



THE MYSTERIOUS MULTI

HOW TO PLAY IT

HOW TO PLAY AGAINST IT

MARK HORTON & JAN VAN CLEEFF

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HOW TO PLAY IT | HOW TO PLAY AGAINST IT

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	7
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	8
CHAPTER 1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	9
CHAPTER 2 THE BASICS OF THE MULTI 2♦	17
The Opening 2♦ Bid	17
A Weak Two-bid in a Major	18
Strong Balanced Hands	20
Strong Three-suited Hands	21
Acol Two in a Minor	22
Responding to 2♦	23
Other Strong Options	35
Interference Over 2♦	36
Quiz	42
CHAPTER 3 ADVANCED IDEAS	47
The Weak-only Multi	47
The Meckwell Mini Multi	54

CHAPTER 4	DEFENDING AGAINST THE MULTI	63
	The Dixon Defense	68
	Winter's Defense	73
	The ACBL Defenses to Multi	76
	The Meckwell Defense to the Multi	83
	The Granovetter Defense	84
	Quiz	86
CHAPTER 5	MUIDERBERG TWO-BIDS	92
	A. The Original scheme	94
	B. The Modern scheme	102
	When the Opponents Enter the Bidding After a Muiderberg Two-bid	106
	Quiz	112
CHAPTER 6	2♥ WEAK WITH BOTH MAJORS	116
	Responses to 2♥	117
	When the Opponents Interfere	123
	Defense Against the 2♥ Opening	124
	The 2♥ Opening in Action	124
CHAPTER 7	THE THREE-SUITED 2♥	127
	Quiz	136

CHAPTER 8	THE WEAK 2NT OPENING SHOWING BOTH MINORS	139
	The Weak Version of the 2NT Opening	141
	The Weak/Strong Version of the 2NT Opening	144
	Quiz	149
CHAPTER 9	THE MULTI LANDY DEFENSE AGAINST AN OPPONENT'S 1NT OPENING	151
	Quiz	166
CHAPTER 10	THE MULTI BY RESPONDER	172
	After a 1♣ Opening	172
	After a 1♦ Opening	176
CHAPTER 11	THE MULTI IN ACTION	178
APPENDIX	THE KOKISH 'SIMPLE' DEFENSE TO MULTI	199
	Defense vs. 2♦ Multi: Weak 2M, With/Without Strong Option(s)	199

INTRODUCTION

If you are thinking of playing a convention, perhaps the most critical decision you must make is how serious it will be to give up the meaning of a bid in its natural sense.

In the early days of bridge there were few conventions and the majority of bids were natural. But the language of bidding is one with very few words, and it's important to use those words as efficiently as one can. As the game developed, players began to discover that some natural bids could be put to better use. The classic example is a response of 2♣ to an opening bid of 1NT — the Stayman convention. By the same token, an opening bid at the two-level used to announce possession of a powerful hand. It was many years before someone (Al Roth) realized that weak hands are more frequent than strong ones and introduced the concept of the weak two-bid.

As the game continued to evolve, players with agile minds began to work on the concept of using more and more bids in an artificial way; in particular, the idea that a single bid could encompass various types of hands was intriguing. Combining multiple hand-types into one bid would be efficient, and it would also liberate some other bids for new assignments. That is how the “Multicoloured Two Diamonds” came to be introduced into the game. It soon acquired a new, and simpler, name — the Multi. Once the convention had gained a foothold it became clear that other new ideas would rapidly be developed to make use of the resulting availability of opening bids of 2♥, 2♠ and 2NT.

What we have done in this book is to provide not only a detailed explanation of how to play the Multi, but also a description of many of the associated conventions that have grown up around it. If you want to start playing the Multi, you can select from among these new meanings for your other two-bids, finding something that suits your own style. We have also included chapters on extended ‘multi-type’ methods, such as the increasingly popular Multi Landy (or Woolsey) defense to 1NT, and the ultra-modern Multi responses to an opening bid of one of a minor.

Even if you don't want to adopt the Multi yourself, you are almost certain to encounter opponents who use it; for you, the material on defending against the Multi will repay study.

