



Convention of the Week

4th June, 2008

CONSTRUCTIVE RAISES

This article is actually about constructive raises *in competition*, which we shall give the acronym of CRIC. But, before we get to CRICs, what exactly is a “constructive raise”? Those players who use Bergen Raises are already familiar with the concept. A constructive raise is generally played as 6-9 HCP’s with 4-card support for Partner. For the Bergen players, if Partner opens 1♠, they’ll make a constructive raise with these hands:

♠ QJ42 ♥ 85 ♦ K76 ♣ T976
♠ K542 ♥ 85 ♦ K76 ♣ KT96

The first hand is at the low end, with fewer points or with a less appetizing 6-count a preemptive 3♣ would be in order. And that second hand, a pretty good 9-count, is at the top of the range ... with the same high cards and 4=1=4=4 shape it would be too strong and we would make a limit raise.

What’s the point of these constructive raises? They have preemptive value and are based on the theory that if our side has a 9-card fit there is safety at the 3-level, as suggested by the Law of Total Tricks. Getting to our level of Total Trick safety as quickly as possible is intended to make life difficult for the opponents, and having 3 ways to get there (preemptive, constructive, limit) is helpful in deciding whether or not we belong in game.

Note that Bergen Raises are not usually played by a passed hand, in that situation most partnerships rely on the Drury convention.

Bergen Raises are off in competition, and that’s where CRICs come in. The treatment is not quite the same as Bergen Raises but CRICs use the same Total Trick logic makes us want to get to the 3-level quickly when our side has a 9-card major suit fit.

After a 1♠ Overall

Suppose that the auction starts:

South West North East
1♥ 1♠ ??

The “standard” schema for showing Heart support here is:

- 2♥ 3- or 4-card raise, around 5-9 HCP’s
- 2♠ Raise with at least game-invitational values, trump length unknown
- 3♠ 4-card raise, weak hand
- 4♠ 5-card raise, weak hand

In other words, strong auctions start with a cue-bid, direct raises are weaker, and jump bids are preemptive. It’s a reasonable method, but there’s a weakness when you hold something like:

♠ K8 ♥ QJ75 ♦ QT97 ♣ 752

Yes, it’s your classic constructive raise. In the above scheme of things, this one is too good for a preempt, so it’s a 2♥ raise, followed by a 3♥ bid if the opponents bid again (and you can be almost certain that they will!). But, if we add CRIC’s to our arsenal, we change the above to the following:

- 2♥ 3- or 4-card raise, around 5-9 HCP’s
- 2♠ Raise with at least game-invitational values, trump length unknown
- 3♣ 4-card Constructive Raise, with shortness somewhere
- 3♦ 4-card Constructive Raise, no shortness
- 3♠ 4-card raise, weak hand
- 4♠ 5-card raise, weak hand

Now that’s more like it! For the weaker hands (less than invitational) the trump length is always known and N-S get to their Total Tricks level quickly, applying maximum pressure to the opponents. The only instance where the number of trumps is not known is when we have a good hand, and in that case there is less urgency to harass the enemy.

Some General Rules

The auction above is not the only opportunity for CRICs, we can use them in other situations, subject to these rules:

- Only when Partner has opened 1♥ or 1♠ or has overcalled 1♥ or 1♠
- Only if 3♣ or 3♦ is a *jump*
- Only if the opponents are bidding (which includes doubling)

Sample Auctions

Following the aforementioned rules, here are some occasions where CRIC might be used:

	1♥	1♠	3♣/3♦
	1♥	Dbl	3♣/3♦
1♦	1♥	Pass	3♣/3♦
1♣	1♥	1♠	3♣/3♦
1♦	1♥	Dbl	3♣/3♦

In each of these auctions, the 3♣ or 3♦ bid shows a constructive raise for Partner's Hearts.

Here are some 3♣/3♦ bids which are *not* CRIC's:

1♣	1♦	Pass	3♣
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Partner has not bid a major.

1♠	2♥	3♦
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3♦ was not a jump bid

1♦	Pass	1♠	Pass
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3♣

An opening bid cannot be a CRIC

Pass	Pass	1♥	1♠
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3♦

It's possible to play CRICs by a passed hand, but if your style is frequently to open in 3rd seat with a 4-card major, then perhaps CRICs should not be played here.

A Special Case

Consider this auction:

1♣	1♠	2♣	??
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Now a jump to 3♦ is available, but 3♣ would not be a jump. In this case, 3♦ is used as a CRIC with or without shortness. And, of course, 3♣ in this situation would simply be your run-of-the-mill cue-bid.

Showing Shortness

Opposite Partner's 3♣ CRIC, showing shortness somewhere, 3♦ asks "Where is that singleton?" The simplest responses are "up-the-line":

3♥	Club shortness
3♠	Diamond shortness
3NT	Shortness in the other major

And if the opponents interfere during this singleton-asking process? The simple approach is (a) we ignore their Double and bid as if they had passed, and (b) if they bid a suit then we show our shortness naturally if this can be done below game.

Some Examples

<i>South West</i>	<i>North East</i>
1♠	Dbl ??

As North, what would you bid with the following hands?

♠ QJ42	♥ 8	♦ K765	♣ T976
♠ K542	♥ 85	♦ K76	♣ KT96

Yes, we already did those, they are minimum and maximum versions of a CRIC. And, as they contain a singleton, we bid 3♣.

♠ K542	♥ 8	♦ K765	♣ KT96
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This one is too good for a CRIC, it's a limit raise

♠ K52	♥ 85	♦ A432	♣ JT76
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Here we have the right point-count for a CRIC, but not enough trumps, so we simply raise to 2♠.

♠ J654	♥ Q87	♦ Q43	♣ Q96
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This collection may include 7 HCP's and 4-card support but it's surely not a CRIC. The hand is square and the values are slow, we'd content ourselves with 2♠ on this one.

♠ J6542	♥ Q87	♦ Q4	♣ Q96
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5-card support but not a 4♥ bid, we'd prefer a bit more shape for that. So we'd make a 3♦ CRIC, with the extra trump compensating for the featureless nature of the hand.

♠ JT96	♥ 5	♦ KJT97	♣ 875
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After downgrading the previous two hands, here is one that is worth upgrading. It may be below the 6-9 range, but there is that lovely singleton, the chunky 5-card suit, and potentially useful trump intermediates. Surely it's good enough for a 3♣ bid.

The purpose of those last three examples is to show that it's an over-simplification to assume that *any* hand with 4 trumps and 6-9 HCP's qualifies for a CRIC. And, by the same token there are some hands which do not fit that definition but which *are* suitable for a CRIC.

That's the end of our quick tour of Constructive Raises in Competition. Try them out, they serve a useful function, and they come up in actual play with some frequency.