

BENJAMINISED ACOL

Benjaminised Acol (named after Albert Benjamin), is a 'weak-two' approach to bidding. Normally the weak-two refers to a major, but it is becoming common to include a weak diamond suit (this approach is not Benjamin Acol). We shall adopt the traditional approach, but will consider the modified form.

Why Benji

The 'weak-two' approach to bidding is popular for two main reasons. Firstly the frequency of hands is much greater than the traditional Acol strong-2 bid. Secondly, it follows the modern trend in bridge to be destructive rather than constructive – i.e. deny the opponents bidding space when they possibly hold the balance of points. However it still manages to retain the equivalent of the Acol strong-2 bids by a slightly roundabout way.

Basic Bids

2♣ - strong single suited hand or 19-20 points balanced (if you use a 2NT rebid as 18-19 – recommended – then the point range should be 20-21. This means 2NT opening bid should be 22-23 points). (Note 1)

2♦ - 23+ balanced (or 24+ if the 2NT is 22-23), or any game forcing hand. If single suited it should be 9½ tricks. (Also I recommend most 21+ two suited hands should be opened 2♦ - but this is not standard).

2♥, 2♠ - weak 6 (or 7) card suit, 5 - 9 points non-vul, 6 - 10 points vul.

Note 1 - the better approach is to use 2♣ as 20-21, since it overcomes the dreaded sequence 1♥ - 1♠ - 3NT with a 19/20 count (which if playing 4-card majors may miss a 5-3 heart fit – not too consequential if playing 5-card majors). However the downside is that you should now play 5-card (Puppet) Stayman over 2NT in order to locate any 5-3 fit – another convention to learn!).

Note 2 – some players play 'Reverse' Benji' which swaps the meanings of the 2♣ and 2♦ bids. Whilst this may seem easier to learn, it is technically less sound (see Appendix)

2♣ Opening Bid

A strong single suited hand, or 19-20 points balanced (but see note 1 above). The strong single suited hand is equivalent to a hand suitable for a two-level opening playing traditional Acol (including clubs – not directly available playing traditional Acol) i.e. 'quick tricks', and 8+ playing tricks for hearts or spades; 8 ½ playing tricks for clubs and diamonds.

Partner's responses to 2♣ opening are:

2♥, 2♠, 3♣, 3♦ - a good 5+ card suit (6 at the 3-level), and 1½ 'quick tricks'.

2NT – 8+ points balanced (but avoid this bid)

2♦ - the negative – this is the usual response. Over this bid, opener responds:

a) if a strong single-suited hand, bid the suit. This then becomes the equivalent of opening an Acol

2♦, 2♥ or 2♠, with the added bonus that you can bid a strong club suit (albeit at the three-level) – not available in ‘standard’ Acol. The only downside is that a strong diamond suit has to be shown at the three-level.

Responder then bids as if partner has opened a strong-2, but the added advantage is that he can just ‘pass’ the opener’s response. Note that if opener has to show his strong suit at the three-level, the bid is technically non-forcing, but responder should still strain to bid.

Opener can jump the bidding to show even stronger hands (but not strong enough for a 2♦ opening) (e.g. 2♣ - 2♦ - stop3♠ would show a 9+ playing trick hand in spades – this would be forcing), and subsequent bids from responder are then cue-bids.

b) balanced 19-20 (but see note 1 above). This is then followed by exactly the same responses to a 2NT opening bid (Stayman, transfers, etc.). However, I suggest that you soon progress to a five-card Stayman approach over any 2NT.

2♦ Opening Bid

This is the same as the Acol 2♣ opening bid i.e. a strong (23+ points) balanced hand, or a game forcing hand (usually strong two-suited). The negative bid is now 2♥ negative, other bids are game forcing.

Examples

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|----|--------------------------------------|----|------------------------------------|----|-----------------------------------|----|------------------------------------|----|------------------------------------|
| a) | ♠ AKQ10863
♥ 1085
♦ 7
♣ AK7 | b) | ♠ AQ976
♥ KQ4
♦ AK7
♣ K6 | c) | ♠ AQ97
♥ KQ4
♦ AK7
♣ K62 | d) | ♠ 7
♥ A8
♦ A73
♣ AKQ10765 | e) | ♠ K64
♥ AKJ1076
♦ AKJ
♣ 8 |
| | ♠ 954
♥ 62
♦ KQ6543
♣ Q3 | | ♠ KJ3
♥ 8765
♦ QJ62
♣ 94 | | ♠ KJ3
♥ 8765
♦ QJ62
♣ 94 | | ♠ KQ842
♥ Q4
♦ 9852
♣ 43 | | ♠ AQJ732
♥ 4
♦ 73
♣ A753 |
| f) | ♠ AKQJ863
♥ 1085
♦ 7
♣ AK7 | g) | ♠ AKQJ863
♥ K85
♦ 7
♣ AK7 | | | | | | |
| | ♠ 954
♥ A2
♦ 1096543
♣ Q3 | | ♠ 954
♥ A2
♦ 1096543
♣ Q3 | | | | | | |

a) 2♣ - 2♦ - 2♠ - 4♠. With eight playing tricks in spades, North opens 2♦ and shows the spade suit after his partner’s 2♥. South has sufficient support and values for game.

