

Fit-jumps?

For the past 20+ years the Fit-jump has been a popular aid to competitive bidding situations. The idea is that, when raising partner's opening bid or overcall in competition you tell him if you have a good side-suit with most of high-card your values concentrated in the two bid suits. Say that partner opens 1♥, promising four cards, the next hand doubles and you are looking at:

♠ 7 3
 ♥ A 8 5 4
 ♦ 6 3
 ♣ K J 10 5 4

In standard methods you would bid 2NT to show a constructive raise to 3♥ or higher. Playing fit-jumps, you respond 3♣ instead, saying that you have the values for a raise to 3♥, four-card heart support and a decent club side-suit. The idea is that partner will now be able to judge whether the partnership has a fit or a misfit in the side-suits, and that will help him to judge how high to compete. In particular, the fit-jump will warn partner when there is a big double fit, the type of deal on which far more tricks are available than expected between the two sides' chosen contracts – e.g. 4♠ is cold in one direction but so is 5♦ by the other side.

As I say, these bids have been very popular for many years, but I keep seeing deals on which the crude pre-emptive leap in partner's suit proves to be more effective. Take these two examples from the weekend action in Stratford.

Round 4. Board 27. Dealer South. None Vul.

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

West	North	East	South
–	–	–	2♠
Dble	3♣	3♠	Pass
4♦	Pass	4♠	5♦
?			

West	North	East	South
–	–	–	2♠
Dble	4♠	Dble	Pass
?			

The popular action on the North cards was to raise directly to 4♠. East made a responsive double to show some values and West had to decide whether to bid on or take the money. Rather than go on in search of a highly speculative slam – East could have had a 2-3-4-4 10-count, for example, the popular decision was to defend 4♠ doubled. This was worth only +300, which was less than the value of the E/W game, let alone slam.

But see the difference where North preferred to show his club suit – presumably 4♣ would have shown shortage so was not available. Now East could cuebid to show that he had game values – also perhaps implying that he did not have club length, with which he might have started with a double – and the diamond fit was found. West was in a much better position than on the first auction and could take a view whether to go on to slam.

If East had been a little weaker, not worth a drive to game, he would have been able to bid 3♦ or 3♥ over 3♣, thereby getting his hand off his chest at a comfortable level. Even had North been able to bid 4♣ as a fit-jump, that would still have left East with more options – he could, for example, bid 4♥ and E/W would have found a fit before N/S got to 4♠.

Round 6. Board 4. Dealer West. All Vul.

		♠	K J 8 6 5		
		♥	A K J 3 2		
		♦	6		
		♣	K 10		
♠	4			♠	Q 7 3 2
♥	9 8			♥	–
♦	10 9 7 6 5			♦	A K Q J 4
♣	A Q 9 7 6			♣	J 8 4 2
		♠	A 10 9		
		♥	Q 10 7 6 5 4		
		♦	3 2		
		♣	5 3		

West	North	East	South
Pass	1♠	2♦	2♠
5♦	?		
West	North	East	South
Pass	1♠	2♦	2♠
4♣	4♥	5♦	?

The full-blooded pre-emptive raise saw several matches in which the board was flat in 5♦ doubled making +750 for E/W. From North's point of view it was unlikely that 5♠ would be making facing a simple raise, and also unlikely that 5♦ would be making when he held ♥AK and ♣K, hence the unsuccessful double.

Contrast North's position in the first auction with the situation after West's fit-jump in auction two. While on a different deal 4♣ might have been valuable to East in judging his decision how high to bid, here it enabled N/S to solve all their problems. Four Clubs left room for North to bid 4♥ to show his two-suiter and now, when East went on to 5♦ because of the double fit in the minors, South could bid 5♥ because he knew about the double fit in the majors. Five Hearts can, of course, be made, and declarer will surely get the spades right to do so. Even if E/W take the save in 6♦, N/S have gone plus on the deal instead of conceding -750.

This is not to say that fit-jumps are never a good idea, just that when considering making one it is necessary to balance the potential benefits which might accrue from describing one's hand to help partner to judge the subsequent auction against the alternative benefits from just blasting as high as possible as quickly as possible and forcing the opposition to guess.

Note that our original example:

♠	7 3
♥	A 8 5 4
♦	6 3
♣	K J 10 5 4

is a good example of when to use a fit-jump. A bid of 3♣ does not take up any less space than the standard jump to 2NT over the double of 1♥ so, once we judge the hand to be worth a three-level raise, it makes sense to make the descriptive bid to help partner.