

Benji ACOL (Benjamin ACOL)

What is Benji ACOL?

Benji ACOL is a system of **Two Level Opening Bids** developed by Albert Benjamin, a Scottish bridge teacher.

Essentially,

- An Opening bid of **2♣** or **2♦** shows a **STRONG** hand
- While an Opening bid of **2♥** or **2♠** shows a **WEAK** hand.

Why is it a good thing to use Benji?

All of us already play pre-emptive bids at the three level - weak – 6 – 9 points with at least 7 cards in the bid suit. **The purpose of making a pre-emptive bid is to get in the way of the opposition. Bidding 2♥ and 2♠ is almost as pre-emptive as bidding, say, 3♣ and you don't need to have a 7 card suit to do it.**

As we know, 7-card suits don't come up very often. But suits with six cards come up more often, and it would be dangerous to open these with a 3-level bid – after all, the opposition could have the majority of the suit, whilst when you pre-empt with **a 7 card suit you know at least that you have the majority of trumps in your hand.**

So bidding at the two level is a kind of compromise.

What do you need to bid a weak 2♥ or 2♠

- A six card major suit (Hearts or Spades) headed by at least a queen or JT
- A point range of 6-10
- It is not a good idea to open a weak two in one major if you hold 4 of the other major. The reason for this is that partner may have a strong hand in the other major and game may be missed.

Currently we play 2♠♥ and 2♥ as a strong hand with at least 8 playing tricks in hearts or spades. We will find a replacement for those in a later lesson.

NB: With 6 Hearts or 6 Spades, do not open 2♥ or 2♠ if you have 12+ points. Hands like this should be opened at the One level.

When playing Benji ACOL, which of these hands would you open 2♥ or 2♠ ?

1. ♠AKJ743 ♥9 ♦J763 ♣Q75
2. ♠KQ9543 ♥9 ♦854 ♣Q75
3. ♠6 ♥J97432 ♦Q54 ♣Q75
4. ♠QJ8743 ♥9 ♦Q54 ♣Q762
5. ♠963 ♥KQJ763 ♦AQ93
6. ♠83 ♥Q97654 ♦83 ♣K93

7. ♠ A 4 3 ♥ 10 9 8 4 3 2 ♦ Q 5 4 ♣ J

8. ♠ K Q 10 8 7 5 ♥ A J 10 5 4 ♦ 9 ♣ 7

Of these,

1. has a decent 1♠ opening, and can rebid 2♠ if partner bids.
2. is ideal for a Benji 2♠ opening,
3. is too weak to open 2♥, whilst
4. is just strong enough to open 2♠.
5. however, is too strong and should open 1♥.
6. is on the cusp, but with only five points and such a poor quality heart suit is better passed.
7. has the points to bid, but not the suit, and
8. is just too strong – if you use the Losing Trick Count on hand 8 you realize that you have only 5 losers, and you can put many hands opposite where the two together would make ten tricks with spades or hearts as trumps.

The moral of this is the Goldilocks one – to open a hand with 2♥ or 2♠ it mustn't be too weak or too strong – **too weak and you risk a huge penalty, too strong and you may well miss a game.** So of the above hands only two – **2 and 4** - meet the criteria for an opening bid of (in each case) 2♠.

Responding to your partner's 2♥ or 2♠

If your partner opens with a Benji 2♥ or 2♠ there are a number of bids you can make.

1. **Pass** This will be a frequent course of action. It probably means you do not have enough points to look for game or you do not have much support for partner's suit.

A typical hand that would be passed if partner opens 2♠ is:

♠ 8 2 ♥ Q 9 7 ♦ A 10 5 4 3 ♣ J 10 9

Do not “rescue” partner if you are short in his suit unless you have a very good suit of your own i.e. at least a 6-card suit.

2. **Raise partner's suit pre-emptively** The purpose of this is not to find a game, but to be **pre-emptive and make life difficult for your opponents.** Your partner is first to bid and has opened 2♥. You know they have a maximum of ten points, and you hold the following hand:

♠ 8 ♥ Q 9 7 ♦ A 10 5 4 3 2 ♣ Q J 10

You have 9 points, meaning that you and your partner are unlikely to have enough to make a game. However, you have three of partner's trumps, and an Ace. Most importantly, you have a **singleton spade**. Your left hand opponent, the fourth person to bid, is **very likely to bid spades**. You can make life more difficult for them by bidding 3♥ or, if not vulnerable, even 4♥. Supposing your partner has a hand like this:

♠ J 7 4 ♥ K J 10 6 5 4 ♦ K 8 6 ♣ 7

With these two hands together, how many tricks will you make? If by some chance the diamonds are divided 2 – 2, you will make 10 tricks. Of course, your partner might not have a hand that fits nearly as well – give them one more club and one fewer diamond and you

may struggle to make 2♥, but bidding 3♥ makes it more difficult for the opposition to bid the spade suit they are very likely to have - so bidding 3♥ is pre-emptive. The person who has opened 2♥ knows that the 3♥ bid is pre-emptive and relatively weak, because if their partner had a strong hand they would make another bid. There are other hands where you might well decide to bid on to a game contract. These would tend to be hands with support for the major, and considerable shape outside – hands, indeed, where the Losing Trick Count would help you to come to the right conclusion.

