

Explorations of Roman 3-Suited Openings at Bridge

[Pete Matthews](#) – Version 2, © October 22, 2011

Three-suited hands can be difficult to bid, especially when using artificial opening bids such as a forcing $1\clubsuit$. Some pairs find it worthwhile to dedicate one or even two opening bids to these hands, either with a standard structure or as part of a canapé or big club system. Nevertheless, use of such openings is not that common. In this article, I evaluate the main contenders for three-suited openings, plus new, related approaches.

History

The first prominent opening bids that described three-suited hands were an essential part of the Roman Club system developed in the 1950s: $2\clubsuit$ and $2\diamond$ described weaker and stronger hands, respectively, with 4-4-4-1 or 5-4-4-0 distribution – any shortness. $2NT$ was an artificial, game-forcing response over either opening.

The Blue Club system, a major factor in the Italians winning 13 of 16 consecutive world championships, included a $2\diamond$ opening describing exactly 4-4-4-1 (any shortness) and 17-24 high card points (HCP). In order to make better use of the space, $2\heartsuit$ became the artificial forcing response, but no longer promised values. The Blue Team $2\diamond$ opening was necessary to make the Blue Club system work, but getting to open such a bid is a rarity. So rare, that the book does not consider competition! Without a hole to plug in an artificial system, most players would not find Blue Team $2\diamond$ worth playing. (For details, see “Evaluated Inferior Methods” below.)

Of course, there is the Precision $2\diamond$ opening, promising short diamonds and support for the other three suits. Talk about wasting a bid to plug a system hole!

Neil H. Timm describes “Extra-Shape Flannery”, promising either 4=5 in the majors or precisely 4=4=4=1. Nifty it may be, but since it falls outside the range of the ACBL General Convention Chart, it is not of interest to many players in North America. (If two suits are promised by the bid, they must be at least 5-4.)

Mini-Roman and Miles Roman $2\diamond$ Openings (2NT Inquiry)

Because it comes up more often, the Mini-Roman $2\diamond$ opening, with normal opening strength, is much more popular than stronger ranges. It is usually played with an artificial, forcing $2NT$ response. Here’s a summary of this convention, with [numbered] variations:

Mini-Roman $2\diamond$: 11-15 or 12-16 high card points (or your favorite range), and a 3-suited hand. Distribution options include [1] 4-4-4-1, [2] 4-4-4-1 or 5-4-4-0 without a 5-card major (possibly a weak 5-card major), or [3] any 4-4-4-1 or 5-4-4-0. The short suit may be [1] any suit, [2] any suit but spades (or not spades if vulnerable), or [3] a minor.	
Pass	Long diamonds with no game interest opposite length.
$2\heartsuit/2\spadesuit$	Natural, weak, pass or correct: opener bids the next suit, if short in the bid suit.
$2NT$	Artificial, asking, with [1] game forcing (better for slams), or [2] invitational or better values: Responder bids [1] the short suit, or [2] the suit below the short suit, the “submarine” method, and responder’s bid of the short suit [a] is to play, or [b] asks in steps, min or max in the simple case.
$3\clubsuit$	[1] Pass or correct (both minors), or [2] long suit, invitational
$3\diamond$	[1] Pass or correct (may be long diamonds with heart tolerance), [2] long suit, invitational, or [3] both majors, either invitational or slamming
$3\heartsuit/3\spadesuit$	Long suit, invitational
$4\diamond$	[both majors, to play $4\heartsuit$ or $4\spadesuit$]

Permitting opener to have a void expands the use of the bid at the cost of predictability and more risks. I'll leave the evaluation of such methods to the reader. This article considers only 4-4-4-1 hands.

Safety is increased when opener promises spades; promising both majors is safer still. However, a hand with short spades is a major reason to play a 3-suited opening. Unless you permit opener to rebid 1NT with a singleton in partner's suit, on 1=4=4=4 hands, natural bidders often wind up with auctions such as 1♠ – 1♣; 2♣.

If you do permit a 1NT rebid with a stiff, you gain by matching the range for the 2♠ opening to the 1NT opening, because opener's 1NT rebid on a 1=4=4=4 hand would typically deny the 1NT opening range. For example, Mini-Roman would be a good match for weak 1NT openings, because a suit opening followed by a 1NT rebid would then promise a stronger hand – whether balanced or with shortness in responder's suit.

When opener bids his short suit over the artificial 2NT inquiry, responder may pass with length and diminished game interest. When playing the submarine responses, you will need some other way for responder to get out in a long suit: either the bid of the short suit should be to play, or play natural direct 3-level responses. The latter treatment allows submariners to use the bid of the short suit as an asking bid.

Just before I embarked upon version two of this article, I received an e-mail from Sherry McHarg. She and husband Woody have been playing a Roman 2♠ opening, based on recommendations by Marshall Miles, for 23 years. It covers opening three-suited hands with three point ranges: 11-15, 16-19, and 20+. In the lowest range, opener must hold four spades, to improve safety. These ranges correspond to their Precision system. I'll call this nearly comprehensive opening the **Miles Roman 2♠**. Opener generally rebids cheaply or passes with the minimum range, raises or bids with an invitational (16-19) hand, or bids NT with a strong hand. I constructed this summary from what Sherry sent:

Miles Roman 2♠: 4-4-4-1, any shortness (not spades if 11-15), 11+ HCP.		
Pass	Weak with long diamonds.	
2♥/2♠	Natural, weak.	
	Pass	Minimum 11-15 with a fit
	2♠	Minimum 11-15 with short hearts
	2NT	Strong 20+ without a fit
	3♣	Invitational 16-19 without a fit
	3♥/3♠	[raise] Invitational 16-19 with a fit
	4♥/4♠	[raise] Strong 20+ with a fit
2NT	Artificial, game-invitational or better.	
	3♣/3♦/3♥	Minimum hand, short in this suit.
	3NT	Strong 20+, partners bid suits up the line.
	other	Invitational 16-19, short in this suit.
3♣	Weak, no tolerance for majors.	
	Pass	Minimum 11-15 with clubs
	3♦	Minimum 11-15 without clubs
3♦/3♥/3♠	Forcing, at least a 5-card suit.	