- b) 2♣ - 2♦ - 2NT - 3♣ - 3♠ - 3NT. The 2NT shows 19-20. 3♣ is Stayman looking for a possible 4-4 heart fit (with more experience you should adopt a ‘five-card Stayman’ approach).
- c) 1♠ - 2♠ -4♠. Similar to b), 19 points qualifies for a 2♦ followed by 2NT, but the good 5-card spade suit and the poor club suit make the 1♠ opening more attractive.
- d) 2♣ - 2♦ - 3♣ - 3♠ - 3NT. 8½ tricks in clubs so North opens 2♦. South is not quite good enough for a positive, so duly bids 2♥. North shows his good club suit, South shows his useful spade suit, and North bids the obvious game.
- e) 2♣ - 2♠ - 3♠ - 4♣ - 4♦ - 4♠ - 4NT... - eventually 7♠ or 7NT. South is good enough to bid his own spade suit and North shows some support (after South’s own spade suit bid you are in a game forcing situation, so take the bidding slowly). Cue-bids (4♣, 4♦, 4♠) and some form of Blackwood lead to the grand slam (players unfamiliar with cue-bids should still reach the small slam).
- f) 2♣ - 2♦ - 3♠ - 4♥ - 4♠. North has 9 tricks – so jump to 3♠. South having genuine spade support, cue-bids ♥A. North isn’t interested (remember partner has shown a negative at his first bid). For less experienced players I would suggest a sequence 2♦ - 2♥ - 3♠ - 4♠ - less precise but simpler.
- g) 2♦ - 2♦♥ - 3♠ - 4♥ - 6♠. Similar to (f), but half a trick better and North is having a good day - so 6♠

But:...

Consider the following hand:

♠ A6	♠ Q107
♥ AQ72	♥ J1084
♦ AKQ1083	♦ 74
♣ 7	♣ K652

Playing Benji, the bidding would go 2♣ - 2♦ - 3♦ - pass (East doesn’t perceive any game prospects). Whereas playing Acol strong 2’s, the bidding would go 2♦ - 2NT - 2♥ - 3♥ - 4♥.

This shows a disadvantage of the Benji approach (the situation is no different if playing Reverse Benji). For this reason, consider opening this type of hand (i.e. strong minor with a secondary four-card major) at the one-level – i.e. 1♦ - 1♥ - 4♥. If partner had passed your 1♦ you would probably have been no worse off.

2♥, 2♠

Essentially a six-card suit, 5 - 9 points non-vulnerable, 6 - 10 points vulnerable. I also like to include the option of a seven-card suit which denies two of the top three honours (conversely I only open 3♥ or 3♠ with a seven-card suit *and* two of the top three honours).

It is important to have a degree of strength in the major suit. As a **guideline**, I would expect either two of the top four honours, or three of the top six (yes – 9’s can be useful cards), but even this can be stretched non-vulnerable.

Excellent
AK9843

Possible
KJ7432

Unsuitable
Q87432

KQJ632	A109532	J106432
AJ10752	QJ8642	1098765
QJ10632	K107632	
KJ10863	J109743 (non-vul)	

(In practical terms most people would open the ‘possibles’ with a weak-two).

Other Considerations

Some players advocate not opening a weak-two with another four-card major. There is some merit in this, in that if partner has a four-card fit with the major it will be more difficult to play at game level in the four-four fit. I don't fully subscribe to this view, preferring the advantage of the pre-empt, but I would not open a weak-two with a very weak six-card suit and a strong alternative four-card major.

Responses To Weak-Twos

Since weak-twos are pre-emptive the usual response is to pass (in the 11 – 14 point range), but there are three other types of response to an opening weak-two:

- a) With some support (doubleton honour or three cards) and weak (i.e. up to about 10 points), the suit can be raised. This merely **extends the pre-empt**, making it even more difficult for the opposition. You should raise to the level of the fit (i.e. with three-card or a flattish four-card support bid 3♥ or 3♠). With four-card fit and a singleton bid 4♥ or 4♠.
- b) With no support, a change of suit response is highly unusual, and is made with a probable other six-card suit and possible strength for game (about 16+ points). It is forcing for one round.
- c) With some support and 15+ points there is a possibility of game. Bid 2NT, over which the opener further describes his hand. We shall assume the popular ‘Ogust’ or ‘Blue Club’ response, which asks opener to define his hand in terms of quality and more concise strength as follows: (Alternatively some players use the Standard American approach whereby 2NT requests opener to show features).