Mark Horton, London, September 2009
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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

It is generally agreed that the birthplace of the Multi 2♦ was England. In order for a convention to be played in UK tournaments, it has to be licensed and approved by the English Bridge Union. It is therefore relatively easy to track down the Multi's first sighting: the EBU Rules and Ethics Committee minutes first mention it in December 1970 in regard to a failed application for a license from Terence Reese. Reese's proposed Multi 2♦ opening showed one of three types of hand: a weak two in a major, a strong balanced hand, or a strong three-suiter. The convention was refused any type of licence by a vote of seven to one. Reese was the first, but by no means was he the only player to try for a license to play the convention — indeed, Mark Horton applied on behalf of a version of his own a short time after this, and like Reese's it was politely refused.

However, the true origin of the concept was probably some years prior to that. Northern Ireland's John Grummit, with help from Jimmy Clarke, devised a convention that he named after the place where he lived — the Holywood Two Diamonds. In the mid 1960s he wrote to Reese to tell him about his invention, and it was probably this letter that eventually led Reese's fertile mind to develop the Multi 2♦.

Others were also working on new systems of two-bids at this time. The classic Acol treatment was to use two-bids for fairly strong, almost game-forcing hands, but these did not occur with great frequency. Meanwhile, weak two-bids were becoming popular, and Albert Benjamin devised a method to combine these with Acol Twos. Multiple meaning bids were also under investigation. In 1968 Hugh Kelsey presented a new idea, Tartan Two-bids, in which an opening bid of 2♥ or 2♠ could be used to describe not only a strong hand in the original Acol style, but also a weak two-suited hand.

While Tartan Twos never gained a huge following, largely owing to their complexity, Benjamin Twos and the Multi 2♦ quickly did so. Even

in the aftermath of the Buenos Aires cheating scandal, Reese was still regarded as one of the world's best players and writers, and with his name behind it the Multi 2♦ became very popular in the UK. Reese himself introduced it into international play in partnership with Jeremy Flint. For a long time opponents did not know how to cope with it as they were unsure whether a weak or strong hand was lurking behind the 2♦ opening. This lack of any effective defensive methods meant that early proponents of the Multi obtained a disproportionate number of good results, adding to its allure.

The first reference we can find to the convention appearing in top-level play is at the 1970 European Championships in Estoril. This deal illustrates the inability of the opponents to get into the auction using the methods available to them at the time.

In Round 9, Great Britain faced Norway:

N-S vul.

	♠ A 6 3											
	♥ Q 10											
	♦ A K J 5 2											
	♣ J 7 6											
♠ 9 5 4 ♥ K 9 8 6 5 4 3 ♦ 7 ♣ K 9	<table border="1" style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ K 10 7 ♥ 7 ♦ Q 10 8 6 4 3 ♣ A 10 2	
	N											
W		E										
	S											
	♠ Q J 8 2											
	♥ A J 2											
	♦ 9											
	♣ Q 8 5 4 3											

West	North	East	South
<i>Reese</i>		<i>Flint</i>	
2♦*	pass	2♥ ¹	pass
pass	3♦	all pass	

1. Pass or correct.

As you will see, today's experts have no problem getting into the auction on North's hand. In 1970, North had no obvious action and South felt that his partner's hand was limited by his initial pass. The 3♦ contract

went three down while at the other table North-South bid and made 3NT after West had opened a ‘normal’ 2♥.

However things were not always so rosy, as illustrated by this deal from Great Britain’s match against Belgium in Round 10. Constructive bidding over the Multi had yet to be refined, and it was already clear that the marriage of weak and strong hand types had some intrinsic issues.

N-S vul.

♠ A J 4 3 ♥ J 8 4 ♦ 8 6 5 4 ♣ 6 4	<table border="1" style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="padding: 5px;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 5px;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 5px;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S	♠ K Q 10 5 ♥ A K 10 7 5 ♦ — ♣ A K 10 3
N					
W E					
S					

West	North	East	South
<i>Pugh</i>		<i>Gordon</i>	
2♥ ¹	pass	2♦*	pass
4♣	all pass	3♣ ²	pass

1. Pass or correct.
2. Strong three-suiter.

West had the machinery to discover East’s exact shape, but didn’t use it (presumably not envisaging a slam opposite his hand) and the excellent 6♣ contract was missed.

Any time you adopt complex new methods, there is potential for disaster. That’s what happened here in the match against Israel in Round 15 of the same event:

E-W vul.

