




This is all about one-level suit openings and limit raises. The play theme reinforces drawing trumps and setting up extra tricks in side-suits. SA version. Part 1 of 2. Updated winter 2015.

VB#7 Openings & limit raises 1 SA	Contract: 3S
Date: 24/03/2016	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 1
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

North		East	
♠ J753		♠ T98	
♥ A65		♥ K83	
♦ KQ		♦ A8632	
♣ 9754		♣ Q3	
West		East	
♠ Q		♠ T98	
♥ QJT97		♥ K83	
♦ T75		♦ A8632	
♣ KJ62		♣ Q3	
South			
♠ AK642			
♥ 42			
♦ J94			
♣ AT8			

This set of six deals (and another series elsewhere in this issue) is all about **limit raises**. This is the first of those series.

In general, an immediate raise by partner of your opening bid is a **limit bid** – it tells you that partner likes your suit but also that he has a certain strength of hand. Armed with this knowledge it is your decision how high to bid. Essentially, do you want to stay in a part-score or advance to game?

Now, we need to dot a few *is* and cross some *fs*.

A simple raise shows *about* 6 to 9 points (eg 1♥ – 2♥);

A jump raise shows *about* 10 to 11 points (eg 1♠ – 3♠);

Why do we say "about" and not "exactly"? After all, we don't say an opening 1NT shows "about" 15 to 17 points. The answer, while subtle, is important.

In No-trumps almost all the high cards play their part. In a suit contract this isn't true; *shortages* (in the guise of *singletons*, *doubletons* and *voids*) can have a profound effect on the play. So the value

West	North	East	South
-	P	P	1♠
P	3♠	P	P
P			

Lead: ♥ Q

Bidding.

We open 1♠ after two Passes and partner raises that to 3♠. This is a limit bid and is *invitational* – it asks us to advance to 4♠ if we can but it does not compel us to do so. So – do we want to *á face the music and dance*?

Here, the answer should be an unequivocal **No!** (Well, perhaps a more polite, "Thanks, but no thanks"). Why? Well, for an opening bid we are minimum (12 points only) and we have rotten *shape*; 5-3-3-2 hands play disappointingly in general because they have too many losers.

Put another way – if we don't Pass 3♠ on this piece of cheese (er, on this beautiful collection), what hand would we Pass it on?

Play.

West leads the ♥Q against 3♠, showing a sequence in the suit.

It is often good practice to draw trumps in order to extract them from the opponents, rendering the opposition less dangerous to us. This is not an inviolable law and there are many coming deals where we would advise you to do something else first. However, on this deal, at this stage of your bridge education, there is no reason to delay drawing trumps.

If Spades split 2-2 we'd make five tricks in the suit (and avoid a loser to boot). We may also note that a rare but possible break, whereby one opponent holds the singleton ♠Q, is also good enough for our purposes.

Assuming trumps break favorably, knocking out the ♦A will create two Diamond tricks and we have in addition the ♥A and the ♣A. Counting this lot up (never forget to **count** and always re-count as the hand is being played) we are seeking to make five Spades, one Heart, two Diamonds and the ♣A. That totals nine tricks. If Spades are unluckily placed for us then we'd be unsuccessful. All we can say is: *Live with it*.

Note that as we are playing in a suit contract it is also worth checking *losers*. What do we expect to lose on this deal? Here, we hope to

of a responding hand might be augmented by having helpful shape, together with trump support.

So by all means think of the point-count as being the basis for negotiations when you are assessing how high to raise partner. Look upon side-suit shortages with approval and flat distributions (especially 4-3-3-3 hands) with disfavor. This is not an exact science!

The card-play reinforces the idea of drawing trumps.

Hand 1 sets the scene.

Your opening bid is raised by partner immediately to the three-level. Should you bid game or not?

get away with no Spade losers, we have to lose one Heart trick (and one only), we must lose the ♦A and we must lose two Club tricks.

Nine winners and four losers. Now isn't that neat and dandy? We warn you – bridge isn't always this straightforward!

So we take the ♥A and try our luck in trumps. On the ♠A the ♠Q falls so we know that we have to cash the ♠J and ♠K to extract all of the poison from the opponents. Note that we do not play any more trumps than absolutely necessary. Keep the others back for later – we may need them.

Having neutered the opponents by means of a "trump-ectomy" we then drive out the ♦A (*draw trumps and then play on the side-suit*) and from that point it's all straightforward.