Sherry says, "We not only find our part scores in the minors *and majors* without overbidding (and with weak hands, our bids tend to block and confuse the bidding of the opponents), but, also it enables us to find games and slams that others do not find because we can so accurately describe the distribution and point count of big 3 suited hands, as well."

Split, Triple and Quad Roman Openings (Step Inquiry)

Robert Munger, in [The Roman Two Diamond Opening and Variations](#), describes the **Split Roman 2♦** opening. Munger piggy-backs a 19-22 maximum hand onto a 10-13 (or 11-14) minimum. Munger asserts that responder usually needs to know where the shortness is, before deciding on the value of his own hand. Therefore he uses an artificial 2♥ response and a natural, invitational 2NT response. If you play Mini-Roman, you should give this excellent small book a good look. Without help from the opponents, you give up the chance to play in 2♦ and 2♥, but Munger's methods are otherwise superior to using 2NT as the artificial inquiry.

Split Roman 2♦: 4-4-4-1 or 5-4-4-0 (long minor), any shortness, 10-13 [11-14] or 19-22 HCP.																	
Key Cards	Responder's 4♣ is Kickback : opener bids 4♦, and responder's choice of the next four bids is RKC Blackwood pointing to a higher trump suit (4♥=♣, 4♠=♦, 4NT=♥, 5♣=♠). When opener is short in clubs, 4♦ is the control ask, and 4♣ is still Kickback.																
Controls	Responder's bid of the known short suit (not 4♣) is the Control Ask in steps, where A=2, K=1, stiff K=0. The first step shows: 0-1 [0-2] (minimum) or 0-4 (maximum).																
2♥ Inquiry	Artificial inquiry, promises no points. Opener describes, and responder generally places the contract. (Natural by a passed hand.)																
	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>2♠</td> <td>Minimum, short in a black suit.</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>2NT Asks for shortness: 3♣ = ♠, 3♦ = ♣</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2NT</td> <td>Minimum, short ♦</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3♣</td> <td>Minimum, short ♥</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3♦</td> <td>Maximum, short ♥</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3♥</td> <td>Maximum, short ♠</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3♠</td> <td>Maximum, short ♣</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3NT</td> <td>Maximum, short ♦</td> </tr> </table>	2♠	Minimum, short in a black suit.		2NT Asks for shortness: 3♣ = ♠, 3♦ = ♣	2NT	Minimum, short ♦	3♣	Minimum, short ♥	3♦	Maximum, short ♥	3♥	Maximum, short ♠	3♠	Maximum, short ♣	3NT	Maximum, short ♦
2♠	Minimum, short in a black suit.																
	2NT Asks for shortness: 3♣ = ♠, 3♦ = ♣																
2NT	Minimum, short ♦																
3♣	Minimum, short ♥																
3♦	Maximum, short ♥																
3♥	Maximum, short ♠																
3♠	Maximum, short ♣																
3NT	Maximum, short ♦																
2♠	Natural, negative, may be only 3 cards.																
	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Misfit</td> <td>2NT = maximum, 3♣ = minimum</td> </tr> <tr> <td>♠ Fit</td> <td>pass = minimum, bid <i>above</i> shortness with maximum</td> </tr> </table>	Misfit	2NT = maximum, 3♣ = minimum	♠ Fit	pass = minimum, bid <i>above</i> shortness with maximum												
Misfit	2NT = maximum, 3♣ = minimum																
♠ Fit	pass = minimum, bid <i>above</i> shortness with maximum																
2NT	Balanced, invitational, 12-14 HCP. With a 10-12 sub-minimum, opener passes holding both majors, or bids 3♣ with both minors. With a good minimum (12-13), bid 3NT. With a maximum, bid 3♦ with a red singleton or 3♥/3♠ with a singleton in the black suit above.																
3suit	Natural, decent 6-card suit (wins one of first 3 tricks on a misfit), 6-10 HCP. With a misfit, opener passes, raises, or bids 3NT. With a fit, opener raises, or bids the suit below shortness with slam interest.																

My challenge, which resulted in the development of the **Triple Roman** openings, was to at least cover all 15-19 HCP hands, to play with the Unbalanced Diamond System by Marshall Miles. These openings describe a hand with any **4-4-4-1 distribution**, and are played with an artificial inquiry of the next bid. If 2♣ is available as a three-suited bid, Triple Roman 2♣ is better than Triple Roman 2♦. (For details of the earlier **Quad Roman 2♣** opening, see "Evaluated Inferior Methods" below.) Opener's hands are divided into these ranges:

	Triple 2♦	Triple 2♣
mini	14-16 HCP	12-16 HCP
midi	17-19 HCP	17-19 HCP
maxi	20+ HCP	20+ HCP

Either of these conventions is a good match for the Unbalanced Diamond system. However, you get to use the 2♦ opening much less often. Its lower limit of 14 was chosen because a survey found that a working 14-count in a 4-4-4-1 hand was often sufficient to jump raise a standard response of 1♥ or 1♠.

Over the Triple Roman 2♣ opening, the artificial inquiry is 2♦. The extra space lets the lower range be wider, and it lets you play in 2♥ – without using a space-consuming 2NT inquiry.

