

Why Open 2NT?

By Neil H. Timm

“Modern” Standard American (SA), 2/1, and some Precision systems (e.g., Standard Modern Precision (SMP) by Neill) use the bid of 2NT to show a balanced hand with 20-21 HCP with no singletons or voids and with no more than one doubleton. The bid also implies that three of the four suits are stopped (the non-stopped suit should be no more than Qx or three small e.g. ♠Qx ♥AKxx ♦AKJx ♣QJx) with shapes: 5332, 4432, 4333 with a 5-card major. With the 20-21 range playing SA or 2/1, the bid of 2♣ shows 22+HCP.

Other Precision Systems use 2NT=19(20)-20(21) (e.g., Santa Fe Precision Playing by Dawson) while some open 1♣* where a rebid of 2NT shows 20-21 (e.g., Precision Today by Berkowitz and Manly).

However, Patrick Darricades (2019), “Optimal Hand Evaluation” page 94 based on the analysis of 6875 contracts and over 4000 deals has observed that with 22 points between two hands, the probability of success for a bid of 2NT was only 40%-45%, that with 23 points success was increased to 50%-55% and that with 24 points the success rate was 60+%. Hence if partner has NO points an opening bid of 2NT with a 20-21 range is often too high to succeed.

Example: ♠Q7 ♥AK54 ♦AKJ5 ♣QJ3 most will open 2NT with 20HCP; but if partner holds: ♠9842 ♥76 ♦Q42 ♣8742 with 2HCP, the 2NT bid fails with only 22 points between the two hands.

Goren in his initial release of the SA system used the range 22-24 for 2NT; however, in 1985 he revised it to 21-22 where strong 2-level suit bids showed 23+HCP.

To avoid these problems with the 2NT= 20-21 range, one may adopt a system like the Polish Club by Jassem, The Optimal Modified 2/1-Club System by Timm, Precision Simplified by Timm, Transfer Responses to One Club with Relays by Poe, Enhanced Precision by Beall, Pattern Precision by Hawthorne, The Viking Precision Club by Groethem and Sontag, The Barcelona Strong Club by Assalit and Sabate, A Simpler Blue Club System by Style, The Simplified Club by Weiss, Transfer Orientated Power Pinpoint Precision by Hawthorne, Every Hand an Adventure (EHAA) by Landau and Baron, Match Point Precision by Wei and Anderson, The Precision Bidding System by Wei, and The Incision Club with Dan, <https://bridgewithdan.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Incision.pdf>, among others.

What is one to do with SA, 2/1, Santa Fe Precision by Dawson, Standard Modern Precision by Neill, The Casey Simplified Precision Club Bidding System by Casey, The Strong Club Unbalance Diamond (SCUD) System by Watson, and the Imprecision Bidding System by Matthews Jr., among others that use the 20-21 NT range?

A simple solution is to define 1NT as 15-18 and the bid of 2♣ as 19+ points playing SA or 2/1.

Playing Precision one would bid $1\clubsuit^* = 16+$ points with the rebid of $1NT = 16-18$ and $2NT = 19+$ points, again a simple solution.

Playing SA or 2/1 with the simple modification allows one to use the bid of $2NT^*$ as a Gambling/Preemptive Bid; however, in some Precision Systems the bid is often used to show a very weak two-suited minor suit hand.

Gambling/Preemptive $2NT^*$ Opening

The $2NT^*$ bid is like the $3NT^*$ bid in that it promises a 7-card minor suit, but with additional requirements and is like 3-level preemptive bids.

The bid promises a 7-card solid or semi-solid unknown minor suit with or without a stopper in a side suit. With a solid suit AKQJ, an outside stopper is not required; however, with only AKQ, a stopper is a requirement.

For example, the following hand is opened $2NT$.

♠K2
♥976
♦AKQ9842
♣7

Lacking an outside honor:

♠82
♥976
♦AKQ9842
♣7

One opens $3\clubsuit^*$ as a transfer or $3\diamond$.

With a semi solid minor suit and no outside honor, open $2NT^*$:

♠82
♥97
♦KQJ9852
♣7

If the above suit was headed by AKQJ, some may use the Gambling $3NT^*$ bid.

Responses to the bid of $2NT^*$.

pass if responder believes it is the best contract

- 3♣ sign-off; opener passes or correct to 3♦
- 3♦* artificial and forcing major two-suited 5-5 hand; opener with 3-card support bids the major and with no support rebids his long minor
- 3♥ non-forcing with a 6-card heart suit
- 3♠ non-forcing with a 6-card spade suit
- 3NT sign-off
- 4♣* preempt with support for both minors, opener may bid 4♦
- 4♦* game forcing bid for both minors; opener next bid 5♣* if diamonds or 4NT* if clubs so that responder becomes declarer.
- 4♥/4♠ sign-off bids

The 2NT* bid is used in all position, but never in the 4th seat.

Alternatively, one may use a Weak Unusual 2NT* Opening

While many use the usual 2NT overcall bid to show a two suited hand, it may also be used to show 5-5 or 6-5 in the minors with say 5-10HCP instead of a strong 2NT bid or a Gambling/Preemptive bid.

Or you may use the intermediate range of 11-15HCP. With the bid of 2NT* responder must show his best minor even if only 2/3-cards and with only 2 may pass. With an unbalanced hand and holding a 4/5-card minor one may jump to 4/5 in a minor.

The bid of a major at the 3-level is natural and non-forcing. For example, the following hand is opened 2NT*.

Opener	Responder
♠92	♠QJ73
♥7	♥Q10543
♦KQJ42	♦93
♣AQ1085	♣J2

Opener	Responder
2NT	Pass

Opener	Responder
♠92	♠A8
♥7	♥AK84
♦KQJ42	♦K932
♣AK1085	♣QJ7

Opener	Responder
2NT	4NT (Blackwood no agreed suit)
5♥	5NT
6♦ (One King)	7NT

Switch the meaning 2NT and 2♣

Playing SA or 2/1 another option is to switch the bids no 2NT and 2♣ so that 2♣*=20-21 with a balance hand and 2NT*=22+ points and artificial.

Over the bid of 2♣* = 20-21

2♦* a balanced hand without a 5-card suit; otherwise, responder has values for game.
2♥/2♠/3♣3♦ to play with a 5-card suit
2NT weak and 5-5 in the minors

Over the bid of 2NT*=22+

3♣ Stayman or Puppet/Muppet
3♦ Transfers to hearts with a weak hand
3NT to play
3♥ transfer to spades and then pass or bid 4♠ with 6
3♥ transfer to spades and then bid 3NT, partner may pass or bid 4♠ or 4NT
4♦*/4♥* Major suit transfers with game/slam values
4NT Gerber or Expert Gerber