♠ Q 9 8 5 2
 ♥ 8 7 5 4
 ♦ A 8
 ♣ A 7



♠ A K 10 7
 ♥ A Q 10 3
 ♦ K 10 7 2
 ♣ K

West	North	East	South
<i>Reese</i>		<i>Flint</i>	
pass	pass	2♦*	pass
2NT ¹	pass	3♠*	pass
4♠	all pass		

1. Forcing relay.

Flint's rebid of 3♠ purported to show a minimum weak 2♠ opener — in an unusual lapse of concentration he simply made the wrong response. Flint, reporting in *Bridge Magazine*, observed later that once he was in the bunker he had no sand wedge available. He could hardly bid on over 4♠ as West might have had two small spades.

Of course, this particular example does not demonstrate a flaw in the Multi itself, but highlights an issue that occurs with any new convention: that of remembering what the various bids mean. When Sandra Landy, who in those days was partnering Nicola Gardener on the British women's team, suggested that they incorporate it into their system, Nicola declared it far too complicated to remember. Undaunted, Sandra suggested a modification whereby a sequence such as 2♦-2♥-3♣ would show an Acol Two-bid. She ran this past Jeremy Flint and, when he agreed it was a reasonable idea, it was refined with the help of another Acol guru, Eric Crowhurst. The result was that the Multi was incorporated into the Smith-Landy methods in time for the European championships in 1977.

In 1972 Reese's book on the Precision Club was published but it made no mention of the Multi — the convention was still without an EBU license. However, Reese and Flint took part in the Deauville Tournament of Champions in that same year and this deal showed that there was still much work to be done on both sides of the table:

N-S vul.

<p>♠ 9</p> <p>♥ Q 8 7 6 4 3 2</p> <p>♦ 9</p> <p>♣ A 8 5 2</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: 60px; margin: 0 auto;"> <p style="margin: 0;">N</p> <p style="margin: 0;">W E</p> <p style="margin: 0;">S</p> </div>	<p>♠ K Q 10 7 6 4</p> <p>♥ —</p> <p>♦ A Q 7 6</p> <p>♣ 9 6 3</p>	<p>♠ —</p> <p>♥ A K 10 5</p> <p>♦ J 5 4 2</p> <p>♣ K Q J 7 4</p>
	<p>♠ A J 8 5 3 2</p> <p>♥ J 9</p> <p>♦ K 10 8 3</p> <p>♣ 10</p>		

West	North	East	South
<i>Sharif</i>	<i>Reese</i>	<i>Sussel</i>	<i>Flint</i>
			2♦*
2♥	2♠	3♠ ¹	pass
4♥	all pass		

1. Game force with heart support.

With twelve tricks available to North-South in spades (or at least a small plus against the 7♥ sacrifice), an East-West game making with overtricks was hardly the ideal result for our heroes. It was suggested that Flint thought Reese’s 2♠ bid was an attempt to sow confusion — if so, it certainly worked!

There is plenty of evidence to suggest that the best way to defend against the Multi was yet to be established. Our own favorite story concerns a club player holding a terrific three-suited hand with a void in spades. When RHO opened a Multi 2♦, he overcalled with 2♠, expecting his partner to recognise it as a takeout of spades. His partner, holding a singleton spade, saw things differently and passed.

When the time came to score up the following exchange took place:

‘Minus 50. Sorry, I went down in 7♦, though I could have made it.’

‘Push.’

‘Oh, they went down in 7♦ as well?’

‘No, they were one down in 2♠.’

But even among top experts it was easy enough to go wrong, as this deal from the 1972 Deauville event illustrates:

E-W vul.

	♠ 10 ♥ K Q J 7 6 ♦ K Q J 10 ♣ 10 8 2											
♠ K Q J 8 6 ♥ 9 5 ♦ 6 ♣ K J 9 6 5	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ 4 3 2 ♥ A 8 4 ♦ 9 7 5 3 2 ♣ A Q	
	N											
W		E										
	S											
	♠ A 9 7 5 ♥ 10 3 2 ♦ A 8 4 ♣ 7 4 3											

West	North	East	South
<i>Flint</i>	<i>Carcy</i>	<i>Reese</i>	<i>Calix</i>
2♦*	dbl	pass	pass
3♠	pass	2NT ¹	dbl
all pass		pass	dbl

1. Forcing relay.

Here, it seems that North-South did not have sufficiently clear agreements on the strength shown by the various doubles. North led the ♥K against 3♠, doubled, and declarer was not hard pressed to make ten tricks for +930.

There was further evidence of defensive uncertainty when England met Scotland later that same year in the Camrose Trophy:

Both vul.

