

The Strong 2C Opening Bid – Part I

Consider the following hands:

| | | | |
|-------------|------------|----------|---------|
| 1. ♠ AKQ843 | ♥ AKQ65 | ♦ --- | ♣ 93 |
| 2. ♠ AKQ6 | ♥ 3 | ♦ AQJ5 | ♣ AKT6 |
| 3. ♠ --- | ♥ KQJT965 | ♦ KQJT95 | ♣ --- |
| 4. ♠ 8 | ♥ AKQJ8653 | ♦ AK | ♣ 76 |
| 5. ♠ AJ5 | ♥ K | ♦ AQJ6 | ♣ AKJT7 |
| 6. ♠ AK94 | ♥ AQ4 | ♦ KQT5 | ♣ A3 |

If you had to rank the above hands in the order of desirability, no doubt you would rank hand #6 as the worst of the bunch. Hands #1, #3, and #4 almost certainly have a game in hand. Hands #2 and #5 have higher point count strength than #6. I contend however, that hand #6 is the only hand of the group that should be opened 2C. The ACBL has a law that states that a player is not allowed to psych a strong 2C opening bid. The league is very vague however on what constitutes a psych. *All* of the above hands would qualify as an acceptable 2C opening bid by ACBL standards. Even the ridiculous

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| 7. ♠ --- | ♥ AKQJ76542 | ♦ 8 5 | ♣ 7 4 |
|----------|-------------|-------|-------|

is an acceptable 2C opening bid under ACBL regulations. To suggest that the league should revise its standards for 2C opening bids is an understatement. Our goal here is NOT to take advantage of inadequacies in the ACBL rules, but rather, to achieve the goal of all bidding situations, i.e.: *Make Your Partner Happy!* I'm going to suggest a number of guidelines to restrict the use of strong 2C openings so that your partner will have a better grasp on what to expect from your hand when you make that call.

General Requirements for an Opening Bid of 2C:

- A. A strong balanced hand of 22 or more high card points - *or*
- B. A strong unbalanced hand with a 6 card suit or longer – *and* – at least 9 playing tricks – *and* - at least 4 Quick Tricks in THREE different suits - *or*
- C. A hand so strong (24/25+) that it risks being passed out with an opening 1 bid.

One rule that may make it easier to determine whether or not to open a hand 2C is the following:

After a 2C opening bid, either WE play the hand, or THEY play it *doubled!*

This rule needs to be understood by both partners. When the opponents interfere in our 2C auctions, they need to know that there will be consequences. Since the most common hand we will hold for an opening 2C bid is the balanced 22+ hand, we need a convenient way to show this to partner when the opponents interfere.

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|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| <u>South</u> | <u>West</u> | <u>North</u> | <u>East</u> |
| 2C | 2S | Pass | Pass |
| ? | | | |

If South has Opened 2C with hand type (B), he makes his planned rebid, which is a one round force. If instead, he holds hand type (A), he reopens with a *double*. This does NOT necessarily show a stopper in the overcaller's suit, but it will usually contain at least one. North can now bid or pass, whichever seems correct. The important point is

that South does NOT reopen with 2NT! Since double would show the balanced big hand, 2NT must necessarily show something different. You can decide for yourself what you would like it to show. I would suggest a very strong hand with both minors, or a very strong 3 suited hand without spades.

Many players choose to agree that North's initial pass showed sufficient strength to have made a positive response if not for the interference, and they use an immediate double to show a bust. This has both advantages and disadvantages, but against most sane opponents, it makes sense. Therefore, in the sequence above, if South reopens with a double, and North does not pass for penalties, any other bid is *game forcing*.

Responding to a 2C Opening Bid

Since we have now narrowly defined what we will open 2C, we need a method for Opener to describe *why* he has made this bid. Although some players agree to play *control showing responses* over the opening 2C bid, I believe these to be mostly unnecessary. They are especially helpful if you are willing to bid 2C on hands similar to #7, where you have tremendous offensive potential, with limited defense. I believe playing 2C this way is as close to cheating as the ACBL will allow. Since we are striving to make OUR auctions as accurate as possible, rather than trying to swindle our opponents out of their possible games, slams, or sacrifices – I suggest the following system for responding to an opening bid of 2C.

- 2D:** A game forcing waiting bid. This bid denies holding a 5+ card side suit headed by 2 of the top 3 honors.
- 2H:** A bust. Nothing useful here. No Ace. No King. Probably no Queen-Jack combination. 4 pts or less.
- 2S/3C/3D:** 5 or more cards in the bid suit headed by two of the top 3 honors.
- 2NT:** A 5+ card *heart* suit headed by two of the top three honors.

These responses are chosen because they tend to convey the most useful information. The 2D *game forcing waiting bid* is extremely useful, because it initiates a game force. Once responder bids 2D, the auction cannot die below game. The 2H *double negative bid* is useful because it warns opener as early as possible that responder will possibly provide zero tricks on offense. The positive bids showing good 5 card or longer suits are useful because they allow opener to count tricks towards possible slams and grand slams. All bids are designed to keep the auction as low as possible until both partners have had sufficient space to adequately describe their holdings.

The Strong No Trump Structure:

The vast majority of the time, when opener holds a strong balanced hand, his point count will be in the 22-24 pt range. This hand is easily shown by opening 2C, and rebidding 2NT. All of the conventions that responder would employ over an opening 2NT bid are applicable here, notably Stayman, and Jacoby and Texas transfers. Responder is the *captain* of the auction, and will place the contract either in a suit or no trump based on the assumption that opener has a maximum of 24 hcp. In the rare event that opener has 25-27 hcp, opener *still* opens 2C and *still* rebids 2NT. However, this time, after responder places the final contract, opener bids once more, raising the final strain 1 level, to show the extra values. For example:

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| <u>South</u> | <u>North</u> | <u>South</u> | <u>North</u> | <u>South</u> | <u>North</u> |
| 2C | 2D | 2C | 2D | 2C | 2D |
| 2NT* | 3C | 2NT* | 3C | 2NT* | 3H |
| 3D | 3NT | 3S | 4S | 3S | 3NT |
| 4NT** | ? | 5S** | ? | 5S or 4NT** | ? |

In all 3 cases above, the 2NT was assumed to be 22-24 pts, but was in reality 25-27*. The auction proceeded normally until North signed off. After the presumed final bid, South bumps the level one higher. This sequence tells North that South has the larger holding. North remains the *captain*, but now decides whether to pass or continue to slam. Had North jumped to a small slam (without using Blackwood), South will raise to a grand.