



Tom Townsend

The Multi 2 ♦ is a good convention

Two top players debate a hot bridge topic. Tell us whose argument has won you over by e-mailing the Editor at elena@ebu.co.uk

THE Multicoloured 2 ♦ opener was promoted by Jeremy Flint and Terence Reese over thirty years ago. There's one reason to play it already – it's British! It soon became very popular at all levels of duplicate bridge worldwide. Just in case you have never come across it, here is the 'Multi' in a nutshell.

An opening bid of 2 ♦ can be a Weak Two in hearts, or a Weak Two in spades; or perhaps some strong hand by agreement.

Partner responds 2 ♥ if he feels that is high enough facing a weak 2 ♥. Opener converts to 2 ♠ with a weak 2 ♠, or bids something higher with a strong option.

Partner responds 2 ♠ if he feels that is high enough facing a weak 2 ♠ but he wants to go higher facing hearts. Opener converts to 3 ♥ with a minimum weak 2 ♥ or 4 ♥ with a maximum weak 2 ♥, or bids something else with a strong option.

We call 2 ♥ and 2 ♠ 'pass or correct', or 'Multi', or 'paradox' responses – the paradox being that you tend to respond in the suit you don't like. With interest in game facing either major, you can respond 2NT to ask about opener's suit and range, or perhaps bid 4♣ to ask opener to transfer at the four-level – that's if you don't mind giving up Gerber.

Perhaps Heather will persuade you that Weak Twos are tactically superior to the Multi, and by and large she's right! Sure, you're better off announcing your suit straight away than starting with a multi-way bid. I've known a player in the Bermuda Bowl, the world open teams championship, defend 3 ♦ when he was cold for 7 ♠, because he assumed his partner's Multi suit was hearts. But the Multi does have a few points in its favour:

- (i) After a weak 2 ♥ or 2 ♠ the partnership has no choice which hand

declares in that trump suit. It's going to be the weak hand; the strong hand must go down in dummy exposed after the opening lead, and the defenders are unlikely to go wrong after trick one. Not so with the Multi: after a 2NT or 4♣ response the strong hand can become declarer, and the lead and defence can be much more challenging.

- (ii) You can play in 2 ♦ doubled or even undoubled after a Multi. You certainly can't do this when you have opened a weak 2 ♥ or 2 ♠.
- (iii) Not knowing opener's suit deprives opponents of a cue-bid to develop the auction when they intervene. For example, you overcall their Multi with 2 ♠ and partner advances with 3 ♥ or 4 ♥. Are these heart bids cue-bids, looking for 3NT or for slam in spades, or are they natural telling you that you've overcalled in the Multi suit? Tricky.
- (iv) The Multi causes disorganised opponents more confusion than Weak Twos. For this reason the Multi is only allowed at Level 3 and above in EBU events. Fair enough I think.

Convinced? Perhaps not yet. But the real value in playing Multi is that you get two or more bids for the price of one. Some Multi users prefer to play a weak-only Multi so they can pass 2 ♦. This puts pressure on opponents to compete directly rather than wait a round. Personally I like to include a strong balanced hand, just below game-forcing strength. Now my opening 2♣ becomes 100% game-forcing, a significant improvement. That's enough for me but some like to add minor-suit Acol Two hands, or giant 4-4-4-1 types, otherwise awkward to bid in Acol.

Now you're opening your weak-two bids Multi, you have 2 ♥ and 2 ♠ available for other purposes, and creative players have plenty of options. Traditionally minded Acol players will play them as natural Acol Twos. This set-up is much better than putting these big hands through Benjamin or Reverse Benjamin 2♣ or 2 ♦ openings, which are an invitation for aggressive opponents to pre-empt. It's a real pleasure to open an Acol Two at rubber bridge but at duplicate I prefer something more frequent and combative. Into this category come Polish Twos or whatever you like to call them, Muiderberg, Lucas, Woo . . . These show two-suited major-minor hands, less than an opening bid. When responder has a fit he can raise to game, whether he expects to make the contract or not. Meanwhile your counterparts playing straight Weak Twos have to pass as dealer, allowing opponents a free run. Getting your blow in first on these spicy deals often brings in the points.

