

# Responding to the Bid of Two Clubs

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Playing 2/1 with a strong 15-17 1NT bid where 2NT=20-21; a common practice is to open the bidding 2♣ with 22+ points (or 9+ tricks or the rule of 44= 4 quick tricks with 4 or less losers); an artificial, forcing, and strong bid.

The bid is game forcing unless partner has 3 or fewer points. With 3 points or more, a common convention is to bid 2♦ which shows an A/K or 2 queens: yes, 3 or more points and a game force (GF) response! And with less, the bid of 2♥\* is often used so that the bid of 2NT=5+ hearts with a GF hand.

After partner bids their suit and with a fit (at least 3-cards) responder supports the suit and without support cue bids his control.

What is one to do with spades, clubs, and diamonds with 5+ cards and a GF hand? Many bid the suit which wrong sides the contract! A better option is to employ transfer bids over 2♣: 2NT\*=hearts, 3♣\*=diamonds, 3♥\*=spades, and 3♠\*=clubs to right-side the contract with 4+ points.

Let's look at a few examples:

♠102 ♥AQ96 ♦8742 ♣J84                      Bid 2♦

♠A2 ♥AQ963 ♦87 ♣J1084                      Bid 2NT\*

♠AQ962 ♥7♦8752 ♣J84                      Bid 3♥\*

♠QJ8 ♥103 ♦J87 ♣KJ842                      Bid 2♠\*

♠987 ♥9632 ♦873 ♣984                      Bid 2♥\*

After the bust bid of 2♥\* what does responder next respond when opener bids:

2♠ = 22+, 2NT= 22-24, 3♣= 22+, and 3♦=22+, and 3NT=25-27.

Most use the second negative bid of 3♣\*/3♦\* when available; however, over 3♦bid 3♥\* (next step) and pass 3NT.

Instead of using transfers, many pairs may use control bids or steps:

**"Controls"**

Some players prefer to show their controls (high cards) rather than suits/transfers in the response to 2♣ opening bids. This has an advantage in cases when the opener has a strong one- or two-suiter (i.e., has an interest in cover cards rather than finding the suit fit), but can take up bidding space and miss a suit fit when the opener is balanced or semi-balanced.

- In standard "controls," an Ace counts as two controls and a King count as one control. The theoretical advantage of this system is that aces and kings may be more significant for finding a potential slam than other honor cards, but it also may miss a slam opportunity if the responder has a lot of inferior honor cards. There are several variations in the manner of showing the number of controls; one option follows:
  - 2♦ shows 0 or 1 control (at most 1 king),
  - 2♥\* shows 2 controls (1 ace or 2 kings),
  - 2♠\* shows 3 controls (specifically 1 ace and 1 king),
  - 2NT\* shows 3 controls (specifically 3 kings), and
  - 3♣\* shows 4 controls,
  - 3♦\* or higher, etc. On up the line.
- With ace-showing responses, the responder bids the suit of the Ace, 2NT with two or more kings, and 2♦ with a king or less. With (unlikely) 2 aces, the responder bids 3♥. As a corollary, subsequent Blackwood 4NT bid by the opener asks for kings rather than aces.

In the above, some use 2NT\* to show 4 controls, 5♣\* for 5 controls, etc. On up the line

## "Steps"

"Three Point Step" responses to a strong 2♣ opening bid is another option. In this simple convention, the responder specifies the high card strength of his or her hand, without regard to distribution, as follows.

- 2♦\* = 0-3 High Card Points (HCP); Very Weak. The responder normally will bid again only to show a long suit (5 or more cards) or a trump fit but should use "Crawling Stayman" or "Garbage Transfers" if appropriate whenever opener's rebid is 2NT. The opening bidder obviously needs more than minimum values (at least 25 points) or a good trump fit to go to game.
- 2♥\* = 4-6 HCP; Alterable and Game Forcing. Subsequent bids are natural, seeking a trump fit, typically with "systems on" (Stayman and transfers are in effect) if opener rebids 2NT showing a balanced hand.
- 2♠\* = 7-9 HCP; Alterable and Slam Inviting. Subsequent bids are natural, seeking a trump fit, typically with "systems on" (Stayman and transfers in effect) if opener rebids 2NT showing a balanced hand. Opener must have extra values (at least 25 points) or a good trump fit to go to slam.
- 2NT\* = 10+ points; Alterable and Slam Forcing. Subsequent bids are natural, seeking a trump fit, typically with "systems on" (Stayman and transfers in effect) if opener rebids 3NT showing a balanced hand.
- Over interference, a Double (Alterable) by responder shows a stolen bid (that is, takes on the same meaning as the interfering bid) and a Pass shows any inferior response. This treatment results in loss of granularity only if the interfering bid is 2♠ or higher.

