

English Bridge

Traps for the Unwary

by Michael Byrne



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Stayman in hope

A new series suggested by Brian Sheridan of Croydon

WHEN people first learn conventional bids, they find the idea of bidding a suit to indicate something else quite unusual. Stayman is often the first convention learnt, but once people get the hang of it the danger is not that they don't use it enough, but that *they use it too much* without thinking through the consequences.

Hand 1 would be a typical example:

Hand 1

♠ A Q 5 4
♥ K 10 7 6
♦ 3 2
♣ 8 7 6

Partner opens 1NT (12-14) and the next hand passes, what do you do?

The most sensible course of action is to pass. If you bid Stayman 2♣ and partner responds with a major suit, then all is well, but what if he responds 2♦? You can't now 'escape' into 2NT because (as with most bids of 2NT) this is invitational, asking partner to go to game if he is maximum. Even if partner enjoys playing the cards, 3NT with at most 23 points between the two hands and no long suit to play on will not be a thing of beauty.

The reason you got into trouble with the hand above is because you didn't consider your rebid.

Let's look at a few hands and think about your rebid.

Hand 2

♠ J 9 7 5 4
♥ K J 4 3
♦ 5 4
♣ 3 2

This is ideal to bid Stayman on, because if partner responds 2♦, then you can bid 2♠ showing a weak hand with five spades. If partner responds

2♥ or 2♠ initially, you will pass, of course, happy to have found a safe haven.

Hand 3

♠ A Q J 6
♥ 4
♦ J 9 7 6 5
♣ 9 3 2

odds-on favourite to bid 2♥ and then you are snookered.

Here the picture is not so rosy and you must pass, not bid Stayman. You would be fine if partner responded 2♠ or 2♦, of course, but what is he likely to do? He is

Hand 4

♠ A K J 3
♥ 5 4
♦ 2
♣ 9 8 6 5 3 2

be strong, but you are assured of a fit since partner has promised at least two cards in clubs by opening 1NT.

This time you can bid 2♣ Stayman with a clear conscience. If partner lets you down by bidding 2♦ or 2♥, then you can bid 3♣ as a weak take-out.

Your clubs may not

Hand 5

♠ A Q 9 7
♥ 8 7 5
♦ 5 4
♣ K Q J 3

provided you have 11+ points. If partner doesn't bid your major, you can rebid 2NT or 3NT depending on your point count.

This hand is also ideal for Stayman, with the hope of locating a 4-4 spade fit. You don't need to have both four-card majors to use Stayman – one will do –

Hand 6

♠ 3 2
♥ A Q J 6 5
♦ A Q J 3
♣ 4 3

you don't play transfers, is 3♥, showing a game-going hand with five cards in hearts, asking for support.

Stayman will not tell you what you want to know on this hand, which is: 'Does partner have three cards in hearts, giving us an eight-card fit?' The correct response, if



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Hand 7

♠ J 6 5
♥ J 8 7 5
♦ 9 8 7 6 3
♣ 3

Eek! You have a terrible hand and are favourite to go down in whatever contract you bid. However, a suit contract will be better than 1NT which no doubt will get doubled. You can bid Stayman, and then pass whatever response partner makes.

Let's finish by reviewing a few Dos and Don'ts of Stayman.

Do:

- Use Stayman when you have 5-4 in the majors, whatever the strength of your hand (0+!) as in Hand 2.
- Use Stayman when you have a weak take-out in clubs, whether or not you have a major suit, see Hand 4.
- Use Stayman when you have at least 11 points and one four-card major (not a *five-card* major, unless it is accompanied by four cards in the other major). Stayman is for finding 4-4 fits, see Hand 5.

Don't:

- Use Stayman on weak hands that have only one four-card major suit, see Hand 3.
- Use Stayman without thinking about your rebid if partner bids what you don't want him to (see Hand 1).
- Be afraid to bid Stayman when holding one major suit and 11+ points; you don't need both majors to bid Stayman, *provided you have a re-bid* (see Hand 5). □

Don't conceal your major suits as responder

ONE of the mistakes that people often make when they are starting out is to forget to look for major-suit fits where they exist, in favour of a hasty bid, often in no-trumps.

This sort of hand is a frequent example:

Hand 1

♠ K 8 7 5
♥ Q 10 3
♦ 8 6
♣ K J 10 8

Partner opens 1♦ and the next hand passes; what do you do?

Hand 2

♠ 8 7
♥ K J 9 7
♦ Q 8 7 6
♣ J 9 3

Partner opens 2NT and the next hand passes; what do you do?

In my experience, players who are just learning bridge are split into those people who want to bid no-trumps (because they have stoppers in the other suits), and those that want to show their strong club suit. It may come as a surprise to learn that the right bid is 1♠, and it is not even a close decision.

It is very important that you don't respond in no-trumps when holding a four-card major, as it gives partner the wrong message.

Remember: if you start by bidding a major suit, there's always plenty of time to end up in no-trumps later. This is because a change of suit is forcing, which means partner has to bid again. However, if you respond in no-trumps partner can (and will) pass, and a major-suit fit will have gone begging.

This may be your partner's hand:

Partner 1

♠ A J 10 4
♥ K 4
♦ A K 7 5 4
♣ 6 5

Now compare these two auctions:

Auction 1

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|----------|
| 1♦ | Pass | 1NT | All Pass |

Auction 2

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|----------|
| 1♦ | Pass | 1♠ | Pass |
| 3♣ | Pass | 4♣ | All Pass |

Remember to bid Stayman – it would be embarrassing to bid a confident 3NT only to fail when we had a nice heart fit.

Partner's hand may be as in Partner 2.

The worry you had about the spade suit will soon be allayed – when the opponents cash the first five club tricks! 4♥, meanwhile, is nice and easy.

Hand 3

♠ Q J 5 4
♥ 6
♦ K 8 7 5 3
♣ 8 7 4

Partner opens 1♥; the next hand passes; what do you do?

It may seem strange to respond in a suit that is not your longest, but you must bid 1♠. The hand is not strong enough to bid at the two level, and if you only get one shot you should show your major. If partner has a diamond suit he will rebid it, and the right trump suit will be found. If he has four spades (as above), he can support you.

What about missing major-suit fits on

Partner 2

♠ A K Q
♥ A Q 8 4 3
♦ A J 2
♣ 6 2

Partner 3

♠ 10 8 3 2
♥ A K 6 4 2
♦ 6 4
♣ A J



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Hand 4

♠ Q 10 8 3
♥ A J
♦ Q 6
♣ K Q J 7 5

your rebid? Say that partner opens 1♦ and responds 2♦ over your 2♣ bid, and you have Hand 4. You correctly responded in your longest suit, since you are strong enough to make several bids, and you should carry on showing your shape by bidding 2♠. Partner's hand may be as in Partner 4; now 3NT (which partner will pass if you bid it) has no chance, but 4♠ is a contract that should present no challenges.

Let's review a few points about bidding major suits as responder:

Do:

- Show a major suit, even a poor one (Hand 1), in preference to responding with a bid of no-trumps.
- Remember to bid Stayman even when you have a balanced hand (Hand 2).
- Look for a major-suit fit on the second round even if partner doesn't show one at first (Hand 4).

Don't:

- Worry about the quality of your major suit – length is strength.
- Be side-tracked by wanting to show partner your point count: there's time to limit the hand later on.
- Let a minor suit distract you when you have a weak hand; if you are only worth one bid, show the major suit (Hand 3). □

Blackwood abuse

BLACKWOOD is a convention that people learn early on and despite most people's reluctance to go anywhere near a slam for the first five years of their bridge career, once the bug hits them they quickly over-rely on Blackwood and frankly abuse it.