In time, we make the nine tricks we have calculated – five Spades, one Heart, two Diamonds and one Club.

Neat job.


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VB#7 Openings & limit raises 1 SA

Contract: 4S

By: South


Date: 24/03/2016

Board #: 2

Dealer: East

Vulnerable: None

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		North		
		♠ J753		
		♥ A65		
		♦ KQ		
		♣ 9754		
West				East
♠ 9				♠ A86
♥ QJT9				♥ K873
♦ T87543				♦ 2
♣ KJ				♣ Q8632
		South		
		♠ KQT42		
		♥ 42		
		♦ AJ96		
		♣ AT		

Partner is persistent – he is asking you to the ball again.

Should you accept the advance here or are you determined to be the wallflower?

West	North	East	South
-	-	P	1♠
P	3♠	P	4♠
P	P	P	

Lead: ♥ Q

Bidding.

We open 1♠ after East Passes as dealer and partner (as in Hand 1) raises us to 3♠. Well, once again, we are being invited onto the ballroom floor – do we want to dance?

Here (as compared with the previous deal) we have 14 points (so, not a minimum hand). Also, we have a 5-4-2-2 shape, which is an improvement on the 5-3-3-2 shape of Hand 1. The more shapely our hand is the better, in general, although we have to be clear here. This is true **if we have found ourselves a trump fit**. Here, we can infer a nine-card Spade fit for our side so we are entitled to look with favor on any extras we may have – such as long side-suits or singletons or voids.

All of these "extras" add grist to the mill and may cause us to upgrade our hand a little (or even a lot). With the supporting feature of a decent side-suit we are fully entitled to advance to 4♠.

Play.

West starts with the ♥Q from his solid sequence. Note, in passing, that there is no reason for West to start by leading his longest suit. In No-trumps yes, but suit contracts are different animals entirely. Now we must survey the dummy and **count our tricks**.

We have four Spade tricks (although we have to drive out the Ace of trumps first), the ♥A, four Diamonds and the ♣A. That lot adds up to ten – which is encouraging as the contract is 4♠.

What is our priority? To **draw trumps**, extracting all the danger cards from our opponents' hands. With that in mind we should take the ♥A and immediately play on trumps, driving out the ♠A. East ducks the first round of Spades, takes the ♠A on the second round, cashes the ♥K and plays a Diamond with an innocent air.

Do not be fooled, do not be distracted. We must extract East's last trump before doing anything else. If we don't, East would trump one of our Diamond winners and make a trick with his ♠8.

If we allow that to happen we'd hear about it for weeks...


So we pull the last trump and then (and only then) can we attend to our side-suit by cashing the Diamonds.

Ten tricks come from four Spades, four Diamonds and two Aces. Put another way, we lose one Spade, one Heart and one Club.



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VB#7 Openings & limit raises 1 SA	Contract: 3D
Date: 24/03/2016	By: South
Dealer: South	Board #: 3
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

		North		
		♠ 76		
		♥ T3		
		♦ A9852		
		♣ KQJ3		
West				East
♠ QJT52				♠ AK84
♥ A842				♥ K97
♦ JT6				♦
♣ 2				♣ T98754
		South		
		♠ 93		
		♥ QJ65		
		♦ KQ743		
		♣ A6		

This time around your long suit is a minor.

Notwithstanding that, partner raises your suit.

Now what? Part-score? Game? Slam?

West	North	East	South
-	-	-	1♦
P	3♦	P	P
P			

Lead: ♠ Q

Bidding.

Here we open 1♦ as dealer with 12 points and a 5-4-2-2 shape. Partner raises that straight to 3♦ and we have to decide what to do.

Well, the simple answer is that we should Pass. Partner is inviting us to bid on but our hand simply doesn't justify bidding further – what contract do you think we might make?

Incidentally, we are not committed to Diamonds after partner's raise, we might decide (on a different hand) to have a stab at 3NT after 1♦ – 3♦. Here, though, bidding 3NT (or 3♥ or anything else for that matter) would be wild speculation.

Play.

West leads the ♠Q against 3♦ and we contemplate a useful dummy. Partner has five trumps and a handy source of tricks in the form of a decent Club suit. As against that, he only has 10 points so we can see why he couldn't bid more than 3♦.

If we *count losers* (a good habit to get into playing in a suit contract) we can see that we must lose two Spades and the ♥A K without even thinking about it – showing that 5♦ would have been hopeless. 3NT would also have been without a prayer given that we are wide open in Spades.

