

WEAK TWOS

14 NOV 2017

Weak Twos occur on a regular basis. In a typical session of bridge you will encounter a Weak Two about half a dozen times, one way or another:

- Either you will bid a Weak Two yourself
- Or your partner will
- Or the opponents will and you'll have to decide what to do about it
- Or you will be wondering whether the opponents would have bid that slam if only you had butted in with a bold Weak Two when you had the chance.

Given this frequency, attaining a mastery of Weak Two situations seems like a rather good idea. So, here we go.

Range

Let's work on the assumption that we use the 5-10 range:

- If 5 is too low for your taste then up it to 6.
- If 10 is too low for your taste then please think again. 11 HCP and a 6-card suit is an opening one-bid for most folks (and also according to the Rule of 20). We suggest that ♠ 94, ♥ AKJ985, ♦ 96, ♣ K62 is a 1♥ bid.

Suit Quality

The classic Weak Two was based on a suit headed by two of the top three honors, or three of the top five. In other words suits like AQxxxx or KJ10xxx, or better. That style was all the rage back in the 1960's.

Nowadays, 'suit quality' is something of an oxymoron. QJxxxx is plenty good enough for many, and even less is OK in certain situations (which we'll get to later.)

In deciding when or how high to preempt, intermediate cards are a key consideration. For example, QJ10932 and AK5432 are both good enough for a Weak Two, but the QJT932 holding is a more effective preempt, with its 4 offensive tricks and zero defense. AK5432 has 4 or 5 offensive tricks, and probably two defensive tricks. Remember, the ideal preempt is characterized by high offense and little or no defense. But we can't spend our lives waiting for the ideal hand, we have to preempt with what we are given!

Five-Card Suit?

Is it OK to base a Weak Two on a 5-card suit? That's up to you and your partner. Our suggestion is:

- (a) Yes, if the hand has a decent suit and some shape (anything but 5332)
- (b) But not when we are vulnerable.

Seven-Card Suit?

Is it OK to base a Weak Two on a 7-card suit? We don't consider this taboo, just uncommon. You hold in first seat: **Q876543, 8, K4, 543**. At unfavorable vulnerability, even in this day and age, opening 3♠ would be a bit too much for many players. But it would be a terrible waste of a 7-card Spade suit to tamely pass. So, why not try 2♠? If we were non-vulnerable we'd open 3♠, though.

Four-Card Major?

Do you or don't you? Opening 2♥ with **A543, KJ7654, 54, 2** comes with a risk, namely that the Spade suit could get lost. Picture Partner with something like **KQ62, 32, AKJ76, A7**. A 2♥ opening will make it impossible to get to 4♠, which will usually make. But guess what? 4♥ will also usually make and is arguably a better contract. 6-2 major games tend to be safer than 4-4 major games, especially if the 6-card suit is in the weaker hand.

The real danger in opening a Weak Two with 6-4 in the majors is that a safe 4-4 fit may be lost when the alternative is a ratty 6-1 fit. To avoid this ignominy, we suggest opening a Weak Two with 6-4 in the majors only when the 4-card suit is weak (Jxxx or xxxx), and when the 6-card suit is really strong (just one loser).

As for opening 2♦ with a 4-card major, our suggestion is to do it sparingly (unless you are in third seat). If, in first or second seat, you happen to pick up **5432, 7, AK9875, Q2**, you would probably open 2♦. However, bear in mind that if Partner has a good hand, then 4♠ is still your most likely game contract, but it will be hard to reach after a 2♦ opening.

Outside Values?

Vulnerable in first seat, would you open 3♠ with: **9876543, A6, A7, 42**? The answer is "No." At least we hope so. Normally, our 3-level preempts are made with better suits, and having an outside Ace is a liability. Having two outside Aces is just plain bizarre, and makes it impossible for Partner to gauge accurately in a competitive auction.

The same applies to Weak Two auctions, but to a lesser degree. Having an outside Ace is quite common, but having two outside Aces (or an Ace and a King) is far from ideal, and could lead Partner astray in a competitive auction. Ideally, we have most of our stuff in the long suit, but then again we don't just hang around waiting for ideal hands.

Is a Void Permissible?

Is it OK for a Weak Two bidder to have a void? Absolutely! Why on earth would we not want to bid with: **832, KJ9862, --, Q1043**?

Responder's First Bid

Partner is in first seat and opens a vulnerable 2♥, showing 5-10 HCP and a 6-card suit. Remember, we have the agreement that we don't bid Weak Twos with 5-card suits when vul. Opposite that Weak Two, some of the options are:

- 3♥ Furthering the preempt, usually with 3-card support. Opener is not permitted to bid again.
- 4♥ Could be preemptive, probably with 4-card support. Or could be a good hand with hopes of making game. Only the 4♥ bidder knows which it is.
- 2NT Artificial. There are various treatments, the most popular being 'Feature', meaning that Opener is supposed to show an Ace or a King (or maybe a Queen) in a side-suit. With ♥AKQxxx or ♥AKJxxx, she bids 3NT. And without one of those holdings and without a feature she bids 3♥. By the way, Opener declines to show a feature if she is in the bottom half of her range.