Triple Roman 2♦: 4-4-4-1, any shortness, 14+ HCP: mini=14-16, midi=17-19, maxi=20+ (use judgment).			
Key Cards	Responder's 4♣ is Kickback , unless a fit is found in responder's bid suit: opener bids 4♦, and responder's choice of the next four bids is RKC Blackwood pointing to a higher trump suit (4♥=♣, 4♠=♦, 4NT=♥, 5♣=♠). When opener is short in clubs, 4♦ is the control ask, and 4♣ is still Kickback.		
Controls	Responder's bid of the known short suit (not 4♣) is the Control Ask in steps, where A=2, K=1, stiff K=0. The first step shows: 0-3 (mini), 0-4 (midi), 0-5 (maxi).		
Misfit	Responder's <i>jump</i> into opener's known short suit is to play.		
R1	O2	R2	Description
2♥ Inquiry	Artificial inquiry, usually has a few points. Opener describes, and responder generally places the contract.		
	2♠	Midi.	
		2NT	Asks for shortness: 3♣=♦, 3♦=♥, 3♥=♠, 3♠=♣
		Other	Natural, non-forcing
	2NT	Mini, short ♣/♦/♠ (long ♥)	
		3♣	Pass or correct.
		3♦	Asks for shortness: 3♥=♠, 3♠=♣, 3NT=♦
		3♥	To play
	3♣	Mini, short ♥	
	3♦	Maxi, short ♥	
	3♥	Maxi, short ♠	
	3♠	Maxi, short ♣	
	3NT	Maxi, short ♦	
2♠	Natural, negative, may be only 3 cards.		
	Misfit	2NT = midi+, 3♣ = mini, 3NT = strong maxi	
	♠ Fit	pass = mini 3♦/3♥/4♣ = short ♥/♣/♦ 3♠ = short ♦, non-forcing	
2NT	Invitational with spades and a place to hide.		
	Misfit	3♣ = mini, 3NT = midi, 4NT=maxi	
	♠ Fit	3♦/3♥/4♣ = short ♥/♣/♦ 3♠ = short ♦, non-forcing	
3suit	Natural, decent 6-card suit (wins one of first 3 tricks on a misfit), 5-9 HCP.		
	Misfit	Pass, raise, or bid 3NT/4NT natural	
	Fit	Raise, or bid the suit below shortness with slam interest – in steps, skipping 3NT, as usual: 2♦ – 3♣: 3♦/3♥/3♠ = short ♥/♠/♦ 2♦ – 3♥: 3♠/4♣/4♦ = short ♣/♦/♠ 2♦ – 3♦: 3♥/3♠/4♣ = short ♠/♣/♥ 2♦ – 3♠: 4♣/4♦/4♥ = short ♦/♥/♣ <i>No Kickback</i> : responder's 4NT is RKC Blackwood; control ask is on.	
3NT	Non-forcing, a long <i>minor</i> suit with no losers opposite opener's weakest possible shortness.		
	4♣	Non-forcing (pass, correct, or raise)	
	4♦	Asks responder to bid a short suit	
4suit	Natural, non-forcing, a suit with no or one loser opposite opener's weakest possible shortness, safe at the 4-level opposite a mini. Opener may bid below shortness with slam interest.		

Triple Roman 2♣: 4-4-4-1, any shortness, 12+ HCP: mini=12-16, midi=17-19, maxi=20+ (judgment).			
Key Cards	Responder's 4♣ is Kickback , unless a fit is found in responder's bid suit: opener bids 4♦, and responder's choice of the next four bids is RKC Blackwood pointing to a higher trump suit (4♥=♣, 4♠=♦, 4NT=♥, 5♣=♠). When opener is short in clubs, 4♦ is the control ask, and 4♣ is still Kickback.		
Controls	Responder's bid of the known short suit (not 4♣) is the Control Ask in steps, where A=2, K=1, stiff K=0. The first step shows: 0-2 (low mini), 0-3 (high mini), 0-4 (midi), 0-5 (maxi).		
Misfit	Responder's <i>jump</i> into opener's known short suit is to play.		
R1	O2	R2	Description
2♦ Inquiry	Artificial inquiry, 8+ HCP (6+ with 2 places to play), interest in game opposite a midi. Opener describes, and responder generally places the contract.		
	2♥	Low mini (12-14), short ♣/♦/♠ (long ♥).	
		suit	Pass or correct
		2NT	Asks for shortness: 3♣=♦, 3♦=♠, 3♥=♣
	2♠	High mini (15-16), any shortness	
		2NT	Asks for shortness: 3♣=♦, 3♦=♥, 3♥=♠, 3♠=♣
		Other	Natural, non-forcing
	2NT	Midi – responder must bid 3♣. Opener shows shortness: 3♦=♥, 3♥=♠, 3NT=♣, 4♣=♦. Kickback and Control Ask are on, if available. Responder's other bids are now natural and non-forcing.	
		3♣	Asks for shortness: 3♦=♥, 3♥=♠, 3♠=♣, 3NT=♦
		3suit	Invitational, cheapest playable suit
	3♣	Low mini (12-14), short ♥	
	3♦	Maxi, short ♥	
	3♥	Maxi, short ♠	
	3♠	Maxi, short ♣	
	3NT	Maxi, short ♦	
2♥	Natural, negative, may be only 3 cards.		
	Misfit	2♠ = mini, 2NT = midi+, 3NT = strong maxi. Any subsequent bids are natural.	
	♥ Fit	pass = mini, 3♣/3♦/3♥ = short ♦/♥/♣	
2♠	Natural, negative, may be only 3 cards.		
	Misfit	2NT = midi+, 3♣ = mini, 3NT = strong maxi. Any subsequent bids are natural.	
	♠ Fit	pass = mini, 3♦/3♥/4♣ = short ♥/♣/♦, 3♠ = short ♦, non-forcing	
2NT	Weak with no tolerance for either major.		
	Pass	Possible with a midi and both majors	
	3♣	Long clubs. Responder's 3♦ is weak and to play opposite shortness.	
	3♦	Short clubs.	
	other	Maxi: 3♥/3♠/3NT/4♣ = short ♠/♣/♦/♥	
3suit	Natural, decent 6-card suit (wins one of first 3 tricks on a misfit), 6-9 HCP.		
	Misfit	Pass, raise, or bid 3NT/4NT natural	
	Fit	Raise, or bid the suit below shortness with slam interest – in steps, skipping 3NT, as usual: 2♦ – 3♣: 3♦/3♥/3♠ = short ♥/♠/♦ 2♦ – 3♥: 3♠/4♣/4♦ = short ♣/♦/♠ 2♦ – 3♦: 3♥/3♠/4♣ = short ♠/♣/♥ 2♦ – 3♠: 4♣/4♦/4♥ = short ♦/♥/♣ <i>No Kickback</i> : responder's 4NT is RKC Blackwood; control ask is on.	
3NT	Non-forcing, a long <i>minor</i> suit with no losers opposite opener's weakest possible shortness.		
	4♣	Non-forcing (pass, correct, or raise)	
	4♦	Asks responder to bid a short suit	
4suit	Natural, non-forcing, a suit with no or one loser opposite opener's weakest possible shortness, safe at the 4-level opposite a mini. Opener may bid below shortness with slam interest.		