Here's a situation that arises far too often:

Hand 1

♠ A Q J 9 4 2
♥ K J 7
♦ A K J
♣ 9

You open 1♠ with Hand 1 and partner responds 2♦ – what now? With 19 High-card Points plus several for distribution, not to mention the ♦A-K-J

of partner's (probable) five-card suit, a slam is very much on the agenda, and many people would launch into 4NT without thought for the final contract.

However, this would be a clear error. You have no idea what suit you want to play in, and asking partner about aces is not going to tell you that. If partner has Hand A, 6♦ is the place to be, but if partner has Hand B, 6♠ will hit the jackpot:

Hand A

♠ 3
♥ Q 5 4
♦ Q 10 7 5 4 3
♣ A K 2

Hand B

♠ K 3
♥ Q 10 3 2
♦ 9 8 6 5
♣ A 6 3

Will asking for aces enable you to find out which of these hands partner has? Certainly not. The right bid is of course 3♠, showing a strong hand with six good spades, (forcing to game after a two-level response) and waiting to hear more from partner.

Let's see a few more situations where people foolishly pile into Blackwood without thought for the consequences.

Hand 2

♠ A 4
♥ K J 3
♦ A Q J 9 6 5 4 3
♣ Void

Holding Hand 2 you hear partner open 1NT – what now?

With 15 HCP, an eight-card suit and a useful-looking void, a slam is quite likely.

So, should you launch into Blackwood?

Certainly not – you may know what suit you want as trumps but you must let partner in on the picture first. A response of 3♦, showing at least a six-card suit and a hand looking for a slam, is the right response. For one thing, even if you did bid 4NT it would not be Blackwood asking for aces, but instead a quantitative raise, asking partner whether he was maximum (where he would bid on) or minimum (where he would pass).

Another situation where people can't see the (Black)wood for the trees is where a suit has been agreed but one suit is 'wide open', meaning you don't have a control in it. Something like Hand 3:

Hand 3

♠ A K J 3
♥ J 3
♦ A K J 7 6 4
♣ Q

You open 1♦; partner pleasantly surprises you by raising to 3♦ – what now?

A slam may well be on, and with a 6-4 distribution a sign-off in game would be very timid – but Blackwood is not the answer! If partner shows you one ace, you will be none the wiser as to whether he has anything useful in hearts, and you might go off in slam straight away when they can cash the ♥A-K if partner holds Hand C:

Hand C

♠ 8 7
♥ 9 7 6
♦ Q 10 3 2
♣ A K J 4

Hand D

♠ Q 9 2
♥ K Q 4
♦ 9 8 3 2
♣ A 3 2

Of course, if you are reading this and thinking to yourself: 'I would avoid that by bidding Blackwood and then stopping in 5♦ when partner only has one ace,' then I should point out that partner might have Hand D: it is very balanced, not even maximum, and has feeble trumps, but slam is still a good proposition.

What should you do instead? Simply bid 3♠ over 3♦ and await developments. If



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partner comes back by bidding 3NT (to show stoppers in clubs and hearts) as he will do very often, then you can continue to 4♦ to indicate you are strong and have something good in spades, and take it from there.

Then of course there is the problem of using Blackwood on hands that don't warrant a slam try at all. Consider Hand 4:

Hand 4

♠ A Q 7 2
♥ K J
♦ A J 9 4
♣ K J 8

You open 1♠ (playing Acol with four-card majors) and partner raises to 3♠. What now?

Here you do know what you want as trumps (spades) and you have a control in every suit. However, you simply don't have enough playing strength to make a slam opposite a normal limit raise (10-11 points). If partner has: ♠ 9 8 4 3 ♥ Q 3 2 ♦ K Q 5 3 ♣ A 3, you would probably go down in 5♠, and 6♠ has no chance whatsoever!

Let's review a few points about Blackwood:

Don't:

- Use Blackwood when you don't know what you want as trumps (Hand 1);
- Use Blackwood when you have a suit wide open (Hand 3);
- Consider a slam without enough playing strength (Hand 4).

Do:

- Make sure you can cope with any response from partner;
- Make sure you know where you are going once partner tells you how many aces he has.

Forcing or not?

ONE of the problems that the improving player struggles with is when a bid can be passed (non-forcing) and when it can't be passed (forcing). In general, 'new' suits are forcing and 'old' suits (support, or preference) are limit bids showing the strength of the hand. Also, there are some situations where you mustn't pass, otherwise a game or slam will be missed.

This is a situation I see people get wrong quite often:

♠ K J 8 7
♥ Q 3 2
♦ 7 6 5 4
♣ J 7

Partner opens 1♣ and you respond 1♠, (ignoring the poor diamond suit); partner re-bids 2♥; what now?

You cannot pass. Partner's bid is a reverse bid, showing 16+ points, and is forcing for one round. He could have 21 points and you might even have a slam on (though that is very unlikely!). The right bid is to give preference to 3♣, following the idea of putting partner back to the 5-2 fit rather than leaving him in the 4-3 fit. Partner will pass 3♣ with a minimum reverse (16-17) and press on to game with a bit more.

What about a different situation, where people want to bid on when they should be passing?

♠ 7 2
♥ K 9 8 6 4
♦ Q J 9 8 4
♣ 5

Partner opens 1♣ and re-bids 2♣ over your response of 1♥; what do you do?

As hard as it seems, the only sensible call is to pass. It may not be pretty, and 2♣ might go down but quite simply, if you carry on bidding, you will get too high. Changing the suit to 2♦ is forcing for one round, and you will only get out alive if partner supports your diamonds. In all probability partner will rebid clubs and you will have 'rescued' partner from 2♣ to 3♣!

You should reserve the change of suit for hands where game is on the radar such as this one (*top of next column*):

♠ A 2
♥ K Q 9 8 4
♦ Q J 9 8 3
♣ 8

What about when partner produces more than just a feeble re-bid of his own suit at the two level?

♠ K 3
♥ A J 9 8 6
♦ K J 7 6 4
♣ J

Partner opens 1♣ and jumps to 3♣ over your response of 1♥; your choice?

You have a great hand, and your jack of clubs will be just what partner needs to fill in the gap in his suit. Should you leap to 4NT, or perhaps to 4♦?

As usual, there is no need: although partner's 3♣ bid is non-forcing (showing a good 15 to a poor 18), any continuation is game forcing; simply bid 3♦ and await developments. At this stage you have no idea what you want as trumps: it could be diamonds, hearts or clubs (or even no-trumps!) so tread gently and see where the tide takes you.

Are there any times when a new suit might be non forcing? There are a few cases, mostly when the opener has had a choice of whether to rebid two or three of a suit, and has chosen to rebid two.

♠ K 8 3
♥ 8
♦ Q 4 3
♣ J 9 8 6 5 4

Partner opens 1♥ and rebids 2♦ over your 1NT response; what is your call?

This time a hasty pass is in order. Partner could have jumped to 3♦ if he had enough for game facing the 6 points you have shown by responding, and he has chosen not to do so. However lowly a contract of 2♦ is, it's always better to stop low and take the points in the bank rather than aim high and miss.

What about bids in no-trumps? Almost exclusively these are non-forcing limit



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bids, which mean you can pass them if you don't think game will make. Let's see one in action:

♠ K J 6 5
♥ Q 10 8 7 4
♦ A 2
♣ Q 4

This time you are the opener and your 1♥ opening is greeted by a 1NT response; what now?