Those are the most common responses. How do you play a new suit (2♠, 3♣, or 3♦ in other words)? This is a controversial subject, and you will get votes for:

- Weak, an attempt to escape from Hearts. Not a good treatment in our view. Responder has no reason to rescue Partner unless the opponents have doubled for penalty (or passed a takeout double), and even then it is usually better to pass.
- Natural and forcing for one round. Opener will raise Partner's suit with three, or retreat to 3♥, or with a really good suit may try 4♥.
- Natural and non-forcing, usually with a 6-card suit. Opener is allowed to bid again but is not required to. Opener can now retreat to 3♥, or raise Partner's suit. Jumping is permitted with a good hand.

Allow us to strongly advocate the third (non-forcing) option.

Some Examples

<i>LHO</i>	<i>Pard</i>	<i>RHO</i>	<i>You</i>	
	2♥	Pass	??	Both Vul (so Pard won't have only 5 Hearts)

♠ A 5 4
♥ 10 9 3
♦ Q 7 6 3 2
♣ 7 5

Clearly the opps have game, probably in Spades. The best you can do here is squeak out 3♥, hoping that this will inconvenience the bad guys. It probably won't, but it's worth a try. With an extra Heart, say **A54, 10932, Q7632, 7**, you'd leap to 4♥, expecting to go one or two down doubled. If the opps bid their game, you and Pard are out of the auction.

♠ A 5 4
♥ K 9 7 6
♦ A Q 7 6 3
♣ 7

Pard has 5-10 HCP opposite your 13. Even so, 4♥ is likely to make, so just bid it. That probably won't end things, as they seem favorites to make game as well. If they bid it, be ready to bid on to 5♥, which may well make.

♠ K J 7 6 4 3
♥ J
♦ Q J 10 5
♣ 5 4

You have a miserable hand opposite a Weak Two in Hearts, and 2♠ may be a better spot. But you cannot safely bid that because Partner might go back to 3♥, at which point the doubling might start. So pass, and bail out in 2♠ if they do indeed try to penalize Partner's Heart contract.

♠ A K J 6
♥ J 3
♦ 8 7 6 4
♣ A Q 6

If Partner's hand is at the high end of the Weak Two range then you would like to take a shot at game. The best way to find out is to bid 2NT, asking for a feature. If Partner shows a feature (you don't greatly care which one) or bids 3NT, then he has a decent hand, and you can take a shot at game. Otherwise you will play in 3♥.

♠ A K J 7 6
♥ 8
♦ A Q J 10
♣ A 4 3

This one belongs in 3NT or 4♠. So you bid 2NT, and let's suppose that Partner bids 3♥. Clubs might be a weak link in 3NT so you bid 3♠. This is forcing and shows a 5-card suit. If it's your lucky day, Partner will raise to 4♠ holding a hand such as: **1093, AK7654, 43, 65**.

Defending Against Their Weak Two

The basic rules are similar to those used when they open one of a suit. To wit:

- Simple overcalls require a 5-card suit (with opening values).
- Double is for takeout.
- 2NT is a strong NT with a stopper in their suit. You can use your normal 2NT opening methods, presumably Stayman and Transfers, with 3♠ being minor-oriented.

Some Obscure Stuff

- Suppose they open 2♥, and **Partner bids 2NT**. You agreed that you would play 'systems on' at this point, but what does 3♦ mean? It can hardly be a genuine transfer into the opponent's 6-card suit. One good treatment is that it shows shortness in Hearts. This might help you find your 4-3 Spade fit or a good 5♣ or 5♦ contract.
- Are you familiar with **Leaping Michaels**? Suppose RHO opens 2♥ and you hold a good 5-5 hand. That being the case, you can bid as follows:

- 4♣ Clubs and Spades
- 4♦ Diamonds and Spades
- 4♥ Minors (slammish)
- 4♠ Natural
- 4NT Minors (weaker than 4♥)

All of these bids are game-forcing, though they will normally need some help from Partner to actually make game. **AQJ65, 4, AJ943, K4** would be fairly typical (over a 2♥ opening bid).

- (c) LHO opens 2♥, Partner doubles, and RHO passes. Now what? You may have a rotten hand that wants to play in a part-score ... or invitational values ... or game values. It's hard to accommodate all of those without help from a convention. That convention is known as **Lebensohl**, and is beyond the scope of this document. Try this link: kwbridge.com/leb.htm. But be warned, this is pretty complicated.

Deviant Behavior

So far we've been solid citizens. True, we are opening our Weak Twos with flimsier suits than our grandparents used to. But nothing outrageous. Now we'll take a brief look at two situations where we cast aside the shackles of conformity and make bids that Grandma might disapprove of.

The first situation relates to vulnerability. When we are non-vul we can be more adventurous, and opening the occasional 5-card Weak Two is a possibility. If it happens that, at the same time, the opponents *are* vulnerable, then we have great conditions for mayhem. White against red, it's often a good idea to bid one for the road ... a Weak Two with a 5-card suit, and a 3-level preempt with a 6-card suit. Partner will know that you are trading on the vulnerability and won't expect your Weak Two to be **AQJ654, 6, Q42, 754** (that would be a 3♥ opening at these colors) ... he will be envisaging something more like **QJ654, 6, J1042, J54**, and he will bid accordingly.

The second situation occurs when you are in third seat and Partner is a passed hand. Now, with two passes in front of you, and with you contemplating a preempt, it doesn't take a genius to figure out who has a good hand. Yes, that's right, it's LHO who has the goods, and it is your solemn duty to spoil his fun by getting in his way and bidding first.