<p>♠ 4 ♥ A K 7 2 ♦ A 10 7 6 2 ♣ K 10 4</p>	<p>♠ A Q 10 9 6 5 3 ♥ 4 3 ♦ 9 8 5 ♣ 7</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 60px; margin: 0 auto; display: flex; flex-direction: column; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> N W E S </div> <p>♠ 8 ♥ 9 8 5 ♦ Q 3 ♣ A Q J 9 8 6 3</p>	<p>♠ K J 7 2 ♥ Q J 10 6 ♦ K J 4 ♣ 5 2</p>
--	--	---

West	North	East	South
Rose	Coyle	Sheehan	Silverstone
	2♦*	pass	2♠ ¹
all pass			

1. To play opposite a weak two in spades.

It seems odd that West allowed the auction to die in 2♠, but perhaps he was misled by South's implied preference for hearts. Declarer went two down for -200, but in the other room East-West recorded eleven tricks in 3NT.

The Multi 2♦ was finally given a restricted English Bridge Union licence in 1974 under somewhat dubious circumstances. A tediously long Rules and Ethics Committee meeting on December 4th had failed to complete its agenda, and the eight members present agreed to adjourn the meeting until December 19th. Not surprisingly, due to the proximity of the holidays, the attendance was poor at the second session. Bypassing the usual formal proposal and acceptance process, those present agreed the following by a 3-1 vote:

“Multicoloured Two Diamonds opening bid

In view of the numbers of applications received for the licensing of this bid, the fact that it is now widely played in international events, and the amount of publicity which it has received, the committee decided on its own initiative to give it an 'A' licence for a strictly limited period until the 31st December, 1975.”

The convention as licensed covered three types of holdings:

- * *A weak two-bid in the majors.*
- * *A balanced hand of either above or below a 2NT opening bid, by decision of the partnership.*
- * *A Roman 2♦ type, with 4-4-4-1 shape, with 17-20 points if the singleton is in the minor suit and with 21-23 points if the singleton is in the major suit.*

The ‘temporary’ licence has never been revoked, but has been amended to allow the 2♦ opening to include other types of hand, including:

- * *A one-suiter — 11 to 14 points*
- * *A one-suited Acol two-bid*
- * *A Flannery-type two-suiter — 17+ points*

In April 1976 the same committee asked Chris Dixon to write an article on defending against the Multi for the May *EBU Quarterly*. The Dixon defense remains one of the most popular in the United Kingdom (you will find it in Chapter 4).

One weakness of the full-blown Multi is the inability of responder to raise the level of the preempt without a fit for both majors, allied to the problems that a jump might cause if the opening includes a strong option. This resulted in the development of a version of the Multi that only incorporates a weak two in a major, which today is perhaps the commonest version of the convention encountered in expert play.

As you will discover later in the book, the modern player has a range of effective defenses from which to choose, and the Multi today no longer terrorizes the opposition as it did when first introduced. Likewise, opening a preemptive spade hand with 2♦ affords the opponents an easy natural 2♥ overcall if their methods allow it. However, some of its advantages remain intact, in particular the fact that the opening bids of 2♥ and 2♠ (and possibly even 2NT) can be freed up for other uses, while a typical weak two-bid hand in a major suit is opened 2♦.

As with any convention, there are trade-offs. Every partnership will have to decide for itself whether there is a net gain from incorporating the Multi 2♦ into its methods.

NEW USES FOR ALL YOUR OPENING TWO-BIDS — AND MORE!

The Multi principle — the idea that one bid can encompass a variety of different meanings — has a well-established history. In the modern game, its most popular applications are the Multi Two Diamonds opening, and the Multi Landy (Woolsey) defense to an opening 1NT. If you adopt the Multi, you have now opened up interesting alternative uses for as many as three other two-level openings.

This book is a first comprehensive look at Multi ideas as they are used today, and covers the following:

- Multi 2♦ — as a weak two in the majors and more
- Response structures to different versions of the Multi, both simple and complex
- Alternative uses for other two-bids, including
 - Muiderberg 2♥ and 2♠
 - 2NT opening showing minors
 - 2♥ weak with both majors
 - Three-suited 2♥ openings
- The Multi Landy (Woolsey) defense to 1NT
- Multi 2♦ used as a response to a minor-suit opening
- The best defenses to a Multi 2♦ opening

The final chapter, entitled ‘The Multi in Action’, consists of a wealth of examples from top-level play.



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