It is absolutely crystal clear to pass. Partner has denied a four-card spade suit (see 'Traps' article in the October issue) and won't have four-card support for hearts or three-card support and a ruffing value as he could have raised. Partner's range is 6-9, so there is no chance of game. Believe it or not, I have seen quite sensible players rebid 2♥ on a hand like this.

Let's review a few points about forcing and non-forcing auctions:

Don't:

- Pass when partner makes a reverse bid, as it is forcing for one round.
- Carry on bidding when there is no chance of game and the hand is a horrible misfit.
- Jump the bidding when you are in a forcing auction and you haven't worked out what will be trumps; just keep the bidding low and consult partner.

Do:

- Pass when there is no chance of game and partner could have shown a strong hand but has chosen not to.
- Bid the full value of your hand; remember a raise of partner's suit is a non-forcing limit bid.

Reversing the norm . . .

ONE thing that people struggle with for little reason is the mysterious sequence of bidding known as a 'reverse'. One of the reasons for this is that no-one knows why it is called a reverse – perhaps the reason is that you bid your suits the other way round to usual.

What is a reverse? It is where you re-bid a second suit that is higher ranking than your first suit, which takes you past the safety net of your original suit – sometimes called 'going through the barrier'.

This would be a classic example:

Hand 1

♠ 3
♥ A Q 9 5
♦ K Q 8 6 4
♣ A Q 3

You open 1♦ and when partner bids 1♠, you rebid 2♥. Note that to put you back to your first suit (diamonds) as partner might often want to do, he has to go to the three level. It is a

good thing then that you have extra values (16+) as partner may only have 6 or 7 points and you will need them all to make nine tricks!

Let's change the hand slightly:

Hand 2

♠ 3
♥ K J 9 5
♦ K Q 8 6 4
♣ K J 3

Now you cannot rebid 2♥ as you lack the values to take partner to the three level. Just rebid 2♦ and if partner has a heart suit he will bid it (if he has enough points to press on).

I mentioned before about 'going through the barrier'. What is this strange barrier I speak of? Of course it is invisible and metaphorical, and is represented by two of your original suit. So if you have opened 1♣ then the barrier is 2♣, and a rebid of a new suit that takes you past 2♣ is a reverse, otherwise it is not:

Hand 3

♠ A Q 5 4
♥ K J
♦ 8 4
♣ Q J 7 4 3

Here you open 1♣ and partner bids 1♦. It is fine to rebid 1♠ as, although spades are the higher ranking suit, it doesn't take you past the barrier of 2♣ and if

partner is weak you will be able to stop low.

What if partner has responded at the two level – is it the same? You hold this hand:

Hand 4

♠ A Q J 5
♥ K 8 6 4 3
♦ Q J 2
♣ 2

You open 1♥ and partner bids 2♣; what do you do now?

You mustn't rebid 2♠, as that is a reverse, and if partner is minimum once again you will be committed to the three

level. The correct rebid is 2♥ – the suit isn't brilliant and if it turns out partner has a poor hand and leaves you in 2♥ you may struggle, but it is better than overbidding on a misfit, and getting far too high.

What about if your rebid would be at the three level? You hold the following hand:

Hand 5

♠ K 3
♥ A Q 6 5 3
♦ 7 3
♣ K J 6 5

You open 1♥ and partner bids 2♦; what now?

If you show your second suit by bidding 3♣, then again you take your side past the barrier of 2♥ and you are showing a good hand.

You need extra values to make this bid – called a 'high-level reverse' – about 16 points. While a normal reverse is forcing, but not forcing to game, a high-level reverse is forcing to game, since partner has shown 9+ points by responding at the two level.

This raises an important point: when you make a reverse bid, partner isn't allowed to pass it. There are various weak responses he can make, either by bidding 2NT to show a poor hand with a stopper in the unbid suit, by giving preference back to your first suit, or rebidding his own suit. Each of those bids shows 5-7 points and can be passed by opener if he is minimum.

Opener

1♣
2♥
Pass

Responder

1♠
2NT



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Responder has little fit for clubs or hearts, a spade suit that he can't rebid, and a stopper in diamonds.

Opener

1♣
2♦
3♣

Responder

1♥
2♥
Pass

Responder shows a poor hand with a re-biddable heart suit (at least five-card long) but opener isn't interested and rebids his club suit to show six (he has already shown a five-card suit by reversing).

Let's review some dos and don'ts of reversing:

Do:

- Make sure you have 16+ points when you make a reverse bid (Hand 1).
- Make sure you are at least 5-4 when you reverse; balanced hands with two four-card suits should either open or re-bid no trumps.
- Show your second suit on weak hands if doing so doesn't take you past the barrier; for example: 1♣ – 1♥ – 1♠ (Hand 3).

Don't:

- Reverse on weak hands just because partner has bid at the two level – you still need extra values (Hand 4).
- Make a high-level reverse by going to the three level unless you are prepared to play in game once partner has responded at the two level (Hand 5).
- Forget to make a weak response to a reverse if you have a bad hand.



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The Pitfalls of Overcalling

THIS month's trap is a commonly occurring situation that many people do feel comfortable with – but in reality they are committing transgressions they don't even know exist. Let's begin by looking at what an overcall shows.

What is an overcall?

An overcall is a short newflash of information to tell your partner that your hand is principally best played in the suit bid. The range is approximately something like 8-17 high-card points, and while most authorities agree on the minimum value, opinion is split on the higher value, which unlike house prices has been rising steadily for a long time.

An overcall is made for a variety of reasons – sometimes you want to win the contract, sometimes you want to pre-empt the opposition, sometimes you want to attract partner's attention to the best opening lead if your side is outbid. In each case you must have a clear reason for bidding – wanting to bid because you haven't opened the bidding all morning and 'Why should they play all the hands?' are not valid reasons!

Here is a common scenario; your left-hand opponent deals and passes, partner passes, right-hand opponent opens with 1♣ and your hand is:

| | |
|---|-----------|
| ♠ | K J 7 |
| ♥ | Q 3 |
| ♦ | K 7 6 3 2 |
| ♣ | J 4 2 |

Ten points and a five-card suit – perfect for an overcall, right? Wrong – there are many downsides to bidding.

Firstly, if your side is outbid (very likely), then you are not particularly keen to get a diamond lead. You're quite happy if partner

wants to whack out his fourth highest heart or spade – you have an honour in both. Partner leading the jack of diamonds could blow the suit, for example, if the next hand has something like ♦Q-10-x and declarer the ace.

Secondly, you are just giving the opponents more information that may help them when they come to play the hand. They will know where the points are and which finesses to take. By bidding you are exposing your honours in the majors to potential detection.

Thirdly, a diamond overcall has no pre-emptive value; what have you stopped the opponents from bidding?

Fourthly, and most importantly, you don't want diamonds as trumps! Imagine the next hand bids 1♥/♠ and partner leaps to 5♦; do you really feel happy? Even if partner has a lot of trumps and some distribution, you are going to struggle to get out for a profitable sacrifice, and your soft honours (queens and jacks) in the side suits means a slam is unlikely for the opponents.

By contrast, change the hand to:

| | |
|---|-----------|
| ♠ | K Q J 9 7 |
| ♥ | Q 8 7 6 |
| ♦ | 8 3 2 |
| ♣ | 7 |

Now it would be right to overcall even though the hand is poorer in high-card points. Your suit is great, you are happy to be raised, you are taking up a lot of

bidding space, and you won't be giving any help to the opponents if they end up playing the contract.