3♣ - lower range (5,6 points non-vul; 6,7 points vul); poor quality suit.

3♦ - lower range (5,6 points non-vul; 6,7 points vul); good quality suit.

3♥ - upper range (8,9 points non-vul; 9,10 points vul); poor quality suit.

3♠ - upper range (8,9 points non-vul; 9,10 points vul); good quality suit.

3NT – shows specifically AKQ of the suit.

(with the ‘middle’ of the range make a judgment. For example, if the point count contains an unsupported Jack, devalue the hand).

The criteria for a good quality suit is one containing two of the top three honours (or one of the top two honours with a seven-card suit).

With a ‘lower range; good quality’ response (3♦), the opposite hand should be aware that there may be

entry problems to the weak-two hand, should he decide to play in no-trumps. It's often preferable to support the weak-two trump suit on even sub-minimum support.

(I actually prefer to reverse the 3♦ and 3♥ bids, since it gives responder an extra cue-bid in the rare situations where a slam is contemplated (but this is not standard)).

Examples (North to open):

a) ♠ 854 ♥ KQ10943 ♦ 52 ♣ 63	b) ♠ Q1098652 ♥ J7 ♦ 53 ♣ K4	c) ♠ 84 ♥ KQJ1076 ♦ 753 ♣ 82	d) ♠ KQJ753 ♥ 954 ♦ 7 ♣ Q74	e) ♠ AK8532 ♥ 86 ♦ 753 ♣ 85	f) ♠ AJ10752 ♥ J84 ♦ 98 ♣ 54
♠ A63 ♥ A5 ♦ A7643 ♣ A84	♠ J7 ♥ AQ6 ♦ Q742 ♣ AQJ6	♠ AK6 ♥ 5 ♦ A1064 ♣ AK1065	♠ 6 ♥ AK8 ♦ KQ654 ♣ J853	♠ 964 ♥ KQ7532 ♦ 6 ♣ J76	♠ 6 ♥ AK9753 ♦ K72 ♣ AK6

- a) 2♥ - 2NT - 3♦ - 3NT. The 3♦ shows lower range, good quality (i.e. two of top three honours).
- b) 2♠ - 2NT - 3♣ - 3♠. The quality of the seven-card spade suit is unsuitable for a three-level pre-empt, so bid 2♠. South is interested in game, so enquires with 2NT. However after the 3♣ response (lower range, poor quality) settles for 3♠, probably losing two spades and two diamonds.
- c) 2♥ - 2NT - 3♦ - 4♥. South knows he is going to game, but after the 3♦ response (lower range, good quality), he deems 4♥ preferable to 3NT despite only having a singleton. Partner's points are in the heart suit (3♦ response - good hearts), and so he would be lacking entries to the heart suit if played in no-trumps.
- d) 2♠ - pass. Despite 15 points, there is no fit with partner. Game would be highly unlikely.
- e) 2♠ - 3♠. Support for spades, weak, but good shape, so pre-empt further (opposition could be making a slam in a minor). The opposition could double 3♠ for take-out, but this takes the opposition beyond 3NT (which they may 'punt', and this will probably be a disaster), They may even make a minor slam.
- f) 2♠ - 3♥ - 4♥. The 3♥ bid is forcing and partner is happy to show support.

Appendix - Advantages Of Benji v Reverse Benji

Above we have described the workings of Ordinary Benji as opposed to Reverse Benji, but many improvers start with Reverse Benji simply to ease the transition from Standard Acob - the 2♣ bid remains the same (I don't recommend this approach).

The advantages of Ordinary Benji mainly involve the heart suit:

- a) in Reverse Benji, with the usual 2♥ negative response, this potentially 'wrong-sides' the eventual contract if opener has the strong heart suit option. This is of less consequence if the negative was 2♦ - as is the case with Ordinary Benji.

- b) in Reverse Benji, with the usual 2♥ negative, opener is forced to the three-level to show his strong heart suit (which is then non-forcing). This does not apply if using Ordinary Benji.
- c) you can readily show extra tricks in either hearts or spades playing ordinary Benji – 2♣ - 2♦ - 3♥/♠. This is only available for the spade suit if playing reverse Benji.

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