Another method doesn't have any name at all but has been adopted by many of England's top players and perhaps represents the state of the art. Use the Multi for your in-your-face destructive Weak Twos, K-J-x-x-x and out, or whatever your minimum is at the position and vulnerability – sixth trump optional. Open 2 ♥ or 2 ♠ with the more constructive style of Weak Two the Blue Team would have approved of, e.g. A-K-J-10-9-x perhaps with something on the side, range approximately 8-11 points, always a decent six-card suit. So if you play this 'two-tiered' Weak Two structure you can vote for me and for Heather. Why did I mention it? But if one vote is enough and you're still undecided I give you a final reason to play the Multi: it's great fun bidding suits you don't have. Enjoy your two bids! □

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is not a good convention

Or vote by post (Editor, English Bridge, 23 Erleigh Road, Reading RG1 5LR).
Comments for publication (not more than 200 words, please) are welcome.

THE Multi 2♦ allows you to fit many hand types into one bid, freeing up room in your system for 2♥ and 2♠ to mean... well, what exactly? In its early days, the Multi allowed you to play both strong and Weak Twos in the majors with the weak variety going through the Multi. These days Acol Twos are an endangered species, lovingly preserved by those who want to look after their good hands making some slams easier to locate, but few and far between. Instead, the additional room tends to be used for further penalty-tries such as ultra-Weak Twos or Weak Two-suited hands. Especially when these two-suited hands can be on a five-four shape, they are at best unsound.

Turning our attention to the downsides of the Multi, the essential problem with squashing as many meanings into one bid is that partner often won't know what you have. This can affect your constructive bidding, your pre-emptive bidding, and your defence.

Before we examine each of these, there is one further downside which shouldn't be overlooked, and that is: where there is a penalty to be had, the opponents have much more chance of catching you than if you had opened a conventional Weak Two. Suppose you hold:

♠ A K 10 9
♥ K Q 10 2
♦ K 4
♣ Q 10 8

and your right-hand opponent opens a Weak Two (in either major) at Game All. You would be worried to pass since it would seem likely that the auction would be passed out and you may well have a game on, so instead you would give up on the penalty and make a natural overcall of 2NT. However, if the opponent opens a Multi, you will have two goes to describe your hand. You will develop a defence where either a pass followed by a double, or a double followed by a double,

is for penalties and thus will be able to wield the axe.

Turning to constructive bidding, this will nearly always begin at a higher level since the first question that needs to be answered is 'what is your hand-type?' Suppose you hold:

♠ 2
♥ A Q 4
♦ A 8 5
♣ A K 7 6 4 3

and partner opens a Multi. You bid 2NT to find out what partner holds (or 3♣ forcing if you prefer) and partner responds 3♠. Which is the better game, 3NT or 4♠? You have to guess. Conversely, playing a Weak Two in spades, you can enquire with 2NT, partner can show a diamond feature and you can happily play in 3NT facing:

♠ K 10 9 6 5 4
♥ J 5
♦ K 7 2
♣ J 9

or try 4♠ if partner responds 3♥ with his red suits reversed. On the given hand 3NT is the better contract, but with the red suits reversed 4♠ is superior. Playing a Multi you would have a guess to make, but with the additional information partner is able to give playing Weak Twos you are able to make a more informed choice.

To take a different example, suppose that, as the Multi opener, you have one of your strong options. Partner, holding both majors in a weak hand, will make some pre-emptive bid, say 3♥ or 4♥, and you will probably have to begin describing your hand at an uncomfortably high level, often ending up having to guess where the contract belongs.

Moving on to pre-emptive bidding, partner opens a Weak Two in spades, the next hand passes, and you hold:

♠ K J 5 3
♥ 4
♦ 9 8 7 5 4 3
♣ A 3



Heather Dhondy

THE DEBATE

This is ideal to make a pre-emptive raise to 4♠. Your poor opponent in the fourth seat is likely to have a tough problem to resolve, and usually ends up doubling, which can be on a wide variety of distributions and values, which in turn often gives his partner a guess as to what to do. This is why we love to pre-empt. Now consider the ineffectiveness of the Multi. You begin with 2♦, and to start with this allows the next opponent in with 2♥, where they may not have had enough to overcall 3♥ over a Weak Two in spades. However, suppose they pass; you will have to respond a limp 2♥ since partner may have a Weak Two in hearts. All your pre-emptive weaponry has been removed, and the opponents have a comfortable entry into the auction.

Finally let's consider the defensive problems that you may face playing the Multi. You hold:

♠ K 5 4
♥ K 5 4
♦ 8 6 4 2
♣ 7 4 3

and partner opens a Multi 2♦. Your right-hand opponent bids a natural 2NT which is raised to 3NT. What do you lead? This is a nightmare. If you guess right, you may well cash the first six tricks, and if you guess wrong, the contract is almost certain to make. □

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