Does the vulnerability matter?

What about vulnerability – does that make a difference? Well, when you are vulnerable the opponents are more likely to play for penalties and try to double you, so while your hand doesn't have to contain

more high-card points, it is a good idea to make sure the suit is respectable and that your hand contains more playing strength.

| | |
|---|------------|
| ♠ | K Q 10 8 4 |
| ♥ | 6 |
| ♦ | Q 7 6 3 |
| ♣ | J 3 2 |

This is a hand where 1♠ is not unreasonable as an overcall over any opening bid non vulnerable, but vulnerable you'd need to think twice about it.

Double or overcall?

There is another problem associated with overcalls and that is when to make an overcall and when to double. One particular urban legend is that 'an overcall shows 10 or 11 points because with an opening hand you double'.

What rubbish! An overcall shows a hand with a five-card suit – often a major and is made so that you can find a 5-3 fit. A double is made on a hand looking to find a 4-4 fit or partner's long suit. This hand might catch a few unwary students out; 1♦ is opened on the right and you hold:

| | |
|---|-----------|
| ♠ | K J 8 7 3 |
| ♥ | K 8 7 4 |
| ♦ | 8 |
| ♣ | A Q J |

With a good opening bid and a singleton diamond I would understand if anyone wanted to double for take-out on this hand – but they would still be wrong.

A 1♠ overcall gives you a good chance of reaching an eight-card fit in spades – partner needs only three to support. And more importantly, if you start with an overcall you can back in with a take-out double later on, if 2♦, 3♦ or even 4♦ comes back to you. That way you will find an eight-card fit in either major suit if one exists. By contrast if you start with a double, then you will be stuck later on: if a pre-emptive raise of 3♦ comes back to

you, you can't now bid your spades – to double and then bid a suit is a very strong bid, showing a hand too strong to have overcalled on the first round.

Overcalling at the two level

So far the common mistakes that we have considered have involved one-level overcalls, but what about overcalls at the two level? Is there a major difference?

Yes. To put it simply, while an overcall at the one level shows a five-card suit, an overcall at the two level shows a six-card suit. (When you are overcalling 2♥ over 1♠, there is more freedom as game is only two levels away, but in general it's easier to have blanket rules as they make it harder to forget.)

♠ K 10 4
♥ J 7 4
♦ A Q 9 6 5
♣ Q 2

This hand is a typical example of the pitfalls of overcalling when 1♥ is opened on the right. In a club duplicate the majority of players would bid 2♦, yet it is wrong to do so. You have a balanced hand (5-3-3-2 is one of the three balanced types) with little playing strength and a mediocre suit. There is no point in saying that you have 12 points – those points will do little to help you when partner puts down two little diamonds and 8 points and you go for 500 despite having half the deck between you.

An overcall at the two level (particularly in a minor suit) should have a good six-card suit with decent playing strength. Often the aim is to get to 3NT and a six-card suit is a trick better than a five-card

suit – that's like having another ace.

♠ K 10 4
♥ J 7
♦ A Q 10 7 4 2
♣ 5 3

This hand, despite containing fewer points, is much more suitable for an overcall; you have more playing strength and less defence, which means if you do incur a penalty, then the opponents might at least have a game on.

Let's review the dos and don'ts of overcalling:

Do:

- Make sure you have a good suit when you overcall – as well as attracting the right lead it offers some protection against incurring a penalty.
- Keep one eye on the vulnerability – yours and the opponents'. (Going for 500 is much less painful when they make 630 in 3NT).

Don't:

- Worry about having a low point count if the playing strength of the hand is up to scratch.
- Overcall at the two level if you have a five-card suit: you'll find yourself having to struggle in vain at the two and three level far too often.
- Give in to 'Bid when it's your turn syndrome': you must have a clear reason for overcalling, whether it be for the lead, to take up bidding room or to have a realistic chance of playing the hand. □

CAPTION COMPETITION



That's two bottoms in a row!

THE winner of our June competition, with the caption above, is Jackie Hinden of Brighton, who will receive a charming Victoriana bridge mug from our sponsors, Bridge and Golf Gifts Direct (see page 16). Other good captions were: *Did you have to push him so hard just because he revoked?* (Sally Izod, Cheltenham); *This isn't quite what I expected when you signed us up to a bridge holiday!* (Steve Sakstein, Stanmore); *According to the inscription, it's 75 years old!* (Dave Bryan, Upton, Chester); *It's bridge, Jim, but not as we know it* (Frank Fallon, Charminster); *See that chap down there, walking towards the river with all those rocks in his pockets? Isn't he the one who went off in that easy peasy 6♦ last night?* (M.J. Connolly, Lakenham); and *This stream is like our bridge partnership – ebbs and flows!* (Bill Roberts, Thornton-Cleveleys).

The cartoon for our new competition is below. Please send your bridgy captions (multiple entries accepted) to the Editor, *English Bridge*, 23 Erleigh Road, Reading RG1 5LR or by e-mail to elena@ebu.co.uk not later than 20th August 2011. **Don't forget to include your full postal address!**



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CROCKFORDS CUP 2010-2011



Photo: James Vickers

WINNERS of the 2010-2011 Crockfords Cup (*in the picture, from the left*) were Paul Denning, Patrick Shields, Adrian Thomas and Peter Goodman, from Gloucestershire and Wales. The Plate winners (from Wales) were Patrick Jourdain, Mike Tedd, Tony Ratcliff and John Salisbury. For the first time, both finals took place at the same time and venue.

Dos and Don'ts of Take-out Doubles



Michael Byrne

THIS month's article continues the theme of competitive bidding by looking at making take-out doubles. The mysterious 'red cross of doom' is an exciting new tool when we first learn about it, but a keenness to use it can quickly turn to an addiction, doubling on the most inappropriate hands and passing on ones you should be bidding on.

Let's remind ourselves of what a take-out double shows:

When you double an opening bid for take out, you are showing opening values, support for the other suits and (in principle) shortage in the suit opened.

A traditional double of a 1♦ opening would look like Hand 1:

Hand 1
♠ A Q 4 3
♥ K J 7 6
♦ 7
♣ Q 9 7 3

Many people often forget that a take-out double should be used when they are too strong for another action, typically too strong for a suit overcall (18+

High-card Points with a long suit) or too strong for an overcall of 1NT (19+ HCP with a balanced hand).

If 1♦ were opened on your right, then you'd have to double on Hand 2 as well:

Hand 2
♠ 5 4
♥ K J 7 6
♦ A K J 8
♣ A K J

It might seem weird to double holding four strong cards in the opponent's suit and a small doubleton in spades, but remember: you have a re-bid available; you are strong enough to

double and then bid no-trumps.

What you must *not* do is double on an 'intermediate hand' with some of the suits and shortage in another and hope to weather the storm. Have a look at Hand 3:

Hand 3
♠ A Q J 5
♥ 8
♦ K Q 2
♣ K 7 6 5 2

While it is fine to double 1♥ on this, if the opening bid were 1♦ the correct call would be 'Pass', hoping to be able to show your hand later (by doubling when an opponent bids hearts). It would be quite wrong to say to yourself: 'I will double and then if partner bids hearts, I can go to no-trumps in the knowledge that partner has that suit covered.'

This would be wrong on so many levels: if you double and then bid no-trumps, partner will think you have 19+ and a balanced hand including at least two hearts. Partner will invariably bid hearts again and the whole auction will descend into chaos.



