



Play & Learn

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The power of an extra trump

Using a five-card major bidding system where a 1♥ or 1♠ opening bid shows a five-card suit, responder needs only three-card support to be sure of a major suit fit. Invitational hands of a good 10–12 points are considered limit raises and can, by partnership agreement, be shown by raising opener’s major to the three level.

Holding:

♠ J 7 5 3 ♥ 8 7 6 4 ♦ 3 ♣ A K 5 2,

how would you respond to partner’s 1♠ opening bid? While we count only high-card points and length when deciding to open the bidding, we count shortness instead of length when we have a fit for partner’s major. The ACBL textbooks suggest adding 5 points for a void, 3 for a singleton and 1 for a doubleton. These shortness points are referred to as dummy points because the hand counting shortness expects to end up as the dummy in a suit contract. Dummy points bring this 8-point hand up to 11 points – a limit raise to 3♠.

Would your bid be the same if you held

♠ J 7 5 ♥ 8 7 6 4 ♦ 3 ♣ A K 5 3 2?

Again you have 8 HCP and a fit for partner’s spades and a singleton to bring your hand up to 11 points. Dummy counts only one type of distribution, so count 3 points for the diamond shortness and nothing for the club length. Distribution points plus high-card points give us a good working esti-

mate of the value of our hand, but there are factors that can make experienced players use their judgment to upgrade or downgrade a hand. It takes experience (some painful) to develop good judgment. There is no one correct way to value distribution and you may see different advice from various experts.

Let’s look at how each of these dummy hands paired with the same declarer hand would fare in 4♠. If responder (North) invites game by making a 3♠ limit raise, opener (South) will carry on to game with 15 total points, expecting about 11 points from responder.

♠ J 7 5 3
♥ 8 7 6 4
♦ 3
♣ A K 5 2

♥ Q led

♠ K Q 10 4 2
♥ A K
♦ Q 8 5 4
♣ 7 6

South has five losers: one spade and four diamonds. Declarer will win the opening lead and give up a diamond to prepare to ruff in dummy: Two diamond losers can be eliminated by ruffing. Had West led a trump, a 3–1 spade split could hurt declarer, but 4♠ is a good game and that singleton was definitely worth the 3 points we counted.

Is 4♠ as good a game with the second hand, where responder provides only three trumps?

♠ J 7 5
♥ 8 7 6 4
♦ 3
♣ A K 5 3 2

♥ Q led

♠ K Q 10 4 2
♥ A K
♦ Q 8 5 4
♣ 7 6

Now it doesn’t take a trump lead to cause problems. The defenders can switch to a trump when declarer gives up a diamond. Playing the ♠ A and a second trump lead leaves only one trump in dummy and declarer can no longer ruff two diamonds. Declarer might still make 4♠ by setting up clubs, but that would need clubs splitting 3–3 and trumps splitting 3–2, and the odds are against that. While we suggest adding 3 points for the singleton diamond with a fit, shortness in dummy is less valuable when dummy has only three trumps. Being aware of this will improve your judgment.

Many players agree that an immediate limit raise of opener’s major suit shows four-card support. We’ll see an advantage to that agreement next month. But some raise immediately with only three trumps. It’s a partnership agreement. ■