

Are you Using the Best 2♣ Convention?

By Neil H. Timm

Karen Walker in 1996 asked ACBL partnerships the following question: What is the general structure used by you and your partner when responding to the artificial 2♣ bid? The results for the members she surveyed were:

- 36% -- 2♦ semi-positive = A/K or 2♥ as an immediate negative bid
- 25% -- Control-showing step responses
- 21% -- 2♦ waiting, cheaper minor double negative
- 10% -- 2♦ negative, 2♥ balanced positive
- 4% -- Point-count step responses
- 4% -- Other artificial systems

Playing the 2/1 Game Force Bidding System, common conventional responses to the forcing 2♣ bids by members of the duplicate bridge club in The Villages, FL was as follows.

- 1) The automatic 2♦ response was the common convention and included for example: (a) a weak waiting bid followed by a “busted” second negative as the cheapest minor bid, (b) a semi-positive invitational game force bid showing at least one control (A/K) with 2♥ = a bust hand, and (c) the Kokish Relay Convention. All used 2♦ as WAITING or invitational!
- 2) Responses to 2♣ were control showing responses where an A=2 and a K=1
- 3) Responses to 2♣ were step HCP responses with 2♦=0-3, 2♥=4-5, 2♠=7-9, and 2NT=10+.

Which of the three are best or optimal?

To evaluate this question Landor (2009) generated 10,000 bridge hands with an opening bid of 2♣ following the acbl’s definition of any hand with at least 4 losers and 4 or less quick tricks (a strong hand) and all three were compared to his new convention, not used by any club members, called the Landor 2♣ Convention, which I will review shortly, where briefly 2♦= 0-2 HCP is the only drop dead bid and all other bids are primarily game forcing (GF).

After a contract was reached, a double-dummy analysis of the results was performed to determine the score for the final contract reached by the four methods.

To ensure that the results were independent of the opponent’s hand, the opponent’s cards were dealt in random fashion 19 different times and a double-dummy analysis was again performed to score each convention on the new position for a total of 200,000 combinations.

All four of the above conventions reached the same contract 31% of the time after the

opening bid of 2♣. The average IMPs per board for each against each other for all 200,000 deals were:

Steps = -0.27 IMPs Controls = -0.38 IMP Waiting = +0.14 IMPs Landor = +0.52 IMPs

As you can see the Landor 2♣ Convention out performed the other three methods, played by over 80% the partnerships. Thus if club members choose to adopt the Landor 2♣ Convention they may do better than other pairs.

The Landor 2♣ Convention

With a balanced hand, the 2♣-opening bidders will likely have 22+ HCP with a balanced hand, but with an unbalanced hand this not the case. However, they will always have at least 4 quick trick and 4 or less losers but may have as few as 18HCP. Hence, if partner has merely a Queen or 0-2 HCP game is impossible. However with a void and aces game may exist.

Following the opening bid of 2♣ the first level bids for Landor's convention are as follows where *=alert represents an alerted bid.

Response by Partner	Open's Rebid
2♦	Pass
	Bid one rank above partner's last bid MAJOR response to ask for Kings.
2♥* No Aces	2♠*=king ask
2♠* One Ace	2NT*=king ask
2NT* Two aces	3NT*=modified Stayman (See Reference Note 6)
3♣* Void showing suit bids	
3♦*	Bid one rank above partner's suit bid to ask for aces: 4♦*/4♥*/4♠*/4NT*
3♥*	(See Reference Notes 7-10)
3♠*	
3NT* 4441 with one A/K	4♣* asks partner to bid singleton (see Reference Note 11)
4♣* 11-12HCP	4NT=standard Blackwood with no 5-card suit, all suit bids show 5+ cards
4♦* 13-14HCP	With two 5-5 suits bid higher ranking first and the 2 nd later
4♥* 15-16HCP	
4♠* 17-18HCP	
4NT* 7+card suit with AKQ	Show the number of Aces using Blackwood
5♣ 7+ card suit missing an A/K/Q	
5♦	Place the contract at the 5-Level by passing, bid 6/7 with a fit and suit bid 6/7 NT with entries and stoppers
5♥	
5♠	