Competition

This table is for competition after a Triple Roman 2♦ opening. It should be easily converted for Triple 2♣.

Auction	Action	Competition after a Triple Roman 2♦
2♦-(X)-?	Pass	Weak, 3+ ♦
	Redouble	Strong, 3+ ♦ (if they declare, must be doubled)
	Other	Unchanged
2♦-(X)-P/XX-(P); ?	Pass	Long ♦
	Bid steps...	Short ♦: 2♥ = mini-midi, 2♠ = midi-maxi
2♦-(X)-P-(bid); ?	Pass	Short or long, mini-midi (responder gets another try)
	Double	Penalty, midi-maxi
	Bid	Short, midi-maxi
2♦-(X)-XX-(bid); ?	Pass	Short in bid suit
	Double	Long in bid suit
2♦-(2bid)-?	Pass	Weak or trapping
	Pass	Long, mini-midi
	Double	Short, mini-midi
	Next suit	Short, midi-maxi
	2NT	Long, midi-maxi
	Double	Cards (8+)
	Pass	Long in suit
	Bid steps...	Short: 1 = mini, 2 = midi/maxi (responder has shown values)
	Bid	Competing, at least 4-4
	Pass	Long in partner's suit, mini
	Bid steps	Short in partner's suit: 1 = mini, 2 = midi/maxi (responder has shown values)
	Other	Long in partner's suit, midi-maxi
	2NT	Game try
	3suit	Below shortness, mini (responder has shown values)
	3NT, 4suit	Below shortness, midi/maxi
	Cue Bid	Game-forcing one-suiter: assume opener is short in either this undisclosed long suit or the opponent's suit.
	3NT	Stopper with length in opponent's suit
	1 st step	Long in opponent's suit, but no stop.
	2 nd step...	Control responses (0-3, ...)
	2♦-(2NT)-?	Pass
Double		Cards: opener doubles any suit with length
New suit		Competing, at least 4-4
2♦-(3nonjump)-?	Double	Cards
	3NT	To play
	New suit	Competing, at least 4-4
2♦-(jump)-?	Pass	Weak
	Double	Penalty
	New suit	Competing, at least 4-4
	NT	Natural
2♦-(P/X)-2♥-(X)-?	Pass	Long ♥, mini, 2NT asks for suit below shortness, suit is pass or correct
	Redouble	Long ♥, midi/maxi, 2NT asks for suit below shortness, suit is pass or correct
	2♠	Short ♥, mini
	2NT	Short ♥, midi
	3♣	Short ♥, maxi
(Later bids)	Double	Penalty

Major Principles for Multi-range Three-Suited Openings

- Except in rare cases when you play in your singleton suit, or with a massive fit and a singleton ace, I believe you should *subtract 2 points when counting a singleton honor* in a 4-4-4-1 hand. These hands don't play well, because at least one of the long suits will usually have slow losers. An honor that's not pulling its weight is a liability – even if it helps set up a discard in another suit. (Don't believe it? Then subtract 1½ points.) To put it another way, use good judgment in evaluating your hand – don't go simply by high card points.
- If your three-suited opening includes minimum opening hands, make sure the hand really is an opening bid. If, like me, you typically pass many 11-counts, some 12-counts, and the occasional 13-count, then apply the same principles to your three-suited opening. Ask yourself, *Is this hand too good to pass?*

Some partnerships like a freewheeling style, and will strain to use the three-suited opening. This can prove costly with multi-range openings. Remember that you are opening a forward-going bid at the two level, where there is less room to maneuver. While unenlightened opponents will present you with gifts, stronger opponents will know to pass with nothing clear to do and suits breaking badly – you will be stuck with your own preempt. For freewheeling, I recommend Split Roman 2♦.

Defense

Here is a defense against any of these 3-suited openings, from recommendations by Munger and BridgeDepot.net, with [numbered] options and my addition in *italics*:

Pass	Often a good choice. If opener is strong, you can get in trouble, and if opener has normal strength, the opponents are likely to land a little high.
Double	Shows a sound opening (perhaps 15+), good for offense and especially defense. Further doubles are penalty. <i>The double of an artificial inquiry shows the bid suit.</i>
Overcall	Natural, sound, definitely a good suit, since a bad split is likely.
2NT	[1] natural, and invitational to 3NT, offensively oriented (assumed without discussion), or [2] Unusual Michaels: two-suiter in either minors or majors, good suits: <i>Advancer bids his better minor, jumps with both a good minor and a good major, or bids a major with a better minor.</i>
Jump	Preemptive, again with a decent suit.

The double of a short suit bid should be penalty or suggest a save. Munger recommends acting early or not at all: balancing can be quite expensive. The natural 2NT overcall, as over a weak two bid, came up only once in all the hands I evaluated: double makes sense on such a hand. Consequently, I recommend agreeing upon Munger's Unusual Michaels bid, with the advances I provide – but I did not test this.