Sometimes people double when they should be overcalling, as with Hand 4:

Hand 4
♠ A Q J 5
♥ 8
♦ 6 5
♣ K Q 10 8 7 5

If the opening bid is 1♥, then while it's true that you have shortage in the opponent's suit, an opening hand and good support for the other major, your heart will sink to its lowest depths if you double and partner bids 5♦ over the opponents' 4♥ contract – not that an unlikely scenario. Better to bid 2♣ and get the spades in later.

And finally what about hands that don't

immediately look like a double but are such that you should be taking action?

Hand 5
♠ A 4 3
♥ K J 6 5
♦ A 3 2
♣ Q 8 6

Hand 5, whether the opponents open 1♣ or 1♦, is a fine double of either. It's true you are lacking shortage, but when you put down your 14 glittering points partner's frown of disapproval will turn to a dazzling smile. You have support for all of the unbid suits and a good opening bid, and whatever partner bids will be fine. It would be a fair gambit to double 1♠ (if that was what was opened) as well, although there is less incentive as partner can't reply cheaply at the one level.

Let's review the Dos and Don'ts of take-out doubles:

Do:

- Remember to double when you have a balanced hand too strong for a 1NT overcall (19+ HCP) (Hand 2).
- Double when you have an opening hand with support for all the other suits, even if you are more balanced than you'd like (Hand 5).

Don't:

- Make a take-out Double when you have a long suit that is better suited to overcalling (Hand 4).
- Double with a singleton in an unbid major, whatever the strength of your hand (Hand 3).

Responder's Rebid: Giving Preference

THIS month's article sees us return to the humble uncontested auction as we look at the situation where partner shows two suits and we are called upon to decide which one we prefer – if indeed we prefer one at all . . .

This is a common situation:

♠ K J 7 6 3
♥ Q 10 3
♦ J 5
♣ Q 10 5

Partner opens 1♦; you make an impeccable response of 1♠, and partner now bids 2♣; what should you say?

A lot of people will think: 'I have shown four spades and I actually have five, so I will rebid them and show the extra length.'

The problem with this is that partner has already shown (at least) nine cards in diamonds and clubs, so he is quite likely to be short in spades. It follows therefore that if you rebid a suit as responder you need a six-card suit.

What about a bid of no-trumps? You do have a full heart stopper but you lack the values for a bid of 2NT which would show an invitational hand of 10-11 points.

Even though you don't particularly like partner's suits, you're going to have to choose one. Although you personally prefer clubs, as a partnership you should prefer diamonds, as a 5-2 fit is generally better than a 4-3 fit. (This is because with a 5-2 fit you have more trumps than anyone else at the table 85% of the time, as opposed to being in a 4-3 fit, when one of your opponents will have the same length as you nearly 50% of the time)

This is called 'false preference', as you are giving preference to a suit you personally don't prefer, but your partnership prefers as a whole.

More importantly, by bidding 2♦ you give partner another chance to bid while not overbidding your hand. Contrast this with choosing clubs, where you either have to pass 2♣ and risk missing game (if partner has a reasonable hand with three spades, for example), or bid 3♣ which will

get you too high as well as putting you in the wrong strain.

Most of the time partner will pass 2♦ but if he makes a try for game, then with a maximum 9 points (out of the possible 6-9 that simple preference shows) you should accept it.

What about if you have a hand where you prefer diamonds enthusiastically?

♠ A 7 6 3 2
♥ Q J 2
♦ K J 3
♣ 5 4

After 1♦ from partner, 1♠ from you, and 2♣ from partner you can now bid 3♦, to show an eight-card fit and an invitational hand (10-11 points).

A common mistake would be to bid 2♦ and wait for partner to carry on bidding – you might be waiting a long time.

What about when you hold a bad hand?

♠ Q 6 5 3 2
♥ 6 3 2
♦ K 7
♣ 9 6 5

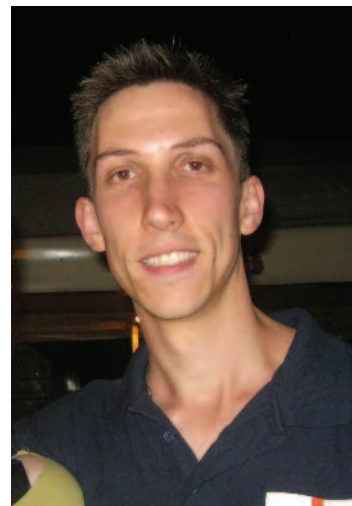
Partner opens 1♦; you bid 1♠ and partner bids 2♣ – what now?

Those of you who have read this far will want to bid 2♦ recalling that at the beginning of this article I said that a 5-2 fit was better than a 4-3 fit. That may be true and if you could choose the final contract, then 2♦ would certainly be higher on your list than 2♣, but if you give false preference on this terrible hand by bidding 2♦ partner is very likely to bid again looking for game. The best thing to do is to pass 2♣ and hope your light response of 1♠ has stolen a contract from the opponents.

Another common error is for people to go on bidding on a misfitting hand in an effort to 'improve the contract', forgetting that partner might take them seriously.

On the hand shown at the top of the next column, partner opens 1♦ and you correctly respond 1♠, but partner disobligingly rebids 2♣ – what next?

It is true that partner could hold four



Michael Byrne

TRAPS FOR THE UNWARY

♠ J 6 5 3 2
♥ A K 8 7
♦ 4 3
♣ 6 5

cards in hearts and lack the values to bid them (as 1♦ – 1♠ – 2♥ is a reverse bid showing 16+) but I'm afraid you just have to bid 2♦. If

partner does have a concealed heart suit and enough to invite game (say: ♠ Void, ♥ Q654, ♦ AKQ72, ♣ A1073) then it is to be hoped that he will bid again over 2♦. If you bid 2♥ now then every time the hand is a misfit you will simply end up too high.

Let's review some of the Dos and Don'ts of responder's rebid:

Do:

- Try and work out what trump suit you want as a partnership not just as an individual – remember a 5-2 fit is better than a 4-3 fit (as it is more resistant to bad breaks).
- Make sure you bid the full value of your hand; if you make the same bid with 6 points as you do with 11 then partner will be confused.

Don't:

- Rebid five-card suits when partner shows 5-4 in two different suits. He will be short in yours and you may end up in 5-1 fits.
- Forget you are allowed to pass when you don't think game is on and you have reached a reasonable part-score.
- Start trying to improve the contract when you have a bad hand and a misfit. Just accept a small loss and move on. □



Opener's Jump Shift

THIS MONTH we look at the opener having a good hand and having to show his second suit to partner by jumping – but how strong a hand is he showing and what should the responder do?

This sort of hand is typical of where many players go wrong:

You open 1♥ and partner bids 1♠ – many people would jump to 3♣ on the grounds that '2♣ is a weak bid.' Alas, all they are doing is giving themselves a problem later on.

When partner bids again they have no idea of whether he has 6 points or 12, and will surely struggle to find the right bid. The right thing to do is bid a simple 2♣ (showing 11-18 points) and wait to hear from partner. Partner can pass 2♣, but if he does so he will normally have one heart and three clubs (with two hearts he will often give 'false preference' – see last month's article) and game will be a struggle.

To jump in a new suit after partner has responded at the one level you need a game forcing hand – or, to put it another way, you need about 19 points. Distribution does play a part but remember shapely hands are at their most powerful when they have found a fit – if partner is short in your suits you will quickly find that you struggle to make tricks.

