



What makes hands strong?

High Card Point Strength

Hands with 23 HCPs or more are almost certain to be able to make/support a game contract for the partnership.

This applies to balanced and unbalanced hands.

♠ A K Q 5 4
♥ Q J 10 9
♦ A K
♣ A K

Distributional Strength

♠ A K Q J 5 4 2
♥ Q J 10 9
♦
♣ 3 2

Hands that can win 9 or more tricks without any help from partner are also almost certain to be able to make/support a game contract.

This example will almost certainly win seven spade tricks and two heart tricks with spades as trumps. It has only 13 HCPs.

"Game Force"

These hands are described as "game forcing". The opener shows by their choice of opening bid that they have a game force hand. A game force opening bid tells partner that the auction will not stop short of a game contract.

Strong, but not game force hands

There are strong, but not necessarily game force strength hands:

For example, balanced hands with 19/20-22 HCPs,

♠ A K Q J 5 4 2
♥ Q J 10
♦ 8
♣ 3 2

Or unbalanced hands able to take 8 tricks without help from partner. These hands may have fewer HCPs than a hand opened at the one level.

♠ A K Q 5 4
♥ Q J 10 9
♦ A Q 5
♣ A 7

Bidding Game Force and Strong, Non-Game Force Hands

The choice of bid that shows a game force hand depends on agreement between the partners. Different bidding systems have different agreements. These openings are usually artificial and must be alerted.

There are two kinds of response to a game-force opening bid:

1. Negative, showing less than 8 HCPs; or
2. Anything else showing 8+HCPs, and a feature, a suit bid shows at least five cards in the suit.

A negative response generally means the partnership is bidding to game, anything else suggests a slam contract may be on.



"Pure" Acol

Game Forcing Hands

Hands with 23+ HCP or 9+ playing tricks are opened with an artificial ("conventional") bid of 2♣. This bid is alerted and it is forcing. The negative response is 2♦.

Game Force - Balanced

♠	A K 9 5 4	N	E	S	W
♥	Q J 10 9	2♣ (ALERT)	P	2♦ (ALERT)	P
♦	A K				
♣	A K	2NT	P	Must Bid	

Game Force - Unbalanced

♠	A K Q J 5 4 2	N	E	S	W
♥	Q J 10 9	2♣ (ALERT)	P	2♦ (ALERT)	P
♦					
♣	3 2	2♠	P	Must Bid	

Stronger Balanced Hands

In “pure” (old fashioned) ACOL hands with 20-22 HCP are opened 2NT. This is not forcing. Partners often agree to play Stayman and Transfers at one level higher when responding to opening 2NT.

	N	E	S	W
♠ A 9 5 4				
♥ Q J 10 9	2NT	P	...	
♦ A Q 7				
♣ A K				

Strong Twos

In “pure” (old fashioned) ACOL an opening bid of 2♦, 2♥ or 2♠ shows a hand capable of taking exactly 8 tricks in the suit without help. This is announced “Strong”.

	N	E	S	W
♠ A K Q J 5 4				
♥ Q J 10 9				
♦ 8	2♠ (📢)	P	Must	
♣ 3 2			Bid	



Benji (Benjaminised ACOL)

This bidding system agrees the opening bid of 2♥ or 2♠ shows a **weak** hand, typically 6 – 9 high card points, and a high quality, six card, major suit.

The suit should contain two of the four honours or six of the top cards.

	N	E	S	W
♠ Q 10 9				
♥ K Q 6 5 4 2	2♥ (🗣️)	P	...	
♦ 6 2				
♣ 3 2				

This is announced “Weak”.

The opening bids of 2♥ or 2♠ show **weak** hands.

So, the Benji bidding system uses the opening bids of 2♣ or 2♦ differently.

The 2♦ opening bid takes on the role of game force opening, and the 2♣ opening bid takes on the job of showing strong, but not game force hands.



Using Benji, what do you bid with a 23+ hcp or 9 playing trick hand?

Game Force – Balanced (Benji)

You open 2♦, showing a game force hand, and partner alerts.
With less than 8 HCP, partner bids a “negative” 2♥, any other bid shows 8+ HCP.

♠	A K 9 5 4	N	E	S	W
♥	Q J 10 9	2♦ (ALERT)	P	2♥ (ALERT)	P
♦	A K				
♣	A K	2NT	P	Must Bid	

Game Force -Unbalanced (Benji)

♠	A K Q J 5 4 2	N	E	S	W
♥	Q J 10 9	2♦ (ALERT)	P	2♥ (ALERT)	P
♦					
♣	3 2	2♠	P	Must Bid	



So, using Benji, what do you bid with a strong two hand?

