



TWO OVER ONE SYSTEM

by Spike Lay

INTRODUCTION

"Two over one" is the name commonly given to any modern bridge system that incorporates a non-jump, non-passed hand, two-level response to a one-level opening as a game force. For example,

1♥ Pass 2♣

1♠ Pass 2♦

1♦ Pass 2♣

are all examples of game-forcing two over one (2/1) auctions. This feature is just a part of a modern system, and most players employ a system known as

TWO OVER ONE WITH GADGETS

The basis of these systems is usually the game-forcing 2/1 bid, a forcing or semi-forcing 1NT response to one of a major, Limit (or Bergen) raises, inverted minors, Checkback Stayman (or 2C Checkback), 4th suit forcing, etc. It sounds foreboding, but it doesn't have to be. Even intermediate players can gradually build a modern, effective system built on the 2/1 treatment. What we can't do is learn everything at once so let's start at the beginning.

First, I assume you're taking this class because you are interested in improving your bridge game and/or your bridge results. Let me say up front that learning a fancy system isn't the key to winning bridge. It will help only if you learn it well and practice it until most of the "gadgets" become almost second nature. A half-learned or misunderstood convention will do more harm than good. Also, the key to winning bridge is (1) knowing what is going on at the table; this relates to card sense, awareness and concentration. (2) playing good defense; after all, you defend about half of the hands you play. And (3) being aggressive, especially in competitive auctions. With that caveat off my chest, I think that learning and playing a modern 2/1 system is one of the most fun and rewarding aspects of bridge. It is gratifying getting to the right contract on most of the hands you play. Let's look at some details.

The 2/1 response to one of a major is a little different than the 2♣ response to 1♦. We will consider both, but will start with the 2/1 response to one of a major. In "Standard American" - whatever that is - the 2/1 response shows 10 points or more and is forcing on opener for one round. In "our" the 2/1 system **the 2/1 response is forcing to game.** Like everything else in bridge there are different versions - even of the 2/1 system - but in our version after a 2/1 response, the partnership must either (1) get to game or (2) double the opponents if they enter the auction. For example, if the auction proceeds

<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>	<u>West</u>
1♠	Pass	2♣	2♥

North may decide to double 2♥ for penalties rather than bid anymore. That is ok.

As long as the partnership either gets to game or doubles the opponents the system is intact.

What you can't do is pass below game after a 2/1 auction has been initiated. Sometimes it may be tempting to do this because the auction doesn't sound forcing anymore or because you didn't like your first bid or for whatever reason. To protect system integrity and partnership harmony never pass a forcing bid. It is much better - in the long run - to go down once in awhile than to violate partnership agreements.

WHAT DOES A 2/1 RESPONSE LOOK LIKE?

To make a 2/1 response you need about an opening hand. One of my rules is that "If you have an opening hand, and partner opens the bidding, make sure your side gets to game" (adapted from Ron Smith). Of course, this isn't foolproof - nothing in bridge is - but it works pretty well. Remember, just because you have the values for a game-forcing 2/1 bid, doesn't mean you are always going to make a game. Bridge is just a game of trying to do what's right all the time and being above average at the end of the day - a game of probabilities and percentages. Don't judge the system hand by hand, but rather over a long period of time.

If you like to open light - like I do - your 2/1 response will have to be rather substantial. I use the "Rule of 20" in deciding whether to open marginal hands. For example, I open **A10xxx KQJxx xx x** and **x AKQxxx J10xx xx**. So my 2/1 response is usually 12 points or more. Of course, if the hand contains a very good suit, e.g., **x AKQxxx Qxx xxx**, the 12 point rule isn't written in stone. With 11 balanced or semi-balanced, e.g., **xx KJxx AQxxx xx**, you can't make a 2/1. Even with 12 bad, e.g., **Jx QJxx KJxx KJx**, you are probably better off responding 1 NT to 1♠ rather than a game-forcing 2♦.

So if Pard opens 1♠ we would make a game-forcing 2/1 bid with all of the following hands:

- (1) **xx AKxxx AJxx Ax**. Bid 2♥. You are not sure where you're going.
- (2) **Kxx Kxxx AQxx xx**. Bid 2♦. You will support spades next.
- (3) **x AKx KJxxxx AKx**. Bid 2♦. There is no upper limit to a 2/1 response.

There are just a couple of rules to follow.

- (1) A 2♥ response to 1♠ always shows 5 or more hearts - just like in Standard American. A 2♣ or 2♦ response promises only 4 (3 in a pinch).
- (2) There is no need to jump shift with a big hand. In fact, a 2/1 response, creating a game force, is better since it gives you more room to investigate.
- (3) Don't make a 2/1 response holding 4-card trump support for Pard. We will do something else with these hands.

WHAT IF YOUR HAND ISN'T GOOD ENOUGH FOR A 2/1 - THE SEMI-FORCING NT

Another integral part of the 2/1 system is the **Forcing** or - in our case - the **Semi-forcing 1 NT** response to 1 of a major. If you don't have the values for a 2/1, and you can't raise partner, you must

bid 1 NT. Of course, this doesn't apply if the opening was 1♥ and you have 4 or more spades. This is a point that maybe needs to be made since I've seen some misunderstandings here before. If you have a normal 1♠ response to Partner's 1♥ opening, make it. The 2/1 response doesn't come into play here. For example, you hold **Kxxxx Ax AKxx xx** and Pard opens 1♥; make your normal response of 1♠. I have seen people bid 2♦ thinking they had to make a game-forcing bid because they were playing 2/1.

Another important point is that the 2/1 response is not game-forcing in competition. If the auction proceeds:

<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>	<u>West</u>
1♥	1♠	2♦	

South's 2♦ bid is not a game force. It's just forcing one round, showing 10 or more points and a diamond suit. The reason is that South no longer has the 1 NT semi-forcing bid to work with. Things change in competition.

Now let's get back to the 1 NT semi-forcing bid. Most 2/1 players play the 1 NT response is **FORCING**. I prefer to play it **SEMI-FORCING**. This treatment is catching on; the new ACBL convention card has a place for either forcing or semi-forcing notrump responses to one of a major. Forcing means just that. Opener is obligated to bid over responder's 1 NT response. For example, if you open **KJxxx Qx KJx Qxx** with 1♠ and Pard bids 1 NT, you should bid 2C. Remember, you must bid something. Playing 1 NT semi-forcing, you may pass the 1 NT response.

This means that responder is limited to 11 or maybe 12 "bad" points for his 1 NT response. Opener will rarely pass, but he does have that option with a balanced minimum. Say you open **Kxxx QJxxx KQ Qx** with 1 H; if Pard opens 1♥ you may pass rather than bid 2♣ as you would have to playing 1 NT Forcing.

What would you do with the following hands after Pard opens 1♥?

(1) **Kxx xx QJxxxx xxx**. Bid 1 NT. You may bid diamonds later.

(2) **xx Kxx AQxxx J10x**. Bid 1 NT. You'll support hearts next.

(3) **Kxxx xx KQxxx xx**. Bid 1♠. Don't bid 1 NT over 1♥ when you have 4 spades.