Change the hand to:

♠ K J 3
♥ A K J 10 7
♦ J
♣ A Q 8 6

Now if partner passes your 2♣ rebid you may well miss game, so you should jump to 3♣. You will be able to show your spade support on the next round and partner will have a good idea of your shape and be able to choose the best contract.

DO YOU always need 19 points? After all, sometimes partner will pass your rebid with 7 or 8 and game might make. That depends

on whether you have a partial fit with partner; if partner has responded at the one level in a suit for which you have three-card support, then upgrade your hand.

♠ K J 3
♥ A K J 8 7 5
♦ Void
♣ A J 10 4

You open 1♥ and partner responds 1♠; are you worth a game force? On this hand the answer is yes. Although you only hold 17 high-card points, you have a partial fit with partner, an excellent heart suit and a void. Partner might well pass 2♣ holding a singleton heart and three clubs, being reluctant to rebid a ropey five-card spade suit such as A-10-8-6-2, when you have a fit and an easy way to make tricks.

Change the hand to:

♠ Void
♥ A K J 8 7 5
♦ K J 3
♣ A J 10 4

Now with a potential misfit you are better off bidding 2♣. Partner's wasted values in spades will not help you make a game.

WHAT SHOULD partner bid over your strong jump shift? This isn't too difficult: since opener's jump shift is game forcing, he can just make a waiting bid, either simple preference or re-bid his own suit.

♠ Q 10 6 3
♥ 7 5
♦ K J 9
♣ 9 4 3 2

With this hand after 1♥ – 1♠ – 3♦, responder can simply bid 3♥ as false preference. If opener has a six-card suit he can carry on in hearts, or bid 3NT with a stopper in clubs.

A common method is to play something called 'fast arrival', whereby if you jump to game it means you are not interested in higher things.

The sequence 1♥ – 1♠ – 3♣ – 4♥ would say to the opener: 'I have heard you tell me we are playing in game and I reluctantly agree to play in 4♥ – but I have a bad hand and if you bid on to a slam, on your own head be it!'

Responder would typically have three-card support and a minimum response such as:

♠ K J 6 5
♥ J 5 3
♦ Q 8 7 3
♣ J 2

Note that if you have the same shape and more points you can just give simple preference and wait to hear more from your partner – as the auction is game-forcing there is no hurry to get to a high level. ***Bid quickly to game with a bad hand, and take your time with a good hand.***

LET'S REVIEW the dos and don'ts of opener's jump shift:

Do:

- Make sure you have enough to make game opposite a misfitting minimum when you make a jump shift.
- Remember to bid out your shape after making a strong jump shift. If partner puts you back to your first suit, he may only have a small doubleton, so even if you have a robust A-K-9-8-4 you might need a different trump suit.

Don't:

- Worry if partner leaves you in 2♣ when you have 17 or 18 points; he will almost certainly have a singleton in your first suit and only three-card support for your second suit, and the hand will be a struggle. (I can't tell you how many times I have seen an angry declarer go off in 2NT after telling his partner: 'You should have put me in 3NT!')
- Automatically re-raise yourself when you get simple preference.
- Bid on (unless you have a monstrous hand!) after partner leaps to game in a game forcing auction; he is showing a weak hand. □



Opening and Rebidding a Five-card Suit

THIS MONTH we look at a situation many people get caught up in when they start off sensibly with a bid of a suit only to find that they have overstated their shape on the next round.

This is an example of how a simple rebid can lead to a silly contract:

♠ Q 6 5 4
♥ A J 7 6 3
♦ 6
♣ K Q 4

You open 1♥ and partner responds 1NT; what now? You might like to rebid 2♠ to show your other suit, but remembering the *Traps* article from April 2011

you recall that such a bid would go 'through the barrier' and thus be a reverse bid showing 16+ points, so you bid 2♥ as you don't want to leave partner to fester in 1NT with a small singleton – right?

Wrong! Partner's 1NT response is not showing a balanced hand, and not promising two hearts. It is commonly called the 'Dustbin 1NT response', and could contain a heart void; all it says is: 'I lack the values to respond at the two level and I don't have heart support or four spades.'

To rebid your heart suit now promises a six-card suit – as partner might not have any. On the actual hand you should pass, which seems difficult to do until you remember that diamonds is almost certainly partner's best suit (remember he has denied four spades and four hearts, and won't normally have three hearts as he could have raised).

If you rebid a major suit after partner has responded a dustbin 1NT then you must have six cards in it – for the simple reason that your bid will often end the auction, and partner might not have any!

If you rebid five-card major suits when you don't have to, then you might end up in a 5-0 fit, effectively having found an eight-card fit – for your opponents!

So – does rebidding a major suit show six cards? No, not always; what about this hand:

♠ Q 6 5 3 2
♥ J
♦ A K 8 6 5
♣ Q 3

You open 1♠ and partner bids 2♥; you have no other choice but to rebid 2♠. A bid of 3♦ would be a high-level reverse, forcing to game. The difference between this sequence and the previous one is that in this second example partner's bid is forcing – so you have to rebid something.

It might not be very pretty, but having responded at the two level partner will often bid again, so if a diamond fit exists it will normally come to light.

What about when the pesky opponents start getting in the way? Let's say you have this sequence:

| | | | |
|------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|
| <i>You</i> | <i>Oppo 1</i> | <i>Partner</i> | <i>Oppo 2</i> |
| 1♠ | Pass | 2♦ | 2♥ |
| 2♠ | | | |

The opponents have intervened; has it made any difference? Yes; as the opponents have got in the way, you are no longer obliged to speak. You could simply pass 2♥ and see what partner can do. If you bid 2♠ when you don't have to, it is called a *free bid* and shows a six-card suit. If you have a five-card suit (and a normal minimum hand), pass and leave it to partner. He will show three-card spade support on the next round, having denied four-card support through his failure to raise on the first round.

Remember that when you are playing Acoll and you open a major, you will either have five cards or a strong balanced hand – if you pass (denying a strong balanced hand) partner will know you have a shapely hand and be able to bid accordingly.

So far all we've looked at is major suits – is it different for minor suits? Let's revisit our first example changing the suit to clubs:

♠ Q 6 5 4
♥ K Q 4
♦ 6
♣ A J 7 6 3

four is when he is 3-3-4-3 and has a grotty diamond suit, perhaps something like this:

♠ K J 3
♥ J 9 7
♦ 10 8 4 3
♣ K 9 2

(In traditional Acoll a 1NT response promised not only four clubs but also 8-10 as with poorer hands you raised to 2♣ straight away, but this is losing popularity as

people appreciate that a 1NT response is a good tactical weapon useful for keeping your opponents out.) In this case knowing of a probable nine-card fit, it is perfectly safe to rebid your clubs on only five.

Does this hold true if you have opened diamonds?

Yes, partner's 1NT reply denies a major. He will normally have two or three diamonds (a singleton only if he was 3-3-1-6 with not enough to respond 2♣), so if you have doubts about 1NT it's OK to rebid 2♦.

The same rules about competitive bidding still apply, though: if you open a minor suit and rebid it in competition, making a *free bid*, then you must have six; with five pass and let partner support you if he can.

Let's review the dos and don'ts of opener's rebid:

Do:

- Make sure you hold a six-card major when you rebid it after a non-forcing dustbin 1NT response from partner; remember you can always pass if you have nothing else to say.
- Protect yourself in competitive auctions by holding a six-card suit when you make a free bid.

Don't:

- Worry too much about leaving partner in 1NT when you have a singleton – your weak suit is almost certainly his best
- Make the same bid you were going to make after an overcall by the opponents – a free bid promises something extra, not just the same opening bid you had a minute ago. □



Opening 2NT – When and Why?

