



Jacoby 2NT is Better than the Baron 2NT

Two top players debate a hot bridge topic. Tell us whose argument has won you over by emailing elena@ebu.co.uk

INEVITABLY AS times move on, things improve. Bidding systems follow this trend as much as technology, science etc.

The 2NT response used to be played only as a natural bid. Fine for when you want to bid it, but in practice (particularly after partner has opened one of a major) quite ineffective as there is *always* an alternative bid available.

The Baron 2NT bid came in during the 1940s, promoted as part of the Baron system of bidding, by Leo Baron. It was primarily to enable strong balanced hands to be bid more effectively, a hand-type which needed much help to be bid at the time as Fourth Suit Forcing had not been developed sufficiently to enable these hands to be bid accurately. However, times have moved on . . .

The Jacoby 2NT response to 1♥/1♠ is an absolutely terrific convention, now being played globally, where essentially the bid announces:

- a) Game going values; 13+ HCP is normal;
- b) At least four-card support for partner's major.

The advantages of playing this system are numerous. Let's consider just a few:

1. The system is very simple to play. My only observation is to remind you that it **does not** apply after passing initially or after intervention.
2. It takes enormous pressure off other sequences, such as the dreaded 'Delayed Game Raise' sequences so common in poorly played Acol, e.g. holding the hand below:

♠ A Q 7 2
♥ 5 4
♦ K J 7
♣ K 8 7 2

You can now respond 2NT to 1♠,

creating a simple statement immediately that the hand has 13+ High Card Points and a spade fit. The alternative is to bid 2♣, then 4♠ which is fatally flawed on two counts:

- a) A classic Direct Game Raise should have a good suit so that partner can judge slam prospects over the jump to game.
 - b) There is ambiguity over the number of trumps held: does it show four or only three? Some argue that with only three you bid Fourth Suit Forcing first, others disagree.
3. It now allows Splinter responses to be made on nice hands with support **but fewer than** 13 HCP, i.e. 10-12 approximately. This gives a *huge* edge in slam bidding for major-suit contracts – something the Baron 2NT players simply do not have!
 4. Those who play the Baron 2NT system often choose to use a 3NT response to 1♥/1♠ as a 'Pudding Raise'. This shows four-card support, no shortage and about 12-15 HCP. When you stop to think about the *merits* (!) of this system, it should not take long to realise that it is clearly awful to have to start your slam investigations at such an unnecessarily high level – much better to simply start with 2NT and await developments a whole level lower!
 5. An optional extra for those using Jacoby is to introduce greater precision into direct Splinter raises, since the 3NT bid is otherwise redundant. With work you can show either voids

or singletons separately – a marvellous way to aid slam judgment (but this is an article for another day!).

6. One further advantage of having Jacoby available is that if partner opens 1♥/1♠ you can use either Ordinary or Roman Key-Card Blackwood:
 - a) To use *Ordinary Blackwood* just respond 4NT directly;
 - b) To use *RKCB* simply bid 2NT (Jacoby) then 4NT on your next turn.

I am not going to fall into the trap often found in this Debate feature of cherry-picking some hands to promote my case. What I am doing is simply to suggest that Jacoby 2NT is a key aspect of modern bidding enabling slam exploration to occur much more easily than without it.

Much work can be done by partnerships to develop bidding when using Jacoby. Below is a very brief outline of a possible scheme of responses:

After 1♥/1♠ – 2NT:

New suit at 3 level	= natural side suit, at least 5-4.
3♥/3♠	= extra values, usually six trumps.
3NT	= 15+ balanced, forcing.
New suit at 4 level	= Splinter.
4♥/4♠	= Weakest bid available (shows a poorish minimum without good controls).

I urge you to ditch archaic methods such as the Baron 2NT and introduce Jacoby to your armoury! □

A new document concerning the forthcoming Blue Point scheme is available for interested club and county event organisers to view at www.ebu.co.uk/publications/Official_Documents/Revised%20Blue%20Point%20Scheme.pdf



Baron 2NT is Better than the Jacoby 2NT

Or write to the Editor, English Bridge, 23 Erleigh Road, Reading RG1 5LR. Short comments for publication are welcome.

ONE OF the joys of bridge is that people love to play 'the best' method – by which they seem to mean the system that if they have perfect judgment, if they never get tired and if opponents keep quiet (and throw in a few more ifs), is the best method. Whether it gets them better results or not is beside the point: at least it is 'theoretically' better.