With eight clear tricks with any of the suits as trumps, open 2♣. Your partner alerts (the clubs are not natural). At his turn to bid, partner should always reply with a “**relay**” bid of 2♦, which is alerted. This 2♦ means nothing; its purpose is to provide partner with the chance of a second bid at the lowest possible level. The opener should now bid the strong suit. For example:

	N	E	S	W
♠ Q J 10 9				
♥ A K Q J 5 4	2♣ (ALERT)	P	2♦ (ALERT)	P
♦ 2				
♣ 3 2	2♥	P	Must Bid?	

After two bids from North, South knows North can take 8 with hearts as trumps.

It is a matter of agreement between the partners as to whether this sequence is forcing.

South bids again to show the strength or features in the South hand, if required.



Playing Benji provides more accuracy, bidding balanced hands

19/20 HCP Balanced Hand:

	N	E	S	W
♠ A K 9				
♥ Q J 10 9	2♣ (ALERT)	P	2♦ (ALERT)	P
♦ A Q 3				
♣ A 3 2	2NT	P	...	

21/22 HCP Balanced Hand:

	N	E	S	W
♠ A K 9				
♥ Q J 10 9	2NT	P	...	
♦ A Q 3				
♣ A Q 2				

23/24 HCP Balanced Hand:

	N	E	S	W
♠ A K 9				
♥ Q J 10 9	2♦ (ALERT)	P	2♥ (ALERT)	P
♦ A K				
♣ A K	2NT	P	Must Bid	



“Weak 2’s in 3 Suits” aka Basic Acol

From the BFA 2019 Full Standard English description...

Open 2NT on all balanced hands of 20-22 HCP.

A 5-card major is acceptable. 2NT may also be the best choice on some slightly unbalanced hands (including a hand with a singleton ace or king in a minor suit).

Opening 2♣

This is the strongest (only strong?) bid in the “Basic” Acol system, showing 23+ HCP or a game forcing hand. “Or game forcing” acknowledges the possibility of eight/nine or more playing trick hands, but there is little further guidance. See below for actions after 2♣ with unbalanced hands.

Responses to 2♣

Make a negative response of 2♦ unless your hand contains:

- 8 HCP or more with at least one ace or king
- An ace and a king
- A 5-card suit headed by at least AQ



Otherwise With a balanced hand of 8+ HCP, respond 2NT With a weak 5-card suit in an otherwise balanced hand 2NT is the best choice With a good 5-card suit, respond in that suit With a solid (no loser) 6-card or longer suit, make a jump response in that suit.

Opener's rebid with a balanced hand

23-24 HCP rebid 2NT

25-27 HCP rebid 3NT

28-30 HCP rebid 4NT

The 2♣ opening does not necessarily show a balanced hand. With an unbalanced hand rebid in a suit.

Responder's action after 2♣ - 2♦ - 2NT

This is the only rebid that responder may pass below game level. With just a couple of points responder should go for game, choosing from the same options as over a 2NT opening.

***Slam Seeking***

Consider a slam when the partnership may have 33 HCP or compensating distribution. Continuations after a positive response

A slam is highly likely so opener will rebid 2NT over a positive response of 2♥ or 2♠ on all balanced hands, leaving room to investigate a fit.

Over a 2NT rebid by opener all continuations by responder are natural.

After a positive response of 2NT, opener rebids a 5+ card suit (game forcing) or 3NT with a balanced hand. Over a 3NT rebid responder, with extra values, can continue by bidding his lowest 4+card suit to look for a slam.

How about a different approach to strong hands in a 3 weak two system?

Agree that the response to 2♣ is always a “relay” 2♦. Opener’s re-bid can show the HCP’s in a balanced hand, or the playing tricks in an unbalanced hand. This gives responder a precise description of opener’s hand and leaves progress up to him/her.



Choosing a bidding system

EBU adopted Weak 2's in 3 suits in their curriculum in 2019. Many players have been taught this bidding system.

It has the potential advantage of being able to disrupt the opponents by opening 2♦ with a weak hand.

However, it has possible disadvantages:

- The 2♦ opening bid is easy to overcall with 2♥ or 2♠ and so does not have the pre-emptive power of the weak 2 in the majors.
- The wide range of bids describing game force and non-game force opening hands available in Benjaminised Acol is not available.

	Pure Acol	Benji	3 Weak 2s
2♣	Game Force	Strong	Strong or Game Force
2♦	Strong	Game Force	Weak
2♥	Strong	Weak	Weak
2♠	Strong	Weak	Weak
2NT	20-22	21-22	20-22