AN OPENING 2NT is not actually as tricky or mysterious as many people think, yet the pressure of holding half the deck seems to cause players to panic, lose their judgement and start making unforced errors.

Let's start by looking at what a 2NT opening shows. In modern Acol it shows a balanced hand of 20-22 high-card points that can't open at the one level for fear that a game will be missed if partner passes. (Some players using Benjamin or a Multi-coloured 2♦ may have a way to show 19-20 which is a waste of time: 19-point hands should not be opened at the two level; if you're going to open them with a 2NT bid, you should have 20-21 and 22-23 as your rebid ranges after 2♣ and 2♦ openings.)

I have noticed that players are often reluctant to open 1NT or 2NT when they have a low doubleton, but this is just part of bridge. Remember: your weakest suit is likely to be partner's strongest, so the suits you are worried about are the ones he normally has covered and *vice versa*.

Let's look at a few hands suitable for a 2NT opening:

| Hand 1 | Hand 2 |
|-------------|--------------|
| ♠ A Q J 6 5 | ♠ Q 7 |
| ♥ 5 4 | ♥ Q 8 5 |
| ♦ K Q J | ♦ A K Q J 10 |
| ♣ A Q J | ♣ K Q J |

| Hand 3 |
|-------------|
| ♠ K Q J 8 |
| ♥ K J |
| ♦ K Q 9 6 5 |
| ♣ A Q |

Don't be put off by the solid five-card suit in Hand 2, or by the five-card major and low doubleton in Hand 1. Get the hands off your chest by opening 2NT.

"But wait" I hear you cry! 'Hand 3 has two doubletons!' Did I say balanced? Well 5-4-2-2 is semi-balanced and that is perfectly acceptable *provided* your hand is

unsuitable for a one-level opening and the doubletons have some points in them. Change the hand to:

♠ A K Q J ♥ 4 3 ♦ A K Q J 6 ♣ 8 7
and now 2NT would be unwise, 1♦ being the most sensible opening.

However, there is a big difference between having a 5-4-2-2 shape and hands with a singleton; look at these examples:

| |
|-----------|
| ♠ K |
| ♥ A Q J 3 |
| ♦ A J 3 2 |
| ♣ K Q 4 3 |

It's hard to believe but there are actually players out there who open 2NT on such a hand and seem totally surprised when partner locks them into spades and they go horribly down. **A hand with a singleton should never open 2NT when there is an alternative.** Here opening 1♥ and re-bidding 2NT (18-19, not the traditional 17-18) over 1♠ should see you in good stead, the hand being worth about 19 points, and a bare honour being tolerable for a no-trump rebid, rather than opening.

On the subject of 19-point hands this is another example of regular abuse:

| |
|-----------|
| ♠ A Q 3 |
| ♥ K J 8 6 |
| ♦ Q J 10 |
| ♣ A Q 2 |

'I had stoppers in every suit, and a useful ten of diamonds, so I added a point on and opened 2NT,' you will hear people say as they explain to partner why they have just reached 7NT missing an ace when partner raised them briskly to the grand holding a 17-count. While it is true that they have stoppers in every suit, that is completely irrelevant. Opening 2NT is for when you hold hands that will miss game if partner passes a one-level opening. Look again at that horrible 3-4-3-3 load of rubbish above and when you start to construct hands for partner opposite you will quickly see that no game will be missed if 1♥ is passed out. It would be remiss of me not to mention that there is a time for adding a point on here and there (called 'upgrading') but only if you have a chunky five-card suit

that will provide tricks. Something like this you might get away with:

| |
|--------------|
| ♠ K 3 |
| ♥ A Q 10 |
| ♦ A Q J 10 6 |
| ♣ K 10 7 |

Here if partner provides either black ace or both queens you will have a play for game, so there is some excuse for opening 2NT, but if it goes wrong you must have your apologies ready ('The light is very poor in this corner of the room,' has got me out of a few jams in the past).

On the subject of long suits, six-card suits should be treated very carefully, as normally they make the hand too powerful for a 2NT opening:

| |
|---------------|
| ♠ A 2 |
| ♥ K 4 |
| ♦ A K Q 9 6 5 |
| ♣ A Q 2 |

This hand with 22 points and a six-card suit is far too good for a 2NT opening; game (or even slam) could be missed very easily.

If you were going to treat it as balanced, then valuing it as a 23-24 pointer is about right: opposite the right Yarborough from partner you could wrap up 3NT with six diamonds, two black aces and either an extra heart or club on the lead. However, change the hand to:

♠ Q 3 ♥ A J ♦ K J 7 5 4 2 ♣ A K Q
and now 2NT is about right, as you do need a little something from partner to make game.

So, remember: **do** (a) open 2NT when you hold 20-22 balanced points, even if your hand contains a low doubleton and (b) treat 5-4-2-2 hands as balanced when the honours are spread out and no better bid is available. However, **don't** (a) treat 4-4-4-1 hands as balanced (partner always insists upon playing in your singleton); (b) open 2NT on 19 points, unless the hand contains a good five-card suit plus good intermediate cards, and you have a genuine fear that game might be missed by opening at the one level; and (c) open 2NT with a six-card suit unless it is very broken and the hand needs a lot of help from partner to make game. □



Opening 2♣ (Part I)

FOLLOWING ON from last time when we looked at opening 2NT, this month we take a step up and look at the strongest bid you can make in Acol – the game-forcing 2♣ opening. (For the purposes of this article I am assuming that you play Acol and not Benjaminised Acol.)

There are many popular misconceptions about the 2♣ opening, primarily that you need precisely 23 or more points to open it. As with most bidding, this is an accurate point range for the balanced hands, but should be tempered with a touch of judgement on the distributional ones. When considering opening a shapely hand with 2♣ just ask yourself the question: 'If I open with a one-level bid and the bidding goes all pass, might I have missed a game?'

This sort of hand is often treated poorly:

♠ A K Q J 8 6 5
♥ A K 7 3
♦ Void
♣ K 2

Yes, it's only 20 points, but partner only needs two hearts and three spades to the ten in a zero count for

you to wrap up seven spade tricks, two hearts, two ruffs and the king of clubs after a favourable lead. If you open 1♠, you may then have to write down the unusual score of +230 – and have some explaining to do!

So the definition of a 2♣ opener should be: **'23+ points, or any strong hand that can reasonably expect to make game opposite a very poor hand that will pass a one-level opener.'**

Two-suited hands are often powerful if you have a fit in either suit:

♠ A Q J 10 8 5
♥ Void
♦ A K Q 7 6
♣ K 2

Again, this hand is more likely to produce slam opposite no points than it is to go off in game, so 2♣ should be the right

opening. There is also a subtle point about which suits you have: if you held a void in spades and a heart suit, then it would be less crucial to open 2♣ as even if your 1♥

opening is passed by partner the next hand will often bid 1♠ (but relying on your opponents to rescue you from your errors is a rather risky strategy).

On the flip side of the coin you sometimes get people opening 2♣ with hands that might produce a lot of tricks but cannot properly be described as strong:

♠ 2
♥ A K Q 10 9 7 6 4 3 2
♦ 5 4
♣ Void

This hand will clearly produce ten tricks opposite a Yarborough, but it is a gross distortion to open 2♣, as it is essentially pre-emptive in nature. The most sensible course would be to open 4♥ to deter a cheap sacrifice, or perhaps 1♥ to disguise the nature of the hand if you were feeling sneaky. **A 2♣ opener must be reserved for hands of power and quality** that only need a few cover cards to make game or a slam.

