and what level should we bid to? With no interest in game, the opener should pass. However, with extra values, the opener should both show his strength and also define his hand type, as follows:

- With a balanced hand (containing only four cards in his major), the opener should therefore pass with 15-16 points, bid 2NT (to invite game) with 17-18, and bid 3NT (offering a choice of games) with 19 points. Following a rebid of 2NT, responder has four options: pass (minimum with three trumps), 3M (minimum with four



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trumps), 3NT (maximum with three trumps) and 4M (maximum with four trumps).

- With an unbalanced hand (or balanced with five trumps), the opener can either simply bid 4M, or invite by bidding 3M (general game try). One final option is to introduce a new suit as a long-suit game try, after which responder can return to 3M with an unsuitable hand or go for game with help for the opener's second suit.

It follows that on the given hand South should have bid 3NT over 2♠, which North would pass.

SUMMARY

After an opening bid of 1M:

- Responder should strain to support with three cards when the alternative is to bid 1NT.
- Following a raise to 2M, the opener can only assume three-card support, and should seek to determine whether the partnership have eight trumps, as well as the level to which they should bid.
- With a balanced hand, the opener should either pass (15-16), invite game by bidding 2NT (17-18), or offer a choice of games by bidding 3NT (19).
- With an unbalanced hand, or a balanced hand with five trumps, the opener should either pass, invite game by bidding 3M or introducing a second suit, or bid 4M. □