Bidding Evaluation

Lacking practical experience in how well these systems work, staged a bidding evaluation. Each of a number of hands was bid with each of these systems, in which I have an interest:

1. **ES:** Eastern Scientific, as played by the author with Gary Schwartz: 1NT strong; 2/1 forcing to game, unless responder rebids his suit; and opener's 1NT rebid promises a balanced hand.
2. **UBD:** Unbalanced Diamond as formerly played by the author: 1NT weak; light, limited major suit openings; 1♦ unbalanced with 11-16 HCP; 1♣ strong, artificial, forcing, and (except when played with Triple Roman 2♣), limited. In the original system, 20+ HCP 4-4-4-1 hands would be opened 2♦, along with other strong unbalanced hands lacking a 5-card major (or 22-23 balanced). 2♣ is dedicated to strong hands with at least one long major. When played with a 3-suited 2♦ opening, 2♣ becomes a standard, artificial, forcing opening.

These 4-4-4-1 systems were evaluated in the first version of the article:

3. **GIB:** GIB software bid each hand. GIB was set to play 2/1 for North-South, standard for E-W.
4. **Blue:** Blue Team 2♦ with Eastern Scientific and Unbalanced Diamond.
5. **Mini:** Mini-Roman 2♦ (11-15, short suit over invitational+ 2NT, 3♣/3♦ pass or correct) with Eastern Scientific and Unbalanced Diamond.
6. **Split:** Split Roman 2♦ (11-14) with Eastern Scientific and Unbalanced Diamond.
7. **Trip 2♦:** Triple Roman 2♦, higher ranges (14-16, 17-19, 20+) with Eastern Scientific and Unbalanced Diamond, called **HiTrip** in the first version. Responder is not required to inquire with 2♥, without game interest opposite a bad 18 or less. Over a 2♠ response, opener may show extras with a good 18 or better.
8. **LoTrip:** Triple Roman 2♦, lower ranges (12-14, 15-17, 18-20). 11-count hands must be passed.
9. **Quad:** Quad Roman 2♣ (11-13, 14-16, 17-19, 20+).

These systems were added for the second version of the article:

10. **Trip 2♣:** Triple Roman 2♣ (12-16, 17-19, 20+). Responder's 2♦ inquiry promises at least 8 HCP or 6 HCP with two places to play.
11. **Miles:** Miles Roman 2♦ (11-15, 16-19, 20+). Responder's 2NT inquiry is at least game-invitational. Opener generally bids more with an invitational (16-19) hand, or bids NT with a force (20+).

South always deals and always has a 4-4-4-1 hand. The vulnerability varies. East-West play the recommended defense to Roman openings, with 2NT natural; Leaping Truscott over the artificial 1♣ opening; and SAYC with 15-17 and 20-21 NT openings. Matchpoint scores for North-South are awarded on a 12 top (6 average) for the auction and visible issues, as well as the final contract.

Deals	HCP	S.H.	GIB	ES	UBD	Blue		Mini		Split		Triple 2♦		LoTrip	Quad	Triple 2♣	Miles
						ES	UBD	ES	UBD	ES	UBD	ES	UBD				
2	9	2	14	11	10	11	10	11	10	11	10	11	10	11	11	11	11
4	10	1	25	20	20	20	20	22	22	22	22	20	20	20	20	20	20
8	11	2	42	54	53	54	53	42	43	48	48	54	53	50	48	53	53
10	12	4	49	58	63	58	63	60	60	67	67	58	63	68	66	68	61
5	13	0	22	36	32	36	32	32	32	33	33	36	32	34	37	37	33
5	14	3	26	35	31	35	31	27	27	26	26	31	31	27	28	28	27
3	15	0	16	18	17	18	17	18	18	18	17	23	23	20	19	22	18
5	16	2	31	37	33	37	33	37	33	37	33	33	33	30	31	31	27
6	17	2	20	38	34	36	36	38	34	38	34	39	39	36	39	39	34
1	18	1	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	5	6	6	3
49	13	17	251	313	299	311	301	293	285	306	296	311	310	301	305	315	287

Results at the table could well differ from these 49 deals in the accompanying spreadsheet, summarized here. With some thought, I chose the best *reasonable* auction I could determine, consistently across systems. You may wish to tweak the numbers yourself, or bid your own system, using the hands and spreadsheet provided on the web page. 144 more deals are provided; on the first 72 of them, I again evaluated the key systems:

Deals	HCP	S.H.	ES	UBD	Triple 2♦		Triple 2♣
					ES	UBD	
1	8	1	0	0	0	0	0
0	9	0	0	0	0	0	0
16	10	9	6	6	7	7	7
8	11	1	28	27	30	29	32
11	12	4	69	69	69	69	69
8	13	4	57	53	57	53	51
6	14	4	41	35	36	36	36
7	15	1	44	42	40	40	42
9	16	2	62	56	57	57	54
1	17	1	8	6	6	6	6
3	18	0	25	21	22	22	18
1	19	0	7	6	7	7	7
1	20	1	7	7	7	7	6
72	13	28	355	328	342	333	331

In the spreadsheet file, adjusted high card points (**HCP**) are listed for the South hand. The **S.H.** column notes hands with a singleton honor (A, K or Q), for which 2 HCP were deducted.

On these extra deals, the UBD strategy was modified so that a South hand strong enough to open 1♣ was rebid in notrump at the first reasonable opportunity. The net effect on the UBD results was neutral: likely gaining a point or more each on boards 9, 10, 21, 29, 30, 37, 46, 49, but losing 4 each on 45 & 65, and another on 55. Furthermore, this would likely undermine other auctions: rebidding 1NT on a singleton is works well after the UBD 1♦ opening, which promises an unbalanced hand, but a balanced hand is common for a 1♣ opening.

Conclusions

The three-suited opening should at least break even when it is used, and preferably improve results. Having a three-suited opening frees up the rest of your system – you expect to gain enough traction on the other hands to make it worth giving up some other meaning for the three-suited bid.

Modern standard bidding systems, such as Eastern Scientific, Bridge World Standard, or 2/1 Game Force, can usually bid 4-4-4-1 hands just fine (despite popular wisdom). However, firm agreements on a few auctions produced some excellent results for ES: the slam on board 19, and twice employing my bidding trick, after 1♦ - 2♣ (boards 2 and 27). In my opinion, having 4-4-4-1 hands excluded from other modern standard auctions would not significantly improve those other auctions. Since the three suited openings perform worse overall than ES, I conclude there is little or no advantage to playing a three-suited opening with ES.