**Initial Responder
bid in column 1
above**

Responders Next Bid (His Rebid Over Opener)

2♦	<p>Pass or bid game if you have additional tricks to bid game</p> <p>Responder bids next step above 2-level bids to show Kings: 2NT*=0, 3♣*=1, 3♦*=2, 3♥*=3, 3♠*=4 3♣*=0, 3♦*=1, 3♥*=2, 3♠*=3, 3NT=4</p>
Other 2-Level (2x) and 3-Level (3x) bids	<p>Response bids next step above 3-Level bids to show Aces: 4♥*=0, 4♠*=1, 4NT*=2, 4♣*=3, 4♦*=4 4♠*=0, 4NT*=1, 5♣*=2, 5♦*=3, 5♥*=4 4NT*=0, 5♣*=1, 5♦*=2, 5♥*=3, 5♠*=4 5♣*=0, 5♦*=1, 5♥*=2, 5♠*=3, 5NT*=4</p> <p>(See Reference Notes 5 and 6)</p>
3NT*	<p>Bid your Singleton – If Opener bids the next rank it is an ace-asking bid again answered with steps as above. After he responds to your “ace” step ask, by bidding the next step it is the king asking bid answered again in steps.</p>
4-Level Bids	<p>Support partner with 3+cards in his suit. Without support bid your own 5+card suit or NT. Over NT opener may use modified Stayman.</p>
4NT*	<p>Partner will bid his long suit at the 6-level. With six additional trick Opener will bid a Grand Slam and with entries bid 6NT/7NT.</p>
5-Level Bids	<p>If responder had a side control, raise the 6-level bid to 7.</p>

General Notes

- (1) Except for an initial response of 4NT*, the 2♣ opening bidder is almost always the captain of the convention.
- (2) Partner's response of 2♦ is non-forcing. After 2♥*, it is a GF provided a fit can be found to play in 3NT or 4M. However minor suit fits are not game forcing.
- (3) Any 4NT* bid is NOT Blackwood except when your partner's bid is below the 3-level and then it is standard Blackwood asking about only aces.
- (4) 4NT* is a temporizing bid allowing your partner to bid again at the lowest level or to perhaps allow or it may be used to ask your partner bid your suit with only 2-card having previously denied a fit, or to bid another long suit.

Reference Notes

(5) After asking for Aces or Kings and you realize that slam is not possible, it is best to play in 3NT or 4M.

(6) If responder has less than 2 aces, then after asking for kings, your 3rd bid over the ZERO king response of 3♣*/3♦* and over 2NT*=2 aces, 3NT* is “modified” Stayman.

Responses are:

3♦*/3NT*	No 4-card major and a balanced hand
3♥	Four or more hearts may have 4-spades
3♠	Four or more spades, denies 4-hearts unless 5+spades
4♣/4♦	No 4-card major, 6+ minor, extra values slam interest
4♥/4♠	6+hearts/5+spades, no slam interest
5♣/5♦	6+clubs/6+diamonds, no slam interest
4NT	Quantitative invitational to slam
5NT	pick a slam
6x	Slam

(7) After partner shows a void, you may bid above him two more times, first by asking for aces and then to ask for kings.

(8) Often time the 2♣ opener uses a lot of bidding space to show a void, aces, or kings. You may even be at the 5/6-level looking for the your best slam suit. If you find yourself at the 5-level and partner does not have 3-card support, start bidding your long suits up the line.

(9) When the 2♣ opener has two 5-card suits and partner has a void in one of them, never begin asking for aces; instead bid yours other 5-card suit. If he does not have 3-card support in your second suit, he will bid one rank above your last bid suit and with 3-card support will bid 2-ranks above your second bid suit. You may then bid one rank higher to ask for aces in that suit or bid your second suit again as a closeout bid.

(10) If you open 2♣ with a long suit and partner shows a void in that suit slam is unlikely. If is a self-sufficient suit with 6/7 cards like AKQJxx(x) you may want to ask for aces and perhaps even kings (e.g. 2♣-3♠=void (and your suit is spades), 3NT=ace ask, 4♦=1 ace, 4♥=king ask, 4♠=0 you may pass or bid slam). With NO aces partner would bid 4♣ instead of 4♦ and you would sign off in game).

