



B3 L04 Very Strong Unbalanced Hands NOTES

Opening Very Strong Balanced Hands

20-22
HCPs



2NT



Announced
(eg. "Twenty to Twenty-Two")

23+
HCPs



2♣



Alerted

Opening Very Strong Unbalanced Hands

An unbalanced hand may draw its power from the quantity of honour cards or from its shape.

1. The point where an unbalanced hand is opened at the 2 level rather than the 1 level can involve either a High Card Point count, or a "shape" assessment, or both.
2. There are also regulations about the features of a hand that makes it acceptable to describe it as "strong".

Players need a good understanding and agreement about both.



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Deciding your hand is “strong” unbalanced

Unbalanced/Balanced

It's normal for partners to agree that a balanced hand with 20 or more HCPs may contain a five-card major. If the distribution of the cards in the hand is 4443; 4432; or 5322, it is balanced.

Assessing playing tricks

When deciding how to bid a hand whose strength is based at least partly on its shape, you assess how many “playing tricks” it can take. This means the number of tricks the hand can win, with no help from partner's hand, providing its best suit is trumps. This is a new way of assessing a hand, it's not related to HCP, it's not related to the Losing Trick Count, it's not the same as the rule of twenty.

It's particularly important to be rigorous about the tricks available in long suits, that is the assumed trump suit and any side suits.

Hands with eight playing tricks are considered strong. They are opened at the two level naturally in simple forms of Acol, or using opening and rebids in other Acol dialects. A “natural” strong two opening is announced either “Strong and not forcing” or “Strong and forcing”.

Hands with nine or more playing tricks are considered very strong. They are opened with a game-forcing bid.



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Examples of assessing Clear/Playing Tricks.

Hand 1

♠ 10 9 8
♥ A K Q 10 9 8 7
♦ 3
♣ 7 4

This hand is unbalanced, has nine HCP, has SIX / SEVEN playing tricks in hearts. It's suitable for a three level pre-empt.

Hand 2

♠ 10 9 8
♥ A K Q J 10 9 8
♦ A
♣ 7 4

This hand is unbalanced, has 14 HCP, has seven playing tricks in hearts and AD = EIGHT. Use a strong two bidding sequence in hearts.

Hand 3

♠ 10 9 8
♥ A K Q J 10 9 8
♦ A
♣ A 4

This hand is unbalanced, has 18 HCP, has NINE playing tricks in hearts. Use a game-forcing opening bid.

Hand 4

♠ J 10 9 8
♥ A K Q 4 3
♦ K Q
♣ K Q

This hand is unbalanced, has 20 HCP, has FIVE playing tricks in hearts. It should be opened either 2NT or else at the one level in hearts.

Hand 5

♠ 10 9 8
♥ A K Q J 5 4 3 2
♦ 7
♣ 6 5

This hand is unbalanced, has 10 HCP, has EIGHT? playing tricks in hearts.
Open 4H

Hand 6

♠ 10 9 8
♥ A K Q J 10 9 8 7
♦ A
♣ 4

This hand is unbalanced, has 14 HCP, has NINE playing tricks in hearts. Use a game-forcing opening bid.



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8 Playing Tricks: Opening a "Strong 2"

You may use a "natural" method, or "Benji"

Auction 1 (Basic Acol)

N E S W



2♠



"Strong..."
*1

*1 If asked, the agreement with partner is that the opening bid of 2♠ shows eight clear tricks in spades.

Auction 2 (Standard Benji)

N E S W



2♣



*2



*3

2♦

*2 If asked, the agreement is that the opening of 2♣ shows eight clear tricks in an unknown suit or, e.g. 19-20 HCP, balanced hand.

*3 If asked, the 2♦ is a relay bid, allowing the opener to bid naturally next.

Either of these sequences tells partner that the opener can take eight tricks exactly in the nominated suit.

It's not usually forcing, if the responder has nothing, they pass.

However, if they can add two tricks to a strong 2 opener in a major, they will raise to game.





Some partnerships will bid 2NT with little or no support for opener, but 6-10 HCPs, and seeking a second suit.



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9+ Playing Tricks: Use a game force opening bid

Auction 3 (Basic ACOL)




N	E	S	W
			
			
			

*4 If asked, the agreement with partner is that the opening bid of 2♣ shows nine or more clear tricks in an unknown suit or, e.g. 23+ HCP, any distribution.

*5 If asked, the 2♦ is a "negative" bid, showing

less than 8HCP and allowing the opener to bid again.

Auction 4 (Standard Benji)

N	E	S	W
			
			
			

*6 If asked, the agreement is that the opening bid of 2♣ shows nine or more clear tricks in an unknown suit or, e.g. 23+ HCP, any distribution.

*7 If asked, the 2♥ is a "negative" bid, showing

less than 8HCP and allowing the opener to bid again.

Either of these sequences tells partner the opener can take nine or more tricks in a yet unknown suit, or has 23+HCP, and does not wish the bidding to subside before reaching a game contract.



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Game Force Opening Auctions

Responding to a game force opening




The next bid "up" is a negative showing less than eight high card points. But a holding of seven high card points in the form of an ace and a king, is treated as positive.

Any other response shows eight or more high card points.

Bidding a suit shows five or more cards in that suit. Otherwise bid no trumps.

What if the responder has a very poor hand?

Auction 5 (Basic ACOL)

N	E	S	W
	 2♣		
			2♦
	2NT		P

West




♠ J 10 9
 ♥ 5 4 3
 ♦ 7 6 5 4
 ♣ 7 6 5

If the opener re-bids 2NT, and the responder has zero or one high card point in a balanced hand, then it is correct to pass.



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Auction 6 (Basic ACOL)

N	E	S	W
	 2♣		
			2♦
	2♥		2NT

West

♠	J 10 9
♥	5 4 3
♦	7 6 5 4
♣	7 6 5




If the opener re-bids 2 of a suit, and the responder has zero or one high card point in a balanced hand, then responder re-bids 2NT, known as the "double negative",

and opener has the option of passing.

Negative Response with 3+ HCP and/or five card plus suit

In any other case, the pair should not stop bidding until a game contract is reached.

Auction 7 (Basic ACOL)

N	E	S	W
	 2♣		 Q4
	 Q5		2♦
	2♥		2NT
	3♣		3♦
	3NT		P

West

♠	J 10 9
♥	Q 4 3
♦	K 6 5 4
♣	7 6 5



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Following a positive response

The partnership is almost certainly going for a slam contract.

Auction 8 (Basic ACOL)

N E S W

 2♣





2NT

3♥

4♥

6♥

Pass

Pass

West

♠ J 10 9

♥ A 4 3

♦ K 6 5 4

♣ 7 6 5

Splinter bids, Cue bids or Slam bidding methods may be used to get the best score out of the deal. They are covered later.