The Unbalanced Diamond system does well bidding 4-4-4-1 hands in the 11-14 range – while confidence would be boosted on other 1♦ openings, the benefits would be minimal from a 4-4-4-1 opening in this range. It clearly will help to have 4-4-4-1 hands removed from 1♣ openings, which could be balanced or unbalanced.

2NT is discredited as the artificial inquiry over a 3-suited 2♦ opening. The 2♥ step inquiry has proven to be superior, despite the reduced safety. I looked briefly at playing the Miles system with a 2♥ inquiry, but this would be inferior to the narrower LoTrip ranges: a 4-4-4-1 hand with more than 20 adjusted HCP is rare, so just lump these hands into an 18+ maxi.

While the new Triple Roman 2♣ opening improves upon the old Quad Roman 2♣, it is only slightly better than Triple Roman 2♦, and I cannot recommend it. If I were to play a Triple Roman 2♣, I'd consider the Triple Roman 2♦ ranges, with a 14-point minimum opening. Then the 2♠ response to the 2♦ inquiry (instead of 3♣) would show short hearts – safer and more efficient. This should outperform Triple Roman 2♦, but I'll leave further investigations to the reader.

The original and extra deals validate the **Triple Roman 2♦** opening as a significant system. Depending on your needs, I recommend:

2/1 game-forcing (and related natural methods): do not play a three-suited opening.

Unbalanced Diamond: play Triple Roman 2♦.

Precision (2♣ opening promises six): play the Precision 2♦ opening to cover 4=3=1=5, 3=4=1=5 and 4=4=0=5 hands (as well as 4=4=1=4). Modern Precision experts recommend this.

Precision (2♣ opening could be five with 0 or 1 diamond, or 1♦ opening permitted with 0 or 1 diamond): consider a low range Triple Roman 2♦ opening: mini=12-14, midi=15-17, maxi=18+.

Freewheeling (light openings): play Robert Munger's Split Roman 2♦.

All the openings and continuations considered in this article are acceptable under the ACBL General Convention Chart for all tournaments in North America, but may not be allowed in other localities.

References

- [The Roman Two Diamond Opening and Variations](#), Robert Munger, © 1998 (available from Baron-Barclay).
“Mini Roman Two Diamonds”, [bridgeguys.com](#). [6 pages of good discussion]
“Roman 2 Diamonds”, [Pitbulls](#). [17-24 HCP, 5-card minor permitted]
“Mini Roman”, [bridgehands.com](#). [muddled presentation; responder could pass opener’s bid of the short suit]
“Mini-Roman”, [worldwidefolks.com](#). [garbled suit symbols, 3♣ for minors, 3♦ = diamonds with heart tolerance]
“Mini-Roman 2 Diamond”, [wikipedia.org](#). [some play the short suit will always be a minor, submarine option]
“The Roman Two Diamonds”, [pattayabridge.com](#). [3♣ for minors, 3♦ = invitational or slamming in both majors, 4♣ = ace-asking, 4♦ = signoff in either major]
“The Mini-Roman and Flannery Conventions”, Neil H. Timm, Bridge News, Sept 2007, [bridgescore.com](#). [opener promises 4 spades, submarine responses, short suit asks min or max, optionally extended to 4450 or 4405]
“The Mini-Roman 2♦”, Brian Senior, [msoworld.com](#). [little used, not licensed in some countries]
“Mini-Roman Convention”, [fourseasonsbridge.com](#). [one-page summary, 2NT is forcing to game]
“Mini-Roman 2D Opener”, [BridgeDepot.net](#). [only a paragraph, but as much on defending against it]
The Blue Club, Benito Garozzo and Leon Yallouze (adapted by Terence Reese), © 1969, pp. 122-133.
The Complete Italian System of Winning Bridge, Edgar Kaplan, © 1959, pp. 124-139, [bridgefiles.net](#).
Howard Schenken’s “Big Club”, Howard Schenken, © 1968.
[Precision Today](#), David Berkowitz and Brent Manley, 2010 (available from amazon.com).
[My System: The Unbalanced Diamond](#), Marshall Miles, © 2007 (available from amazon.com).
The Unbalanced Diamond System by Marshall Miles, Pete Matthews, [web.mit.edu/mitdlbc/](#).

Supporting materials for this article, [web.mit.edu/mitdlbc/](#):

- Spreadsheet summarizing the bidding results for all hands and systems.
- All deals with full analyses in PDF and PBN format.
- The deals as a PDF presented in “Goldway” format for practice bidding, with notes on interference in a separate file.
- Two additional sets of deals, one evaluated here, in PDF and PBN format.

Notes

In the first version of this article, I seriously considered two ranges, high and low, of the Triple Roman 2♦ opening, plus a Quad Roman 2♣ opening. The High Triple Roman 2♦ bid outscored the Low Triple bid. This convention also outscored by a small margin the Quad Roman 2♣. There seems little point in playing a convention that consumes the valuable 2♣ opening, unless it proves substantially better than using the less-important 2♦ opening. Accordingly, I reformulated it as Triple Roman 2♣ opening for the second version of the article. I took some inspiration from the Miles Roman 2♦ of Sherry and Woody McHarg.

You should consider these possible sources of error in the results:

Subjective: While I worked hard to be consistent my personal judgments are likely to be in error, here and there. And you may simply disagree; some choices were tough. The judgment of the bidders is as important as the systems.

Clerical: copying results from BridgeComposer (PBN) to the spreadsheet was error-prone. Again, I was finding these errors right up to the end. Since I bid fewer systems and did not change the systems in the middle, the extra 72 deals should be relatively free of these errors.