(11) If partner has 4441 distributions with at least one A/K, his first response will be 3NT. If you now bid 4♣, he will bid his singleton suit. Now you may ask for aces by bidding one rank above the last bid suit and then also ask for kings.

Summary and Comments

The convention may appear complicated, but is very easy to remember since whenever the 2♣ bidder (opener) wants to ask about controls, he bids one rank above responder's last bid and partner responds up the ladder from the last bid starting at zero, --one, two, three, etc. for the number of aces or kings. With interference steps may also be initiated with an X depending on whether you are telling or asking.

With this convention the 1st step is always a king ask, the next step is a king ask after the ace step answer. Responses to all ask bids are always given in steps. Following RKCB one may also ask for stoppers in a specific suit by bypassing the king ask step and bidding a suit and bidding a 3rd step or higher for a control. The 2♣ opener may have Kxxx(x) and even though he knows that partner has the A, he may need to know whether partner has Ax, or AQ(x) and not Axx(x) for a grand slam. One may use the Specific Suit Ask (SSA), which is again answered with steps:

1st step = no control in the asking suit (e.g. xxx, Jx(x))

2nd step = third round control: Ax, AQx, KQx, or Qxx (2 of top 3 or protected Q)

While almost all-2♣ bidding conventions find most slams. However, with marginal and distributional hands the Landor convention out performed those used by others even with 4441 distributions. We all know that no convention is perfect but this one deserves study.

Let's now look at some bidding sequence for the convention.

Looking for Controls and Modified Stayman

Dealer South	North - Responder
♠AKQJ ♥A7 ♦KQ52 ♣AQJ	♠1092 ♥Q952 ♦A987 ♣72
2♣	2♠* I have an ace
2NT* (next step –how many kings?)	3♣* (first step – I have none)
3♦* Modified Stayman	3♥ Natural bid 4-hearts
3♠ Natural 4-spades	4♦ Natural with 4+diamonds
6♦	

Using the bid of 4NT

Dealer South	North - Responder
♠A ♥7 ♦AKQ95 ♣KQJ532	♠K1098 ♥98654 ♦87 ♣A4
2♣	2♠* I have an ace
2NT* (next step - how many kings?)	3♦* (2 nd step – I have one king)
4♣ Natural 4+clubs	4♥ Natural bid 4+hearts
4NT Need more information	5♣ I have 2+ clubs
6♣	

Here 4NT was a temporizing bid instead of re-bidding clubs allowing partner to bid again at the lowest level. After 5♣, you would bid 5NT if you wanted to play in NT. If partner bid 5♦, you would have bid 6♦.

Showing Voids

Dealer South
♠AQJ53 ♥73 ♦AKQJ5 ♣7

North - Responder
♠98 ♥ - ♦98742 ♣A109865

2♣	3♥* I have a heart Void
3♠* (next step - how many aces?)	3♦* (next step - I have one ace)
4♦* (next step – how many kings?)	4♥ (next step – I have none)
4♠ I have 5+spades	5♣ I do not have 3 spades, but 5+ clubs
5♦ I have 5+diamonds	6♦

Showing Two Long Suits

Dealer South
♠AKQ98 ♥K7 ♦KQJ32 ♣7

North - Responder
♠ - ♥5432 ♦A654 ♣109865

2♣	3♠* I have a spade Void
4♦* Natural	3♦* (next step - I have one ace)
4♦* (next step – how many kings?)	4♠ yes forcing cue bid
4NT How many aces?	5♦ (2 nd step – I have one)
6♦	

Long suit with Voids

Dealer South
♠AKQJ543 ♥AQ ♦KQ3 ♣7

North - Responder
♠ - ♥543 ♦J10987 ♣A10986

2♣	3♠* I have a spade Void
3NT* (next step – how many aces?)	4♦* (2 nd step - I have one ace)
4♥* (next step – how many kings?)	4♠ (1 st I have none)
6♠	

As often happens with these types of hand Responder is playing the slam. If partner had no aces instead of one, he would have bid 4♣* instead of 4♦*, opener would bid 4♠ and play the contract. If partner has 2 aces by bidding 4♥*, you the opener would just bid 6NT.