Anyway, West cashes two top Spades and leads a Club. What now? Cash some more Clubs? This is where we have to be careful. Firstly, we must take the Club shift with the ♣A (*play the honors from the short side first*) and then we must play trumps. We have ten of those so East-West have only three.

If the missing Diamonds break 2-1 we could extract them by cashing the ♦A K – that way we would not have to worry about suffering adverse ruffs. As it is, they break 3-0 so we need to play three rounds to pull them all.

Note what would happen if we *didn't* draw trumps – West would ruff the second round of Clubs. (Why do you think he led one?)

As the cards lie, we pull trumps in three rounds and then take our Club tricks. The opponents have two Heart tricks to take but we still have our nine tricks.


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VB#7 Openings & limit raises 1 SA

Contract: 4H

Date: 24/03/2016


By: South

Dealer: West

Board #: 4

Vulnerable: None

[Play this hand online!](#)

		North		
		♠ Q85		
		♥ AJ53		
		♦ QT85		
		♣ Q9		
West				East
♠ JT7				♠ K9643
♥ T				♥ Q8
♦ 7642				♦ A
♣ AKT74				♣ 86532
		South		
		♠ A2		
		♥ K97642		
		♦ KJ93		
		♣ J		

Partner is still there with his limit raises – once again he is inviting you to the dance.

So, it's decision time. Do you think your hand is worth a shot at game or not?

West	North	East	South
P	P	P	1♥
P	3♥	P	4♥
P	P	P	

Lead: ♣ A

Bidding.

We open 1♥ after three Passes and partner again raises our suit to the three-level by bidding 3♥. Well, we are being invited to the party – are we going to accept or decline?

Here (as compared with Hands 1 and 2) we have 12 points (so, a minimum hand in terms of *points*). However, we have a 6-4-2-1 shape, which is a great improvement on the 5-3-3-2 shape of Hand 1 and over the 5-4-2-2 shape of Hand 2.

Remember, the more shapely our hand is the better (in general) **when we have found ourselves a trump fit**. Here, we can infer a ten-card Heart fit for our side so we are entitled to look with favor on any extras we may have – such as long side-suits or singletons or voids. Our hand has improved dramatically on hearing the news that partner has four trumps. The long, straggly Heart suit is now a gold-mine and the singleton Club is very useful too.

All of the above is a roundabout way of saying that our hand is far from being a minimum and the extra features (a six-card trump suit, good shape, a side-suit) should cause us to upgrade our hand a little (or even a lot). We are easily worth a stab at 4♥.

Is game certain to make? No, of course not! But bridge is not a game of certainties – it is a game of odds, and here the odds say we should bid 4♥. If game fails, shrug your shoulders in Gallic fashion and utter the immortal French phrase *c'est la vie*.

Play.

West cashes the ♠A and smartly shifts to the ♠J. We try the ♠Q (forlornly, it has to be said) and East clobbers that with the ♠K. We take that with the ♠A and immediately set about **drawing trumps**. With ten of them that's easy – it only takes two rounds on this deal as Hearts split 2-1.

Now, having extracted the poison, we switch our attention to our side-suit and knock out the ♦A. We must lose the ♦A, we have already lost

the ♣A and we have to concede a Spade trick as well but that's all we lose.

Put another way, we make one Spade, six Hearts and three Diamonds. Three losers, ten winners.

*[For those of you who like poring over deals and enjoy deep postmortem analyses you may notice that the defenders can beat 4♥. West has to lead a **Diamond** at trick one. East wins, plays a Club to West's ♣K and a second Diamond is ruffed. Fortunately no one (and we mean **no one**) plays as well as that. If anyone does, we suggest you find yourselves some more amenable opponents...!]*



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VB#7 Openings & limit raises 1 SA

Date: 24/03/2016

Dealer: North


[Play this hand online!](#)

Contract: 2S

By: South

Board #: 5

Vulnerable: None

North		East	
♠ J764		♠ Q	
♥ K86		♥ A543	
♦ KT5		♦ A982	
♣ 863		♣ T952	
West		East	
♠ KT9		♠ Q	
♥ QJT9		♥ A543	
♦ 74		♦ A982	
♣ KQ74		♣ T952	
South			
♠ A8532			
♥ 72			
♦ QJ63			
♣ AJ			

We have been looking at three-level raises so far.