Feedback: I used intermediate results to redesign the Triple and Quad conventions in the first version of the article. First, I created the HiTrip ranges, then I changed the 2NT response to be invitational with spades, and finally I changed all opener’s bids with a fit for a known suit to be *below* shortness. Since these systems were “designed for the test”, it is more likely that some other set of hands will provide different results. The evaluations of the extra 72 deals should be free of these errors.

No hand from the first version of the article was rebid with the systems presented in that article, even if *the hand was not too good to pass*. However, a posting error on board 13 was corrected, reducing the total score for Quad 2♣ by 5 points.

Design Considerations from the First Version

Here are some considerations in the design of the Triple and Quad Roman openings, and three-suited openings in general:

- The Blue Team 2♦ opening is anchored by its high upper range of 21-24. To a lesser extent, this is true for the Split Roman 2♦, at 19-22. The low range Triple and Quad openings are riskier, in that the maxi range is only 18-20 or 17-19. You may get too high on these hands, but at least you should find the correct strain. The high range Triple opening is much safer, because its 14-16 hands are bid with mini sequences, and its 17-19 hands are bid with midi sequences.
- As opener, avoid bidding the known short suit, lest the opponents get a free double. Instead, bid below shortness (submarine responses) whenever possible. This leaves the short suit available as a Control Ask by responder. Similarly, avoid bidding NT when weak. Playing this way, you need some way for responder to suggest playing in a long suit despite a singleton, and to handle variations in strength at the same time. Some “submariners” play the bid of the short suit as natural.
- The [original] Triple and Quad conventions are designed to keep the bidding as low as possible, especially for the weaker ranges. In both the [original] Triple 2♦ and Quad 2♣ systems, opener (at some point) bids 2NT to show a hand with long hearts. This is no accident: it guarantees responder can both escape into hearts, or offer a choice of minors. (A choice of minors should be sufficient, because responder has already bypassed a natural 2♠ response.)
- As Munger points out, keep the point ranges narrow. (Mine are narrower than his!) We mostly give up invitational sequences for improved accuracy in selecting the strain.
- If playing the natural, invitational 2NT response, you might expand the mini range to 11-14 instead of 12-14. However, this makes exploring for a midi-game riskier.
- Resist opening light, especially if playing an artificial 2NT response. Let your partner count on your opening bid. Remember, you don’t have invitational sequences. If you must, push all the ranges down a point.
- After the artificial inquiry of 2♦ or 2♥, responder’s 4♣ bid is always Kickback – you cannot play there. (When clubs are short, 4♦ is the Control Ask.)
- When responder makes a “pass or correct” bid, he may well be hoping opener will correct. Responder may then sign off in another suit or bid a game.
- Interference – general principles:
 - Under pressure, lump mini and some or all of midi ranges into one minimum, and reserve stronger actions for maxi and super, or at least a good midi.
 - When responder has shown values (2♦ inquiry, double, redouble, or competing in a suit), opener lumps super, maxi, and possibly midi into one range.

The Bidding Evaluation

“Average” over the original 49 deals is 294. Descriptions of East-West intervention are provided for these deals, for those wishing to bid the hands – I needed these instructions myself. The full deals and all content are available as a separate PDF document and in Portable Bridge Notation (PBN). Only the summary is presented on the next page. The North-South hands are also available for practice bidding in “Goldway” format, with notes on intervention in a separate file.

Using Dealmaster Pro, I dealt 52 hands, requiring South to be 4-4-4-1 with any shortness, and at least 10 HCP. I then weeded out three that nobody should open, e.g. 10 HCP including a singleton honor. I also made South dealer on every hand. The deals were saved in Portable Bridge Notation (PBN). I also dealt two further sets of 72 boards, which were not used in the first version of the article.

Next I opened the file with BridgeComposer, and ran both “Double Dummy All Boards” and “GIB Bid and Play All Boards”. (I own a copy of GIB as well.) I then deleted GIB’s play, to save space, and added auctions and a verdict to the bottom of each page. The GIB results show what can happen in real life, perhaps at BridgeBase.com.

The scoring of each auction is at the end of each line following the equal sign (=), and in the table that follows. The Blue, Mini, Split, HiTrip, and Triple2♦ auctions, not being comprehensive, are scored with both ES and UnbalD substitutes as applicable, the shaded areas of charts.

Conclusions from the First Version

Munger’s Split Roman 2♦ opening only degraded the other systems a little. He designed it for O.A.T.H. (Open All Ten-point Hands), with a range of 10-13. I infer that the opening bid of one of a suit would promise a five-card suit, except in a minor when holding 14 or more points. 1NT would be 10-13, balanced. In this context, the Split Roman 2♦ opening makes sense, and it is superior to Mini-Roman in any context. Kaplan-Sheinwold, a natural system with a weak 1NT opening, would also be a candidate for the Split Roman 2♦ opening.

The Mini-Roman 2♦ opening is clearly inferior, because of the wide range (11-15 or 12-16) and because of the inferior 2NT response. Still, it performed as well as the Triple and Quad openings, until I improved them.

The Blue Team 2♦ opening comes up seldom: one out of seven 4-4-4-1 possible openings here, which are not that common anyhow. It rates about the same as Eastern Scientific and Unbalanced Diamond, depending on which it is used with. I cannot see wasting a good bid on this convention.

The Quad Roman 2♣ opening is *comprehensive*: it covers all 4-4-4-1 opening bids, including 11-pointers and the rare huge hand (none of which were in the evaluation). If you are playing an artificial system and can afford to dedicate your 2♣ opening to it, the Quad Roman 2♣ opening is worthy of consideration.

The low range Triple Roman 2♦ is almost comprehensive. It excludes 11-point hands, which are not mandatory to open, and the rare huge hands. It slightly improves results with the Unbalanced Diamond system. In this context, it also beats the Split Roman 2♦ opening.