(The 2007 regulation changes make it illegal to open 2♣ on hands below 16 HCP unless they satisfy the Rule of 25 or have eight clear tricks and opening points.)

What about balanced hands? Well, they are very simple: with 23+ points, open 2♣. A minimum rebid of no-trumps indicates 23-24 and is non-forcing; partner can pass if he has nothing, but should raise you when he has a queen or even a jack in a long suit.

As with all balanced hands it is OK to add a point on for long suits if you have good controls:

♠ A J 10
♥ A Q
♦ K J 10
♣ A Q J 10 5

This powerful 22-count is easily worth an opening 2♣ bid; treat it as a 23-count and re-bid 2NT. The club suit is worth one

more point, and the intermediate cards will be useful. If partner has nothing, then you'll play in the same 2NT as if you opened it, but you will hit the jackpot when partner is able to raise you holding, say, the queen of diamonds and jack of hearts.

After a 2♣ opening and 2NT rebid, the bidding proceeds in exactly the same way as after a 2NT opening, so Stayman and Transfers apply, enabling you to get to your 4-4 or 5-3 major-suit fits as usual. It also puts the bidding on a sound footing as it places you and partner in more familiar territory, and you should aim to get there:

♠ A Q
♥ K Q 9 7
♦ A Q J 6 5
♣ K Q

Even holding two doubletons it is far better to open 2♣ and rebid 2NT, which will keep you low when partner has nothing, and help you find a 4-4 heart fit if one exists.

What about balanced hands of more than 25 points? Ostensibly you would open 2♣ and rebid 3NT (25-27) over a 2♦ response, but such a sequence is very unwieldy and should be avoided at all costs if you have a sensible suit to bid. Such sequences come up very rarely, however, and are not worth worrying too much about. If your worst problem in bridge is that you keep picking up balanced 25 counts, then you are a lucky player indeed!

Let's review the dos and don'ts of the 2♣ opening:

Do:

- Open 2♣ whenever you have 23+ points, or any strong hand that can reasonably expect to make game facing a hand that will pass a one-level opener.
- Remember that if partner opens 2♣ and rebids 2NT you can pass, as he is showing 23-24 balanced only.

Don't:

- Open 2♣ when you have a bad hand with a long suit that should be opening a pre-empt.
- Forget you can add on a point for a long suit in no-trumps, or treat a 5-4-2-2 hand as balanced if your points are spread out. □



Opening 2♣ (Part II)

IN THE last issue we looked at the 2♣ opening, the strongest opening bid in Acol, and we considered what you needed to open 2♣ and how best to judge whether your hand was worth a 2♣ opener. This time we will dwell on responding to a 2♣ opener and subsequent bidding.

One common fallacy is to believe that a 2♦ response shows a bad hand and that all hands of 8 or more points must give a positive response – absolutely not. Despite the tenet that ‘a positive response shows 7+ points (traditionally an ace and a king is the required minimum)’, it does not follow that a 2♦ response denies 8 points.

If that were the case what would you bid on these hands?

| | |
|---|---------|
| ♠ | Q 3 2 |
| ♥ | Q 4 2 |
| ♦ | J 8 7 6 |
| ♣ | Q J 2 |

Please don't tell me that three queens and two jacks makes you respond 2NT – your hand isn't worth a positive for starters.

Then there are some lopsided hands that have the strength but in the wrong places:

| | |
|---|-----------|
| ♠ | A K 2 |
| ♥ | 8 |
| ♦ | 9 8 6 5 4 |
| ♣ | J 9 7 6 |

Here you have good controls and some playing strength but a positive response of 3♦ is a crime against humanity. Partner will expect you to have a good diamond suit with honours in it, rather than five ‘grotties’ and controls outside.

| | |
|---|---------|
| ♠ | A 8 6 5 |
| ♥ | K J 7 6 |
| ♦ | Q 9 4 2 |
| ♣ | 8 |

This sort of hand has three suits, and half the problem will be finding a fit. Start with 2♦ and you will be well placed to raise partner later on.

A positive response in a major suit should contain a good suit of at least five cards so that partner can support quite freely on as little as J-x-x. In a minor suit, you will often have six cards, as your positive response takes up so much room.

Certainly 2♣ – 3♦ should always be based on a six-card suit or an exceptional five-card one, as it is so space consuming.

If you are ever lucky enough to be dealt a solid suit and hear your partner open 2♣, then you can give a jump positive response. For this your suit needs to be A-K-Q-J-x-x or better, as a grand slam will be in the picture.

★★★★★

A response of 2NT shows 8+ balanced, but should normally be avoided unless you are 4-3-3-3 or have good support for all suits, Normally when you have values it means partner has a shapely hand and is about to rebid in a suit, in which case you want to be able to support him. A hand such as:

| | |
|---|----------|
| ♠ | A 3 2 |
| ♥ | K J 6 |
| ♦ | 10 4 3 2 |
| ♣ | J 3 2 |

would be ideal, as you can raise partner's suit on the next round and let cue-bidding begin.

★★★★★

When it comes to raising partner's suit, remember that you are in a game-forcing auction (the only time you can stop in a part-score after a 2♣ opener is the one auction 2♣ – 2♦ – 2NT which is 23-24 HCPs, non-forcing) so this is one of the rare times when a three-level raise is stronger than raising to four. If the auction begins, say: 2♣ – 2♦ – 2♠, then with good values bid 3♠ (something like 6+) and with a poor hand and primary support bid 4♠.

Traditionally 2NT is used as a second negative, which shows you have a really poor hand.

If you have a shortage and support for partner, you can jump to the four level as a Splinter, but even though partner has promised a five-card suit your jump shows four-card trump support.

Let's see some hands that you might have after the auction has started 2♣ – 2♦ – 2♠:

| Hand A | Hand B |
|-------------|-----------|
| ♠ Q 3 2 | ♠ J 7 6 3 |
| ♥ K 8 5 4 | ♥ 6 5 |
| ♦ Q 10 8 2 | ♦ 8 7 4 3 |
| ♣ 6 5 | ♣ 7 6 5 |
| Hand C | Hand D |
| ♠ 8 7 | ♠ Q 7 6 4 |
| ♥ 9 6 4 3 2 | ♥ 8 7 5 4 |
| ♦ 8 7 5 4 | ♦ 4 |
| ♣ 7 6 | ♣ K J 8 7 |

Hand A should bid 3♠, a stronger bid than 4♠ and let opener decide whether to look for a slam. Hand B should bid 4♠ to show spade support and a bad hand; partner can still go on but only with an exceptional hand. Hand C bids 2NT showing a terrible hand, waiting to see where they'll end up; it wouldn't be a good idea to bid 4♠ as partner might be 5-4 in the majors. Hand D jumps to 4♦ to show a singleton or void diamond and primary support for spades.

Let's review some of the dos and don'ts of responding to a 2♣ opener:

Do:

- Give a natural positive response when you have a good suit with five or more cards (or six in diamonds).
- Feel free to give a negative response of 2♦ with 8+ points just to hear what is going on; there is always time to catch up later.

Don't:

- Give a positive response on 4-4-4-1 hands: you must be balanced for 2NT, and have at least five cards in a suit to bid it.
- Give a positive response on bad suits; it will just mislead partner.
- Forget that in a game-forcing auction, a jump to game is always weak ('fast arrival'). With good values, take the bidding slowly, as every bid below game is forcing. □