What does a single raise to the two-level mean?

West	North	East	South
-	P	P	1♠
P	2♠	P	P
P			

Lead: ♥ Q

Bidding.

We open 1♠ on a 5-4-2-2 hand with 12 points and partner makes a minimum raise to 2♠. We now have to decide whether to stick or twist, er, whether to bid on or to Pass.

Here the decision is easy – we have a minimum hand with nothing exciting in terms of shape. There is little here to suggest that the North-South hands could have the combined power to make ten tricks – in fact, making as many as eight might prove a challenge. Pass – and quickly.

Play.

The ♥Q lead from West looks like being the top-of-a-sequence and we can count only two top tricks (two Aces in this case). Further, the ♥K in dummy is known to be useless after this opening lead. Only lunatics (or geniuses) lead away from Aces against suit contracts and we don't allow them to play at VuBridge tables. East is marked with the ♥A and His Majesty the King is – alas – heading for the executioner's block.

The defenders play three rounds of Hearts and we ruff the third round. We need to draw trumps and hope that they break 2-2. If so, we'd emerge with four Spade tricks altogether.

When we cash the ♠A the Queen drops from East – that could be ♠K Q doubleton, of course, but a singleton ♠Q is just as good. The next round of Spades sets up a trick for the ♠J on table, whether West takes his ♠K or not. He does on this occasion and attacks Clubs by leading the ♠K.

Now we are in the driving seat. We take the ♣A, hasten to draw the last trump with the ♠J and then turn our attention to our side-suit, Diamonds. Knocking out the ♦A sets up three tricks there and we have our contract (four Spades, three Diamonds and the ♠A).

Put another way, we lose one Spade, two Hearts, one Diamond and one Club.



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VB#7 Openings & limit raises 1 SA	Contract: 4S
Date: 24/03/2016	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 6
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

<p>West</p> <p>♠ QT5</p> <p>♥ QJT5</p> <p>♦ 2</p> <p>♣ QJ952</p>		<p>East</p> <p>♠ 2</p> <p>♥ 9743</p> <p>♦ 98764</p> <p>♣ AK7</p>
<p>North</p> <p>♠ J764</p> <p>♥ K86</p> <p>♦ KT5</p> <p>♣ 863</p>		
<p>South</p> <p>♠ AK983</p> <p>♥ A2</p> <p>♦ AQJ3</p> <p>♣ T4</p>		

Another minimum raise from partner – but this time your hand is so much better.

What should you do?

Pass? Bid more? It's decision time again.

West	North	East	South
-	-	P	1♠
P	2♠	P	4♠
P	P	P	

Lead: ♥ Q

Bidding.

We open 1♠ on our 5-4-2-2 hand with 18 points and partner makes a minimum raise to 2♠. We now have to decide whether to bid on or to Pass (whether to stick or twist).

Here the decision is easy – we have a near maximum hand to open 1♠, partner has 6 to 9 points (give or take a little) so we have a minimum of 24 points between us. We have a trump fit and can look upon our strong Diamond side-suit with favor.

Pass is out of the question. 3♠ (or the like) would just be buck-passing; we have the values for a shot at game so we should go for it. We bid 4♠.

Play.

The dummy may look a little familiar (we are like that here at VuBridge!) but you can see the point. Partner has exactly what he said he had – 7 points and Spade support. He also has exactly what he had on Hand 5...

We'd have preferred to see a shortage in there somewhere rather than a flat 4-3-3-3 pattern but that was what North got dealt. We must get on with the job at hand by **counting our tricks**.

We hope that trumps are 2-2 – that way we'd make five trump tricks (and avoid a loser in Spades). We haven't any losers in Hearts or Diamonds, just two losers in Clubs. Things are looking promising!

We win the Heart lead in the closed hand (West was hoping his partner had the ♥A – just like in Hand 5 – and he could kill the ♥K. *Not tonight, Josephine!*) We try the ♠A K hoping to pull all the trumps but they are 3-1 and we realize that West has the boss trump. Still, no problem.

We could play another Spade but instead it is good technique to play on our side-suit, Diamonds. True, West can trump the second round, but it cannot hurt our cause to be ruffed by the master trump. What costs contracts is when we lose tricks to **low** trumps.

Here West takes his ♠Q by ruffing one of our Diamond winners and the defenders take two Clubs in the fullness of time but we have the rest, for the loss of a trump and two Clubs.