

Washington bridge league

We offer our thanks to Washington Bridge league as we, hereunder, present a copy from their 2011 Nov-Dec bulletin on Major Suit Raises by columnists > Ron Zucker and Shawn Stringer. Read original - [Here](#)

MAJOR SUIT RAISES - PART 2

Our last article focussed on various raises showing 3-card support after partner opens 1♥ or 1♠. Since responder's first bid is so important is determining "how high do we bid", we will expand our discussion of hand evaluation concepts.

We're all familiar with Step One - count your High Card Points (HCP.) Step Two says to upgrade your hand if, in addition to your 3-card support, you also have shortness in a side suit. Your hand is worth more with shortness because now your six of trump may become a trump trick separate from the trumps tricks declarer takes in his own hand. Steps One and Two are counting exercises. Step Three is where the challenge begins and requires you to evaluate whether your hand contains good points or not-so-good points. Remember, not all points are created equal!

Let's see some of what makes for "good" points.

1) **Aces rule:** Especially in hands to be played in a trump contract, such as when partner opens 1♥ or 1♠ and we have 3 or more card support, aces are excellent, and kings are good. Conversely, stray queens and jacks are not. Most experts refer to queens and jacks collectively as "quacks," and they are derided in hand evaluation. Think of it this way: if you have only 6 points for partner, would you rather put down a dummy with one Ace and one Queen, or 4 Jacks and one Queen, or even 3 Queens. All equal 6 HCP. Queens, however, may not take any tricks on a hand, since an opponent may be able to ruff the third round of a suit. Aces rarely get ruffed on the first round.

2) **Combined honors are good:** Having honors in the same suit is better than having them scattered. A side suit containing Aqxx is worth more to partner than these two side suits: Axx/Qxx. So, you can upgrade for hands holding combinations like AJTx or AQxx, and downgrade for holdings like Qxxx. Here is how you should analyze your cards: If partner holds xxx opposite your AQxx, partner can make at least two tricks if his LHO has the King by finessing the Queen. But if partner holds xxx opposite Qxx, your side will win a trick only if LHO holds both the Ace and the King. Most of the time, you will lost all three tricks.

3) **Honors in partner's suit(s) are valuable:** There are no guarantees, but when partner opens 1 Major, she is likely to have some honors in her five-card suit. So if you hold Qxx, your Queen is likely to fill in partner's suit. If partner holds AJTxx, your Queen gives partner a 50% chance of having no trump losers. Even if partner opened with JTxxx, your Queen is a relief to partner. Similarly, if partner opens 1♠ and rebids 2♦ after your 1NT bid, you should upgrade hands with points in spades and diamonds, while downgrading for queens and jacks in clubs and hearts.

With this in mind, let's review a few more hands, all of which occurred during a recent sectional. Assume partner opened 1♣, and the right hand opponent passed. Using our framework from last month of simple raises, constructive raises, invitational raises and game forcing raises, evaluate these hands.

Your hand	Type of raise and why
AKJT3/J76/JT4/93	Invitational - This is a solid invitational hand. With a good fivecard spade suit, your side has the potential to take a lot of tricks. Nonetheless, the diamond jack is a bit overvalued, and, with only three trumps, the doubleton club is only worth one point. If the ♥J were the ♥Q, many would force to game with this hand
Q74/Q73/K73/K832	Constructive - Last article we said that a constructive raise was from 8 to a bad 10 support points. With no ruffing values for partner and no aces, this is a bad 10 HCP. We have no combined honors and no source of tricks for partner. This 10 HCP hand is not an invitational raise.
T3/Q96/AKT873/72	Invitational - Though it has fewer high card points than the previous hand, this hand has trump support that includes an honor, has a source of tricks in diamonds, and has ruffing values. This hand is worth an invite.
T53/765/AQJ72/AT	Very close... Invitational or Game Force - This hand has 12 support points. The two aces are super and so is having the side diamond suit with all those combined honors. That makes for a great source of tricks. However, the bad trump support (no honors) and the three little spades would suggest that we should tread lightly with this hand. Though some would choose to call this a game forcing hand, we would not argue with anyone who chose only to invite

The last hand shows the challenge of hand evaluation. Most of us can eventually get the easy hands right. It is the tough hands that makes us want to learn more and become better players. And remember, even the experts don't always agree on what a hand is worth.