Responder is 4441

Dealer South

♠9854 ♥7 ♦KQ32 ♣AK105

North - Responder

♠AKQ98 ♥K543 ♦AK ♣Q2

2♣

3NT* I am 4441

4♣* (next step – where is it?)

4♥* in hearts

4♥* (next step – how many aces?)

5♣* (2nd step I have one)

5♦* (next step – how many kings?)

5♠* (2nd step I have 2)

6♠

The slam was reached with only 28 HCP.

Specific Suit Ask (SSA)

Dealer South

♠AKQ985 ♥AKQ97 ♦Q3 ♣-

North - Responder

♠J42 - ♥543 ♦K104 ♣5432

2♣

2♥ I have no aces

3♠

4♠

5♦ (SSA in ♦ bypass 4NT & 5♣)

5♠ yes (2nd step bid)

6♠

A slam is reached with only 24 HCP.

We next look at a complete deal, which you may want to compare with your preferred Method.

Example 1 – Played on BBO at 10:30 a.m. Virtual Club game on 01/28/21

Dealer me (South) all Non-Vulnerable

		♣	AKQ		
		♥	Q10432		
		♦	K103		
		♣	10752		
♠	K532	<div style="background-color: green; color: white; text-align: center; padding: 10px;"> N W E S </div>		♠	AQJ874
♥	75			♥	9
♦	Q7642			♦	J9
♣	J8			♣	9643
		♠	96		
		♥	AKJ86		
		♦	A86		

South	West	North	East
2♣	Pass	2♥* (No ace)	Pass
2♠* (any kings)	Pass	2NT* (one King)	Pass
3♥	Pass	4♥	Pass
4♠* (any kings)	Pass	5♣* Yes one)	Pass
5♦ (SSA for diamonds)	Pass	5♠ Yes 2 nd step	Pass
6♥			

Using this new convention we were the only pair against 148 pairs to bid the slam.
Most were in 4♥ making 6♥. However, some east pairs overcalled 2♠, *=alert.

Common bidding sequences were:

2♣	2♦ (Waiting or A/K)
2♥/3♥	4♥
Pass	Pass

If we had interference, my bid of 2♠* would be replaced by the X = king ask or the next cheapest bid of 2NT*= king ask depending on your agreement. The bid or 2NT* may get the bidding too high and now the X is no longer negative. Simple overcalls mainly affect partner's 2-level and 3-level bids. We start telling using the X (aces and voids) and begin asking (about aces and kings) next steps.

Example 2 – E-W Vulnerable South Deals

		♠	542		
		♥	2		
		♦	AQJ9762		
		♣	104		
♠	109	<div style="background-color: green; color: white; padding: 10px; text-align: center;"> N W E S </div>		♠	8763
♥	K1095			♥	QJ873
♦	K1084			♦	53
♣	Q53			♣	J9
		♠	AKQJ		
		♥	A64		
		♦	-		
		♣	AK8762		

South	West	North	East
2♣	Pass	2♠* (One ace)	Pass
2NT* (any kings)	Pass	3♣* No	Pass
3♦* Modified Stayman	Pass	4♦ No but 6+♦	Pass
4♥ Control Bid	Pass	5♦ Control bid	Pass
5♠ Control bid	Pass	6♠	Pass
Pass	Pass	Pass	

Lead = ♠10

South won the opening lead in his hand and observed that there might be trouble if he tried to ruff a club. East might be able to over-ruff and lead another spade, cutting South's communication with dummy and leaving him with two potential heart losers. An alternative was to ruff a heart and discard his remaining heart on the ace of diamonds before ruffing a club. However, an opponent would be able to ruff the third club and then force South to ruff a red suit. This line of play would require a 3-3-trump split and a 3-3-club split which was highly unlikely.

South used a line of play that only required that neither opponent hold a singleton in the black suit. He chose to lead a low club at trick two. East won and led another trump, South won and cashed his ace of hearts and ruffed a heart. He discarded his last heart on the ♦A and returned to his hand with the ♣A. He drew the rest of the trumps and ran his clubs to make his slam. Slam bid and made.