3. Responding with a strong hand

A **strong hand** is one with **at least 16** High Card points.

Very occasionally you will have a strong hand with a **self supporting suit** of your own. In this case, you should bid your suit at the lowest possible level. It is forcing for one round so the opening bidder must bid again.

More usually you are interested in a game in opener's suit or No Trumps. Partner has opened a weak 2♥ or 2♠ so has a maximum of 10 points. Together with your 16 points this makes the magic total of 26 pts usually required for a game in Hearts, Spades or 3 No Trumps. It is important for you to be able ask the weak 2♥ or 2♠ bidder how strong a hand he holds. This is done with the **2 No Trump Asking Bid**.

• The 2 No Trump Asking Bid

When partner opens by bidding 2♥ or ♠ 2, you know that he holds:

1. **Between 6 and 10 points**
2. **A six card suit**

For example, if partner opens 2♥ and you hold a reasonably strong hand with heart support you may wish to find out just **how good their bid is**.

The answer to this is via a bid of **2 No Trumps**. ,(alerted, because not a natural bid)

NB: This does not mean the 2 No Trump bidder wants to play in that contract.

Partner **must** reply as follows:

1. **3 Clubs** means **Weak Suit** and **Weak Points (6-8 pts)**.
2. **3 Diamonds** means **Strong Suit** and **Weak Points (6-8pts)**.
3. **3 Hearts** means **Weak Suit** and **Strong Points (9-10pts)**.
4. **3 Spades** means **Strong Suit** and **Strong Points (9-10pts)**
5. **3 No Trumps** means **Strong Suit (A,K,Q)** and **Strong Points (9-10pts)**

Here: **Weak Suit** means **only one** of the top three honours.

Strong Suit means **at least two** of the top three honours.

So what sort of hand do we need opposite a weak 2♥ or 2♠ hand to bid 2 No Trumps, asking about the quality of the 2♥ or 2♠ hand?

You need a hand with **good opening values (16+ pts)** and **some tolerance for the suit bid**. The following would be hands where, opposite a **good 2♠** opening, a game would be **almost certain**, whereas, opposite a **poor** opening, game would **almost never** make. Three examples might be:

♠ K 2 ♥ A J 10 5 4 ♦ K J 10 ♣ K J 4

♠ J 4 ♥ A Q 7 6 ♦ Q J 10 ♣ K Q J 9

♠ A 6 ♥ K Q 8 5 ♦ A 6 5 ♣ Q J 9 7

A Cautionary Tale The temptation with all of these hands following a 2♠ opening bid by partner would be to think about a 3 No Trump game contract. After all, you have the three suits outside the spade suit well-stopped. However, as many of us have found to our cost over the years, making 3 No Trumps on these hands would depend on partner having exactly the right cards. If it's not possible to access partner's spades (which on the third one, unless partner has K Q ♠ and an outside Ace it will never be) then you will be playing 3 No Trumps entirely out of your hand – which is never a comfortable prospect.

So **on the hands above**, when your partner has opened with a weak 2♠ bid, your response is to bid **2 No Trumps**, alerted as not natural.

If opener responds with a weak bid (3♣ or 3♦) you should settle for 3♠.

If opener responds with a strong bid (3♥ or 3♠ or 3NT) you should bid 4♠.

Some Examples You have opened 2♥. Your partner has bid 2 No Trumps. You know they have a good hand and are interested in game. You hold:

♠ J 6 ♥ A K Q 5 3 2 ♦ 10 9 ♣ 8 7 6

♠ Q 4 ♥ A 10 8 5 3 2 ♦ 10 9 ♣ 8 7 6

♠ Q 4 ♥ A K 10 8 6 3 ♦ 10 9 ♣ 8 7 6

♠ 10 2 ♥ K Q 7 6 5 3 ♦ 10 9 ♣ J 7 2

♠ 10 2 ♥ Q J 7 6 5 3 ♦ A Q 9 ♣ 7 2

On the first, you would bid 3 No Trumps (10 points and all three top honours)

On the 2nd, 3♣ (6 points and only one of the top honours)

On the 3rd, 3♠ (two top honours, 9 points)

On the 4th 3♦ (good suit, poor points) and

On the fifth, 3♥ (good points, poor suit)

And now something slightly more challenging: **Your partner has opened 2♥** .
 What would you bid with each of the following hands?

1. ♠ 10 ♥ Q 5 3 2 ♦ A Q 6 5 4 ♣ A 3 2

2. ♠ A K Q 7 ♥ J 4 ♦ K Q J 3 ♣ 8 7 6

3. ♠ K Q 7 4 2 ♥ Q J ♦ A 10 8 5 ♣ 8 7

4. ♠ 10 3 ♥ A J 7 ♦ K Q J 7 6 ♣ A 7 3

5. ♠ Q J ♥ A J 7 5 ♦ K J 10 5 4 2 ♣ 7

My suggestions would be:

On 1, bid 4♥ ,

On 2, bid 2 No Trumps and rebid 4♥ unless you get a 3♣ response;

On 3, pass 2♥ but be prepared to bid 3♥ if the opposition overcall 3♣ ;

On 4, bid 2 No Trumps, and bid 4♥ if partner responds 3♠ or 3♥ and

On 5. bid 4♥ .