When I arrived at university I knew nothing about bidding, but I played the Baron 2NT, a response to one of a suit opening showing 16 or more points and a balanced hand.

Over this we did not play complicated methods: we bid naturally. We did not spend hours discussing the continuations: what does it mean if I open 1♦, you respond 2NT and I rebid 3♦? Well . . . it shows five diamonds. And if responder bids 3♥ over this, is that showing four hearts? Err . . . yes. You've got it: we didn't need any time to discuss the continuations and neither would you.

Similarly, 1♣ – 2NT – 3♥? Well, you haven't got five clubs as you would bid 3♣, so you must be 4-4, either a strong no-trump (playing weak no-trump), or it could be a 4-4-1-4 distribution. 1♣ – 2NT – 3NT? You don't have five clubs, you don't have another suit, so I make that a 3-3-3-4 shape, stronger than a weak no-trump (else you would have opened 1NT, not 1♣), perhaps 15-16 points, since you are happy to play in 3NT. How accurate is that?! It is all easy to work out.

However, at university I learnt how to bid 'properly' and we abandoned Baron:

♠ 6		♠ A 7 5 2
♥ A 5 2		♥ K J 6
♦ A Q 7 6 5 3 2		♦ K 9
♣ 8 4		♣ A Q 7 6

We bid uncontested 1♦ – 1♠ – 2♦ – 3NT. Opponents were know-nothings from the sticks; worse than that: they played a Baron 2NT. They started: 1♦ – 2NT – 4♦

and soon reached the good slam. Knowing that partner had a strong balanced hand, the opening hand was worth a lot, and it would be hard to fault the auction. Except for one thing: they only bid it because they were playing the Baron 2NT, and we all know that Baron is not how you bid 'properly'.

There are plenty of other hands that are difficult too; try:

♠ 6		♠ K 7 5 4
♥ A K 7 5 4		♥ Q 2
♦ A Q 10 6 3		♦ K J 8
♣ Q 9		♣ A K 7 6

I saw this bid: 1♥ – 1♠ – 2♦ – 3♣ – 3♦ – 3NT. This is not even a hand that is fitting terribly well, with wasted cards in both black suits, yet a Baron auction usually ends in slam, whereas starting with a 1♠ response probably does not. After this deal, I heard a long debate about whether bidding the fourth suit followed by 3NT was showing extra values, doubt about the club stop, looking for three-card spade support, or something else.

The basic reason why Baron is so useful is that strong balanced hands are hard to bid; if anyone tells you otherwise, view them with grave suspicion!

Some top players partly get round the problem by playing some 4NT bids as natural and invitational. For example 1♥ – 2♣ – 2♥ – 4NT. Do you really want this sort of confusion over Blackwood in your methods? And even if you do, it doesn't get round all the problems. Others start inventing suits, and generally faffing around and hoping that somehow partner is going to guess what they have.

Playing a Baron 2NT allows you to show your points, and this makes the whole thing a lot easier.

OK, so what's the catch? What do you lose?

You lose the Jacoby 2NT, showing a game-forcing hand with four-card support

for partner. This still doesn't prevent you from using 3NT to show a balanced raise, using a splinter bid, perhaps trading in a strong jump shift for a raise in partner's suit, or simply bidding a suit at a low level, and supporting partner later – when you have actually found out a bit more about what partner has.

Neil might point out that nobody in the Premier League was playing a Baron 2NT, and he may be right, but then not everyone was playing Jacoby. And let me tell you about two key boards from the match between the first- and second-placed teams. First, we gained a game swing where a trivial grand slam was missed using Jacoby that would have been easy playing Baron and Splinters. Space permitting I would give you the hand and you would say 'but it shouldn't have been missed using Jacoby', which would be true – but the point was, it *was* missed. Bridge is about keeping things simple enough so that they work at the table, not about the theoretical merits of a system where everyone has perfect judgment and full recall of the system!

Second, we lost a game swing when we used Jacoby and described our hand too well, so opponents found the defence to beat the contract. Playing Baron we would more quickly have found our strength, and not needed to describe the hands so fully. It made me feel like Skid Simon's 'unlucky expert', who is always playing best, but always loses!

Jacoby has several flaws: it needs a lot of discussion to make it effective (and few who play it make it work for them), and gives away too much of declarer's hand, particularly where you are only going to play in game anyway.

Meanwhile, Baron has its flaws: 'good' players will sneer at you as you beat them, you will lose that delightful feeling of being able to blame partner for not realising you had a strong balanced hand, and auctions will become short and snappy. Do you think you can live with these weaknesses?