

START WINNING

Chapter 7: Jumping

Before we review some actual deals from play in the lower grades of a club, I would like to very briefly go through how bidding should proceed when the partnership is looking for higher level contracts. This may occur when one or both of a partnership recognises that a game contract is certain, or when a game contract might be possible. In the first case, you have to find a way of telling partner that you want to be in game; in the second case, you want to tell partner that you want to INVITE game. Usually both of these can be discussed with partner by making jump bids, that is, missing one level of bidding and going to the next level. But there are significant differences, so let me tell you what these differences are and how you can make the best use of them.

Firstly, let's look at LIMIT BIDS.

You would have been taught that a jump raise in the suit that partner has opened is a limit bid. That, in essence, means that this is as far as you are prepared to go to help partner, but that you have a better hand than if you had a mere single raise of partner's suit.

A simple example of the limit jump raise is a jump to 3H when partner opens 1H. You would have 10 or 11 HCP and heart support. Better than a raise to 2H which would promise 6-9 HCP. The jump raise can also be made by the opening bidder when partner responds in opener's second suit. For instance, you open 1C, partner bids 1H, and you bid 3H. This also is a limit raise but the significant difference here is that you have a point count of about 16-18. Why is that? Because you have opened the bidding and guaranteed 12+ HCP, therefore you don't need to do any more than bid to your limit if you have no more than what you have already promised, by rebidding at the lowest level. Therefore a jump raise must be stronger, must it not?

The jump rebid in your own suit is another way of suggesting a better hand and inviting game. For instance you open 1H, and partner responds 1S. If you make a jump rebid in your own suit, hearts, you are showing a better hand and inviting partner to go further if he has the right cards. The jump rebid to 3H says that you have 15-17 high card points and at least six hearts. But it is still limited and responder is free to pass with a minimum initial response. Similarly, if partner had responded with 1NT, though the difference is that the 1NT is limited to no more than 9 HCP whereas the 1S response could have any number of points above five.

So, you should treat the 1NT response with caution. In my earlier discussion I have mentioned No Trump bids as 'stopping stations'.

The jump to 2NT should be treated no differently. An initial jump to 2NT when partner opens one of any suit should also be a limit bid, 11-12 HCP and no suitable suit bid available. That is quite significant if you think about it. If partner opens 1S then a jump to 2NT is much less meaningful than if partner had opened 1C. Why? Because opposite 1S, the jump to 2NT might include a four card club or diamond suit, perhaps even a four card heart suit. But if partner opens 1C and you jump to 2NT, what does that say? If you have no four card or longer suit of your own, then you must have at least four clubs! And with four clubs and no other four card suit, you could also bid 3C with the same point count, could you not? These are subtle differences that many beginners fail to get to grips with but are logical and common sense corollaries of basic bidding.

A jump rebid of 2NT by opener follows the same reasoning as a jump raise in responder's suit: to jump to 2NT, opener must have 17-18 HCP. But not only that, opener should not have another suit that they could have shown at the one level. For instance, if opener opens 1C and responder bids 1H, with 17-18 HCP but a four card spade suit, opener should bid 1S and save the 2NT bid for later. That is common sense bidding because finding a trump fit is most important, especially in a major. First things first. Too many people have been taught the point count for a No Trump response but not that it should be 'suit first, then No Trumps' whenever possible..

And while we are discussing jump bids, there is one other very important case where jump bids are used: when you are playing Acol and partner opens a weak 1NT. When that happens and you have a weak hand, you can do one of two things: you can pass and let partner get on with it, or you can make a weakness takeout and play it yourself. But if you have a stronger hand, you will have either a hand strong enough to go to game, or a hand that is good enough to INVITE game. Let's look at both these cases.

Because the Acol 1NT opening is specifically 12-14 HCP, you will want to go to game if you have 13 or more points opposite. You can do that by raising to 3NT if you have no interest in anything else. But you may have interest in a better contract than 3NT, for instance you may have a four card heart or spade suit and would like to play in that if partner has four of them. To find out, there is a simple way: you bid STAYMAN. That is an artificial bid of 2C and specifically asks: "do you have a four card major, partner?" If the 1NT opener denies a major by bidding 2D, you will then bid 3NT. If you find the major suit fit that you were looking for, you can go to game in that suit.

If you have a six card or longer major suit and enough points for game (a suitable hand may have as few as ten points if you have six or more cards in it) then you can jump directly to game in it, no need to look any further because the 1NT opening must have at least two cards in your suit, must it not?

And there is one other case that you should consider when looking at 1NT openings and jump bids. What happens if you have a five card major suit and a) enough points for game or b) not enough for game but enough to invite game, i.e. about 11-12 HCP and exactly a five card suit?

In the first instance, you make a jump to 3H or 3S and that is a very specific bid saying to partner: "please raise me to game if you have three or more cards in my suit, or bid 3NT otherwise."

In the second case, if partner responds with 2D, you also jump to 3H or 3S but the significant difference is that this time, having gone through Stayman first, you are saying that you don't have a hand strong enough for game, but enough to invite game, with the same five card, possibly six card, suit. After all, you do need to have a way to force to game, and a way to invite game, that is the art of being able to stop at a manageable level, or to ensure that you get to game.

If you have a long MINOR suit and enough for game, the best idea is to just jump to 3NT, that is the difference in scoring between the minor and major suits. Minor suit games require eleven tricks and score much less than major suit games, which need to make only ten tricks, and a No Trump game requires only nine tricks. There has been much argument by experts as to whether 3NT or 4H or 4S is better if you have a 5-3 fit in the major in a balanced hand. Personally, I would prefer the 5-3 major fit. 3NT may be the better option at times.

Those sorts of things you will be able to decide for yourself when you get to a much more advanced level, when your bidding might change with the introduction of such things as transfer bids. But for now, we'll try to keep things simple and follow basic logic. I suggest you always look for your major suit trump fit when you are looking to go forward in an auction. The same should apply to choosing a trump suit in response to a 1NT opening by partner: if you have a weak hand (it can be up to 10 HCP so it isn't necessarily a 'weakness' takeout) and five or more cards in a major, I suggest you always choose to play in that suit rather than leave it in 1NT. The value of having a trump suit will become apparent soon enough, whether you have a Yarborough or a ten count.

A Yarborough, by the way, is a hand with no picture cards in it, though some people insist that a true Yarborough should not have any tens either.

More on jumps.

A jump rebid by RESPONDER in their own suit should be treated the same way as a jump rebid by opener. For instance, partner opens 1C, you bid 1H and partner rebids at the lowest level, be it 1S, 1NT or 2C. A jump rebid by you, to 3H, follows the same logical pattern: it is inviting partner to raise to game, and normally would have a six card or longer suit. If you have enough for game, i.e, 12+ points, just bid game in your own suit if it is good enough and of six or more cards, or make another forcing bid such as a jump shift, a 'responder's reverse', or 'new suit at the three level'. Also, many people play 'fourth suit forcing' so you can keep the bidding open by bidding the fourth suit, irrespective of the number of cards you have in it.

With all these options, in different bidding scenarios, there is always a logical way to continue bidding.

Simply rebidding your own suit at the lowest level never shows any extra values, be it by opener or responder.