

Investigating Slam after a weak 2-Level Bid

By Neil H. Timm

Playing 2/1 **weak two bids** are used when one has a weak 5-10HCP hand with a 6-card suit and little strength outside the suit bid. It is used most when a 2♣ bid shows a strong hand and is invoked using the suit bids of 2♦/2♥/2♠. J.B. Elwell introduced the bid into duplicate bridge in 1910. The bid is preemptive and may or may not deny a 4-card major (partnership agreement). If the 2-level bids are not weak, but are Intermediate, Strong, or a Convention (e.g. Flannery 2♦* = 5-4 in hearts and spades/Wagner convention where 2♦* = shows a long major/2♥* = Flexible Flannery 6-4/5-4 in hearts and spades) requires an alert.

When making the bid, weak and strong hands are defined by partnership agreement and may depend on vulnerability. A common agreement for a “weak hand”=5-7HCP (e.g. 8-losers) and a “strong hand”=7-10HCP (e.g. 7-losers) and a “strong suit”=2 of the top 3 honors or 3 of the top 5 (some exclude QJ10) where a “weak suit” does not meet these requirements. In the 3rd seat many make weak 2-level bids with only 5-cards and in the 4th seat a 2-level bid is often made with values for an opening hand (11/12+HCP) and no alerts are required, you must ask.

The bid of 2NT is used about the opener's hand using Ogust (hand-suit responses and an alert) or a side Feature (e.g. A/K or void in a side suit and an alert). A new bid by responder is played as either Forcing (no Alert) if non-forcing an alert is required. However, some play Raise ONLY Non Forcing (RONF) all other bids are forcing (no alerts are required for these bids).

Ogust responses (all responses are alerted), but the 2NT asking bid; responses are:

3♣* = Bad hand, Bad suit	3♦* = Bad hand, Good suit
3♥* = Good hand, Bad suit	3♠* = Good hand, Good suit
3NT* = Showing precisely AKQxxx in trumps	

Another common practice is to employ the Rule of 17 which goes: if the HCP + the number of cards in the suit bid is 17 (often 17-19) bid game otherwise sign-off in three of the 2-level bid suit. If responder's values are 20+ one is usually interested in slam.

In this Tip I will review some the conventions employed to investigate slam **we assume the weak 2-level bidder no more than 2 keycards with the Queen** for their bid. Why? Because 2 Aces and the King of Trumps = 11HCP (12 using the OPC method since an Ace=4.5).

The convention is called **Weak Roman Keycard Blackwood (WRKCB)** (it may be used with both 2/3-level preempts and is initiated by the bid of 4♣ (if the preemptive 3♣ bid, 4♦ is the ask and with 4-level bids 1430 RKC kickback bids are used).

The responses are:

- 4♦ = 0 keycards
- 4♥ = 1 keycard without the Queen
- 4♠ = 1 keycard with the Queen
- 4NT = 2 keycards without the Queen
- 5♣ = 2 keycards with the Queen

If you have zero keycards (an undisciplined 2-level bid, 4♥ over 4♦ is the queen ask)

Responses over interference use DOPI, ROPI or DEPO.

If partner opens with only QJ10xxx in the trump suit with a worthless side suit doubleton, even if you have the AK of trumps you may lose two tricks outside the trumps suit. If however, you have a side Ace and the Ace of trumps, the side suit may be controlled and may be willing to risk a slam on a trump finesse. If responder knows you have the King of trumps, he will avoid close slams, while if he knows you have Aces close slams will be more successful. Thus, know whether or not you have the A/K of trumps is critical. The convention is called **Weak Keycard Blackwood (WKCB)** and is initiated by the bid of 4NT excluding the weak 2♠ where one must first use the bid of 2NT.

- 5♣ = 1 keycard
- 5♦ = 0 Keycards
- 5♥ = 1 Ace and the King of trumps and no Queen
- 5♠ = 2 Aces, no Queen of trump
- 5NT = 2 Aces with Queen of trump

Note that the bids of 5♥/5♠ is similar to RKCB (e.g. 2 Keycards without the Queen of trumps) where 5♠ is the stronger bid showing two aces and 5♥ the weaker bid with only the trump King.

The 5♥ bid over 5♦ bid is again the Queen ask where

- 5♠ = no Queen
- 5NT = trump Q with spade King (asker will sign-off in the agreed suit)
- 6♣ = trump Q with club King
- 6♦ = trump Q with diamond King
- 5♥ = trump Queen with heart King

Skipping 5♥ then 5♠/6♣/6♦/6♥ are the Specific Suit Ask (SSA) bids and 5NT is the Specific King Ask (SKA).

This convention may also be employed over the strong 2♣ when the response is 2♥* no A/K to see if partner has the trump Queen. Then after 5♣ = 1 Keycard, 5♦ = trump Queen ask where now 5♥ says no Trump Queen, 5NT = trump Q with spade King, etc.

Note that you may also use the convention after 2♣ when 2♥* denies as much as a King or two Queens using the WKCB 4NT bid.

What happens over 2♦/2♥? One uses Kickback WKCB. Over 2♥ then 4♠ becomes the ask where the responses are:

- 4NT = 1 keycard
- 5♣ = 0 Keycards
- 5♦ = 1 Ace and the King of trumps and no Queen
- 5♥ = 2 Aces, no Queen of trump
- 5♠ = 2 Aces with Queen of trump

Over 2♦ then 4♥ becomes the ask where the responses are:

- 4♠ = 1 keycard
- 4NT = 0 Keycards
- 5♣ = 1 Ace and the King of trumps and no Queen
- 5♦ = 2 Aces, no Queen of trump
- 5♥ = 2 Aces with Queen of trump

With 1/0 keycards the next step is again the Queen ask.

Lets look at a few examples:

Opener	Responder
♠ 94	♠ AKQ6
♥ Q65	♥ 7
♦ AK7652	♦ QJ9
♣ 108	♣ AKQ92

WRKCB

2♦	4♣
4NT 2 without the Queen	5♦

WKCB

2♦	4♥
5♦	Pass

Note if you used 4NT as 1430/3014 the response you would bid 5♥ and you would be in 6♦, down one.

Opener

♠AQ9542
♥K105
♦52
♣108

Responder

♠J102
♥7
♦AKQJ109
♣A

WRKCB

2♠
5♣ 2 with the Queen

4♣
6♠

WKCB

2♠
3♠
5♣ =1
5♥ yes and ♥K
6♠ no more

2NT
4NT
5♦ do you have the Queen
5NT specific king
Pass

For more on WKCB see Ken Rexford (2012), "Variable Keycard Blackwood", Master Point Press. A nice summary on responding to 2-level weak bids is also on the web site:
<https://www.bridgewebs.com/nkbc/Weak2FollowUps.pdf>.