But none of these answers is gold-standard right – 4♥ isn't guaranteed to make on either 1 or 5 – but if it doesn't, it's likely that the opposition would be making something like 3♠ or 4♣ .

Example Hands

1.

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| | North - dealer ♠ 10 ♥ K Q J 10 5 4 ♦ 9 5 2 ♣ A 3 2 Not Vulnerable | |
| ♠ A 9 8 7 2 ♥ 2 ♦ Q J 10 7 6 ♣ 7 6 Not vulnerable | Hand 1 | ♠ K Q J 6 5 ♥ 3 ♦ A K 8 4 3 ♣ 5 4 Not vulnerable |
| | South ♠ 4 3 ♥ A 9 8 7 6 ♦ ♣ K Q J 10 9 8 Not Vulnerable | |

A Bidding Competition! North opens 2♥ and East gets in the way by bidding 2♠ , South shouldn't have any hesitation in bidding 4♥ and West should be equally quick to bid 4♠ . North/South then have a decision to make, and South, with a diamond void and an excellent club suit, should bid 5♥ . If East West now bid 5♠ , North/South may just be driven to 6♥ which, because of the shape, makes.

2.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | North ♠ A K 7 ♥ K 10 ♦ A 10 8 7 ♣ Q J 9 8 Vulnerable | |
| ♠ Q J 10 9 8 2 ♥ A 5 4 ♦ Q J 2 ♣ A Not vulnerable | Hand 2 | ♠ 6 5 ♥ 3 2 ♦ K 9 3 ♣ 10 7 6 5 4 3 Dealer |
| | South ♠ 4 3 ♥ Q J 9 8 7 6 ♦ 6 5 4 ♣ K 2 | |

East passes, South opens 2♥ and West overcalls 2♠. North would have liked to bid 2 No Trumps to find out more about South, but decides instead to bid 4♥. Whether this makes or not depend on the play, on the likely lead of the Q♣ South can take the A♠ and lead a club immediately. West takes the A and if they now lead a diamond, South is in danger of losing two diamonds, a heart and a club.

3.

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| | North ♠ K J 8 ♥ A 6 ♦ A 8 6 3 ♣ 8 6 5 3 Not vulnerable | |
| ♠ 10 2 ♥ J 10 9 8 7 2 ♦ 4 ♣ K Q J 2 Vulnerable | Hand 3 | ♠ A 6 5 4 3 ♥ 4 ♦ Q J 10 2 ♣ A 10 9 Vulnerable |
| | South - dealer ♠ Q 9 7 ♥ K Q 5 3 ♦ K 9 7 5 ♣ 7 4 | |

South passes and W is just strong enough to open 2♥, North, East and South should probably all pass. West may just scrape 8 tricks, but if West hadn't opened with a weak 2♥ North would have opened 1 No Trump, passed out, and this would have made 7 or 8 tricks on the standard diamond lead

4.

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| | North ♠ Q 3 ♥ Q J 10 9 8 7 ♦ K 2 ♣ 8 7 6 Vulnerable | |
| Dealer ♠ 7 6 5 4 ♥ 4 2 ♦ A J 8 4 ♣ 5 4 3 | Hand 4 | ♠ A 10 9 8 ♥ K 3 ♦ Q 7 6 3 ♣ Q 10 9 Vulnerable |
| | South ♠ K J 2 ♥ A 6 5 ♦ 10 9 5 ♣ A K J 2 Vulnerable | |

West deals and passes, North opens 2♥, East passes and South now bids 2 No Trumps, asking North about the quality of their heart suit. West passes and North responds 3♥, poor suit but good points (only just good enough). Now South puts North into 4♥. West has a difficult lead, but probably does best to lead 7♠ (Top of nothing). As the cards lie, North could well make 11 tricks.

5.

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| | North Dealer ♠ A Q J 10 6 4 ♥ Q 9 ♦ 7 5 4 ♣ 3 2 Vulnerable | |
| ♠ 5 3 ♥ 6 5 4 2 ♦ K J 10 3 ♣ J 9 6 | Hand 5 | ♠ 8 7 ♥ A K 8 7 3 ♦ 9 8 6 ♣ K 5 4 Vulnerable |
| | South ♠ K 9 2 ♥ J 10 ♦ A Q 2 ♣ A Q 10 8 7 | |

North opens 2♠, East passes and South now bids 2 No Trumps, asking North about the quality of their spade suit. West passes and North responds 3♠, good suit with good points. Now South puts North into 4♠. East leads the Ace and King of Hearts and then a diamond. Declarer takes the Ace and leads a trump to the Ace. The club finesse is taken and, when it holds, the Ace is cashed. A further club is led and trumped to set up the suit. The remaining trumps are drawn and 11 tricks are made.