Not playing the new convention the bidding went as follows with E-W passing.

South	North
2♣	2♦
3♣	3♦
3♠	4♦
4♠	Pass
Pass	

And the slam was not reached!

While many recent books on bridge discuss several approaches for responding to 1NT*, most do not recommend a comprehensive integrated set of conventions and gadgets except for perhaps **Alvin Leon "Al" Roth** (November 6, 1914 – April 18, 2007), an American bridge player considered one of the greatest of all time, in his book "Picture Bidding" (1991, published by Alvin Roth and Granovetter Books).

To quote the ACBL "**Al Roth** was a **player** who fell in love with "the beauty of **bidding**" and is generally considered the premier bidding theorist of his **bridge generation**". His book is about the art of painting a bridge hand ergo Picture Bidding!

The Roth 2♣ System (“Picture Bidding,” Chapter 7)

2♦ = A&K/KKK/AQQ = 6 - 8 HCP

2♥ - 2♠ = spade suit with A/K

2NT – 3NT minimum balanced with 7-9HCP

2♥* = artificial and negative

2♠ = 6+ spades or 5+ with Q or better

2NT = 8-10HCP

3NT = 11-13HCP mostly Queens and Jacks

Dealer South

♠AKQJ ♥A7 ♦KQ52 ♣AQJ

North - Responder

♠1092 ♥Q952 ♦A987 ♣72

2♣

3NT 25-27

4NT

6♦

2♦

4♦

5♦ = 1 ace

Pass

Using the bid of 4NT

Dealer South

♠A ♥7 ♦AKQ95 ♣KQJ532

North - Responder

♠K1098 ♥98654 ♦87 ♣A4

2♣

2NT

3♥

4♣

6♣

2♦

3♦* (Transfer to hearts)

3♠

5♣

Pass

Showing Voids

Dealer South

♠AQJ53 ♥73 ♦AKQJ5 ♣7

North - Responder

♠98 ♥ - ♦98742 ♣A109865

2♣

3♦

5♥ = 2 (steps 012)

Pass

2♦

5♥ ERKCB

6♦

Pass

Showing Two Long Suits

Dealer South

♠AKQ98 ♥K7 ♦KQJ32 ♣7

North - Responder

♠ - ♥5432 ♦A654 ♣109865

2♣
2♠
3♦
5♦

2♦
3♣
4♦
6♦

Long suit with Voids

Dealer South
♠AKQJ543 ♥AQ ♦KQ3 ♣7

North - Responder
♠ - ♥543 ♦J10987 ♣A10986

2♣
3♠
4♦
6♠

2♦
4♣
5♦

Responder is 4441

Dealer South
♠9854 ♥7 ♦KQ32 ♣AK105

North - Responder
♠AKQ98 ♥K543 ♦AK ♣Q2

2♣
3♠
5♣
6♣
Pass

2♠
4♠
5♦
6♠
Pass

Specific Suit Ask (SSA)

Dealer South
♠AKQ985 ♥AKQ97 ♦Q3 ♣ -

North - Responder
♠J42 - ♥543 ♦K104 ♣5432

2♣
3♠
5♣
6♠

2♦
4♠
6♦

We next look at a complete deal, which you may want to compare with your preferred Method.

Example 1 – Played on BBO at 10:30 a.m. Virtual Club game on 01/28/21
Dealer me (South) all Non-Vulnerable

		♠	10		
		♥	Q10432		
		♦	K103		
		♣	10752		
♠	K532	<div style="background-color: green; color: white; padding: 10px; text-align: center;"> N W E S </div>		♠	AQJ874
♥	75			♥	9
♦	Q7642			♦	J9
♣	J8			♣	9643
		♠	96		
		♥	AKJ86		
		♦	A86		
		♣	AKQ		

South	West	North	East
2♣	Pass	2♦	Pass
2♥	Pass	3♥	Pass
4♠ (kickback)	Pass	4♠ = 0/3	Pass
5♥	Pass	Pass	Pass

Using the Roth approach, the slam was not reached. This was also the case with other often used conventions.

Irwin S. Landow (2009), Win Bridge Tournaments with Innovative Slam Bidding, Xlibris Corporation