

Conventions You Should Know

Benji Acol

Even if you have no desire to play Benji Acol it is helpful to understand what it involves as you will meet many opponents who do.

WHY do people play Benji?

Playing ordinary Acol all opening 2 bids are strong—that's 5 bids. Yet how often in an evening does one come up? Once if you are lucky.

Playing Benji the opening 2 bids in ♥s and ♠s are weak. A typical range is 5 to 10 high card points with a 6 card suit.

This leaves 2♦s for the strong near game force opening hand (the same as the normal Acol 2♣) and 2♣s as an opening hand showing 8 playing tricks in (at that stage) an unspecified suit.

Responding to a Benji Opening Weak Two Bid.

An opening 2♥ or 2♠s can be passed. If you have a good hand and think game is possible you need to know more. **Bid 2NT.**

Partner will respond 3♣s with 5 to 7 HCPs and 1 of the top 3 Honours; 3♦s with 5 to 7 HCPs and 2 Honours; 3♥s with 8 to 10 HCPs and 1 Honour; 3♠s with 8 to 10 HCPs and 2 Honours and 3NT holding Ace, King, Queen. You can then decide whether to quit in 3 of the major or bid game in either the major or No Trumps.

On convention cards you may see these responses described as Ogust or Blue Club. Both are the same.

Responding to a Strong Benji Opening.

Your partner opens 2♦s. If you have less than 7 HCPs you give a negative response by bidding 2♥s. If partner rebids 2NT showing 23 to 24 HCPs you can pass with a complete bust. If partner rebids anything else it is game forcing. If you have 7 HCPs or more bid your lowest 5 card suit or if you do not have one bid 2NTs. A positive bid from you is game forcing.

Your partner opens 2♣s. This is forcing for one round as you do not know which suit partner has. If you have less than 7 HCPs you need to make a negative bid and you bid 2♦s. If partner's suit is ♦s he will pass, otherwise he will bid his suit and you will pass. If you have 7 HCPs or more bid your lowest 5 card suit or if you do not have one bid 2NTs. A positive bid from you is game forcing.

When should I not use a weak Benji opening?

If you have a weak opening bid in one of the major suits but you also hold 4 of the other major it is usually better not to open a Benji Two. If you are top of the range and your hand has some additional good feature such as an outside Ace or a void you may be able to open with one of the major. If partner happens to hold the other major you will be unlikely to miss the fit. If your hand is too weak to open at the 1 level pass and hope to come in later. As always there is an exception to this advice. If you are third in hand and both your partner and right hand opponent have passed open a weak Benji Two even if you have 4 of the other major. Your bid is highly pre-emptive and can put left hand opponent in a quandary.

Announcing and Alerting Benji Bids.

Weak Two opening bids are announcable simply as weak. Responses are alertable unless natural.

Variations on Benji.

You will meet players who play Reverse Benji where the 2♣ and 2♦ bids are reversed and others who use 2♣ as their only strong opening bid at the two level with all others being weak. Some players play Benji openings as very weak indeed e.g. 3 to 8 HCPs. If in doubt ask for an explanation remembering of course the right time to ask and when you should keep quiet. On when to ask questions please refer to Winter 2006 newsletter.