The **High Triple 2♦** opening is *the only three-suited bid that significantly improves another system on 4-4-4-1 hands themselves*. This should be the first choice for pairing with Marshall Miles’ Unbalanced Diamond system. The ranges of 14-16, 17-19 and 20+ were chosen to fit into this system, with these ideas in mind:

- 15-19 is the normal range of the 1♣ opening, the key range to cover. Stronger hands are covered gratis.
- Many standard bidders feel a working 14 HCP is worth a jump raise of a major on a 4-4-4-1 hand.
- The unbalanced 1♦ opening range is 11-14 when holding a 4-card major, so a “super” raise of responder’s major will now promise a longer minor.

The chart (below), extracted from the first version of the article, compares the **Blue Team** and **Quad Roman** three-suited openings.

Evaluated Inferior Methods

	Blue Team 2♦	Quad Roman 2♣ (precursor to Triple Roman 2♣)	
Shape	4-4-4-1, any shortness	4-4-4-1, any shortness (optionally also 5-4-4-0 with long minor)	
HCP	17-24: minimum=17-20, maximum=21-24	11+: mini=11-13, midi=14-16, maxi=17-19, super=20+ (Alternative: 14-15, 16-17, 18-19, 20+.)	
Key Cards		4♣ Kickback (except as noted): opener bids 4♦, and responder's choice of the next four bids is RKCB pointing to a higher trump suit (4♥ = clubs, ...). When opener is short in clubs, 4♦ is the control ask, and 4♣ is Kickback.	
Controls	Control ask in short suit (A=2, K=1), with responses in steps: 17-20: four to eight; 21-24: six to ten.	Control Ask (A=2, K=1, stiff K=0), first step shows: 0-2 (mini), 0-3 (midi), 0-4 (maxi), 0-5 (super).	
Inquiry	2♥ artificial inquiry: 0-5 with two 4-card suits or short spades, 6-7 semi-positive, or 8+ positive. Over a 17-20 rebid, the next step asks 17-18 or 19-20 (and which major).	2♦ artificial inquiry, usually has at least a few points. Opener describes, and responder generally places the contract. Note: responder's jump in the short suit is natural.	
Responses to Inquiry	2♥	(not available as a rebid)	Midi: 2♠ asks: 2NT = short ♣/♦/♠ (long ♥): 3♣ is pass or correct 3♦ asks for short: 3♥=♠, 3♠=♣, 3NT=♦ 3♥ to play 3♣ = short ♥ 2NT = game interest with spades & place to hide (see 2NT below) 3♣/3♦/3♥/3♠ is pass or correct
	2♠	Minimum, short major (2NT asks).	Maxi: 2NT asks for suit below the singleton. Suit=pass/correct.
	2NT	Minimum, short ♣	Mini, short ♣/♦/♠ (long ♥): 3♣ is pass or correct 3♦ asks for short: 3♥=♠, 3♠=♣, 3NT=♦ 3♥ to play
	3♣	Minimum, short ♦	Mini, short ♥
	3♦	Maximum, short ♥	Super, short ♥
	3♥	Maximum, short ♠	Super, short ♠
	3♠	Maximum, short ♣	Super, short ♣
	3NT	Maximum, short ♦	Super, short ♦
2♥	(artificial inquiry – see above)	Natural, negative, may be only 3 cards. With a misfit: 2♠ = mini or midi 2NT = maxi+ 3NT = strong super With a fit: pass = mini or midi 3♣/3♦/3♥ = short ♦/♠/♣	
2♠	Natural, 0-5 HCP, may be only 3 cards. Minimum opener: pass = fit, 2NT= misfit. Maximum opener: 3♣/3♦/3♠ = fit, short in suit above, 3♥ = misfit.	Natural, negative, may be only 3 cards. With a misfit: 2NT = maxi+ 3♣ = mini or midi 3NT = strong super With a fit: pass = mini or midi 3♦/3♥/4♣ = short ♥/♠/♦ 3♠ = short diamonds, non-forcing	

	Blue Team 2♦	Quad Roman 2♣ (precursor to Triple Roman 2♣)
2NT	Artificial, semi-positive, with an unspecified good 6-card suit (KQxxxx or KJTxxx). Opener bids the suit <i>below</i> the singleton. Responder bids the suit (3NT=clubs), and opener acts accordingly; a new suit is a cue bid asking for a singleton.	Invitational+ with spades and a place to hide. Opener bids: 3♣, 3NT or 4NT = misfit. 3♦/3♥/4♣ = short ♥/♠/♦ 3♠ = short diamonds, non-forcing No Kickback: 4NT is RKC Blackwood for spades. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alternative: Balanced, invitational, 11-12 or 12-13 HCP. With a weak mini, opener passes holding both majors, or bids 3♣ with both minors. With a good mini or better, bid 3NT. With slam interest, bid 3♦ with a red singleton or 3♥/3♠ with a singleton in the black suit above. • Alternative: Negative with both minors. Opener picks a minor with a mini or midi. With a maxi, opener may bid a lone long major or jump in a lone long minor. With a super, jump to game or in a lone long major.
3suit	Natural, semi-positive, fair suit 6-card (e.g. Axxxx, QJxxxx, KTxxxx). With a misfit, opener passes or tries game with 23-24.	Natural, decent 6-card suit (wins one of first 3 tricks on a misfit), encouraging. With a misfit: opener passes, raises, or bids 3NT/4NT natural. With a fit: opener raises, or bids the suit below shortness with slam interest – in steps, as usual: 2♦ – 3♣: 3♦/3♥/3♠ = short ♥/♠/♦ 2♦ – 3♦: 3♥/3♠/4♣ = short ♠/♣/♥ 2♦ – 3♥: 3♠/4♣/4♦ = short ♣/♦/♠ 2♦ – 3♠: 4♣/4♦/4♥ = short ♦/♥/♣ 4NT by responder is Blackwood; control ask is on.
3NT	(undefined)	Natural, a long suit with no losers opposite opener's weakest possible shortness, safe at 3NT or the 4-level opposite a mini.
4suit	(undefined)	Natural, a suit with one loser opposite opener's weakest possible shortness, safe at the 4-level opposite a mini.