

Weak Twos in the Majors

[A] Discipline

We decided to play Weak Two bids in the majors¹ because they combine two attractive features. When the opposition holds the balance of the points they are very effective as pre-empts. And on those rare occasions when partner has a decent hand they do not pre-empt partner. Weak Twos are *limit* bids, so they give a precise picture of the hand. Partner is then well placed to select good games and slams, and to avoid bad ones. To preserve these virtues *discipline* is important. The hands must fall within a precisely defined range. BSI enjoins merely 6-10 points and a 6-card suit. I suggest that we adopt the following agreements, which I take to be more or less standard across the world of deadly serious bridge.

The requirements for a Weak Two are:

- (1) About 6 – 10 points²
- (2) A decent six-card suit. Which means Q-10-x-x-x or better
- (3) No other 4-card major
- (4) No void
- (5) Not two singletons.

Hands with a void, or with two singletons, are too strong for a pre-emptive opening. So there are only three possible hand patterns:

6-3-2-2, 6-3-3-1, and 6-4-2-1 where the 4-card suit is a minor.

When you are responding to a Weak Two, and especially when you end up defending, *remember* these patterns. You can often deduce partner's precise shape from the opposition bidding/early play and your own hand.

[B] Maximum versus Minimum

At the moment, we think of these as defined by point-count. Wicked waste. Under the discipline of section [A], a much sharper definition is available:

- A Minimum Weak Two has 8 losers
- A Maximum Weak Two has 7 losers

[C] When to open 1-of-a-major and when to open 2

Since a Weak Two may have only 7 losers, it will be near-as-dammit worth an opening one-bid. So the boundary between an opening of one and an opening of two is rather blurry. The difficult cases are when

¹ Balliol Standard advertises 2♦ as likewise a weak two bid. I don't especially like this, although opinions differ. James, for instance, is quite a fan. So make your own minds up. But here, for what it is worth, is my argument:-

2♦ is much weaker in pre-emptive power than 2♥ or 2♠. And opponents will be much readier to double for penalties, because they are not risking doubling you into a lucky game. 2♦ doubled and made costs only 180. 2♠ doubled and made costs 470 non-vulnerable and 670 vulnerable. And advanced Sons and Daughters of the Revolution will have a quite different use for a 2♦ opener.

² But see below, in section [C]. Some 11-12 point hands should also be opened with a two-bid.

you hold a good six-card suit and 10-12 points.³ Should you cheat on the point-count limit and bid a pre-emptive two? Or should you open with a light one-bid? I opine that these cases are best distinguished by counting losers, which dictates the logic of the following guide:

6 losers and 10-12 points	Bid One	Far too strong to pre-empt
7 losers and 11-12 points	Bid One	Still too strong
7 losers and 10 points	Bid Two	Maximum Weak Two
8 losers and 10-12 points	Bid Two	Too weak despite the extra points

[D] Ogust

Many use some⁴ version of an Ogust 2NT conventional inquiry to explore game contracts after partner opens a Weak Two. The Ogust responses are more accurate if defined in terms of losers:

3♣	8 losers, one top ⁵ honour in the suit
3♦	8 losers, two top honours
3♥	7 losers, one top honour
3♠	7 losers, two top honours
3NT	7 losers, three top honours

And for those wedded to Ogust (but see my suggestion below), I remind you of other potential uses. Suppose partner deals and opens a Weak Two Hearts. RHO passes, and you stare at a near-yarborough, with no fit for partner's major. Disaster impends. The opposition hold up to 30 high-card points. So why did RHO pass? Why didn't he compete? The likely explanation is that he has the Hearts stacked over your partner. And the likely consequence, should you meekly pass, is that LHO will double for take-out, and RHO will leave it in for penalties. And that means you are going for a telephone number. **Goodnight, Irene: match over.** The effect of a naughty 2NT in this situation can sometimes be quite magical. It will be a good exercise for you to think through the likely continuation of the auction.

The same trick, by the way, can come to your aid when partner opens a weak NT, LHO passes, and you hold your traditional yarborough. If you pass, you will surely hear LHO double, and RHO pass. Goodnight Irene. *So don't pass. Bid anything.* For then a double from LHO will be for take-out, not for penalties. More often than not, a naughty Stayman 2♣ will save the day.

[E] Other Methods

I am not a fan of conventions like Ogust. You learn about your partner's point-count, and you learn about his suit quality. But very often that still leaves you guessing the best contract, because you do not know your partner's *shape*, nor *where* his points lie. And it is those matters which determine the thin games.

I prefer a much simpler system. Your conventional 2NT instead asks partner to do one of two things. If minimum, rebid his suit at the three-level. And if better than minimum, make some other bid to show a *feature*, an aspect of his hand which you might find useful. So my responses to a 2NT conventional inquiry are:

³ With 13 or more, you will of course open with a one-bid.

⁴ Some versions insist on 16 points before you use Ogust. Wicked waste. You only need a high point count when you have no fit with the 6-card suit. Use the loser count to decide whether or not to explore game contracts.

⁵ I.e., one of A-K-Q.

After 2♥ Pass 2NT Pass ?

- 3♣ Better than minimum, club feature – say Kx or Kxx, or perhaps even Kxxx, etc. or better
- 3♦ Better than minimum, diamond feature – ditto
- 3♥ Minimum opener
- 3♠ Bugger! I forgot we were playing Weak Twos. I am two suited, with 8 playing tricks.
- 3NT AKQxxx in Hearts

And after 2♠ Pass 2NT Pass ?

- 3♣ Better than minimum, club feature – say Kx or Kxx, or perhaps even Kxxx, etc. or better
- 3♦ Better than minimum, diamond feature – ditto
- 3♥ Better than minimum, heart feature
- 3♠ Minimum opener.
- 3NT AKQxxx in Spades

[F] Responding to Weak Twos

It is vital to distinguish *constructive* bidding opposite a Weak Two, and *defensive* bidding. Bidding defensively, raise to game with a fit and the odd useful card. If you have nothing, then the opposition have a certain game and a likely slam in the other major. Make it hard for them.

When you bid *constructively* opposite a Weak Two it is important to distinguish three cases. *Fit* with the suit, *tolerance* for the suit, *misfit*. More precisely:

(1) With 3-card or better support

You have a 9-card fit. So the LTC is a much better guide than point-count. Whereupon Responder's basic strategy is obvious:

- | | |
|-----------------------|---|
| With 8 or more losers | <i>Pass</i> |
| With 7 losers | <i>Invite</i> game. Bid it opposite a maximum, sign-off opposite a minimum |
| With 6 losers | <i>Bid</i> game |
| With 5 losers | <i>Explore</i> slam. Bid slam opposite a maximum unless two key cards are missing.
Bid game opposite a minimum |
| With 4 losers | <i>Insist</i> on slam unless two key cards are missing |

(2) With doubleton support

With only a 6-2 fit, the LTC is less reliable as a predictor. Because you have little ruffing potential, be careful. Use the strategy outlined in (1), but temper it with caution.⁶

(3) With singleton or void

Alarm bells. This is a misfit. Do not use the LTC. Pass unless you hold 16 points or better. When hands do not fit you need the full high-card quota to make game.

⁶ Indeed, add a loser unless your doubleton is J 10 or Q x or better. Later we can refine the LTC, introducing the notion of *cover-cards* to fine-grain assessment in these cases.