If requested, the explanation of an alert should describe the meaning of the bid completely, for example:

- "My partner's response of 2♥\* shows 4-6 HCP. It says nothing whatsoever about distribution, and neither shows nor denies hearts."

or

- "My partner's double of 2♠\* shows 7-9 HCP. It says nothing whatsoever about distribution, and neither shows nor denies spades."

This convention for response has two significant advantages and two relatively minor disadvantages over other responses. The first advantage is that the 2♦\* "Drop dead!" response alerts the opening bidder to partner's weakness immediately, while there's plenty of room to find a safe landing spot, when partner's hand is too weak to go on to game—which happens quite often in actual play. The second major advantage is that it immediately tells the opening bidder the combined high card strength of the two hands to within one HCP, and thus the most probable optimal level to which to bid (with the caveat that one sometimes can go a level higher with a good trump fit). The first drawback is that the weaker hand occasionally will end up declaring a contract with a trump fit in the major suit of the response. (Note that a transfer following opener's rebid of 2NT over a response of either 2♥\* or 2♠\* may be to the suit of the response. Such transfers cannot achieve the objective of making the strong hand the declarer, but they still help to find a trump fit.) The second drawback is that it uses up some bidding space if the responder has an unusually strong hand.

Finally – what follows is a transfer system suggested in Bridge World.

### **Transfers after a 2C Opening from Bridge World**

1. A 2NT opening is 22-23. With 20-21 you open 2C. This means about 2/3 of the 2C openings will be 20-21 balanced.
2. Responder bids assuming the 20-21 range. 2D/2H/2S/3C are transfers. If opener does not have 20-21 balanced, he breaks the transfer with 2NT/3NT (24+ balanced) or a suit.
3. All signoffs, most 2 suited hands and most 1 suited slam tries start with a transfer. Responder can sign off at 2H, 2S, 3C or 3D, and show 2 suited GF hands one level lower than is possible after a 2NT opener.
4. This scheme is mostly natural. More descriptive schemes are possible.

2C 2D = Transfer to 2H

- Default bid. After 2H you bid 2S to force 2NT, and then proceed as over a 20-21 2NT opening.
- Weak hand with 5+ hearts (pass over 2H)
- "Texas Transfer" hand (bid 4H).
- 2 suited GF hand with 5+ hearts and 4+ of a minor (bid 3 of the minor).
- GF hand with 5-5 in the minors (bid 2NT) (See note below)

- Choice of games with 5-5 in the majors (bid 3NT) (See note below)
- Slam tries. 3H = good (1 loser) 6+ card suit, 3NT = broken suit, jump in new suit = void

2C 2H = Transfer to 2S

- Hands with spades; like the 2D transfer to hearts hands.
- Weak hand with 5-5 in the minors (bid 2NT) (See note below)
- Slam going with 5-5 in the majors (bid 3NT) (See note below)

2C 2S = Transfer to clubs

- Weak hand with clubs (pass)
- Slam tries with clubs. New suit = natural (4+ cards), 3NT = balanced, bid at the 4 level = shortness.

2C 3C = Transfer to Diamonds (like the club hand; 4C=shortness)

2C 3D/3H/3S = shortness, 3 suited hands. 3D/3H could have a 3-card major (bid 3NT if opener bids it at the 3 level).

Note: The 5-5 major and minor suit sequences are designed to ensure the strong hand plays the weakest responding hands (minors signoff, majors' choice of games).

After 2C 2D 2H 2S 2NT the sequences showing a major + minor is no longer needed:

- 3C 3D 4C/4D shows a 3-suiter short in clubs (4C=4441, 4D=4450)
- 3C 3H/S 4C/4D is a cue bid
- Transfer to a major followed by a new suit shows singleton; followed by a raise to game is a mild slam try.
- 3S is MSS but is not 5-5; usually 4 clubs and 4+ diamonds

Usually if opener breaks the transfer with a suit the auction is GF, but 2C 2D 2S 3C is negative and 3S may be passed.