

Why 2/1 and Precision Fail?

By Neil H. Timm

At a recent World Championship, I observed the following bidding sequence for two expert pairs bidding the following hands playing 2/1.

Example 1:

North ♠AK85 ♥AK ♦KQ1043 ♣A4

South ♠4 ♥J986 ♦AJ7 ♣107532

Pair 1 – 2/1 bidding sequence

North

2♣ 22+

2♥* Kokish 2♥=Hearts or a balanced hand

2NT* Balanced

3♠ slam try (by passed 3NT)

4♥ cue bid (since 4♦ would be 1430 for clubs)

Pass minimum hand

South

2♦ waiting

2♠* relay

3♣ Stayman

4♣ cue bid

4NT

Pass

Pair 2 – 2/1 bidding sequence

North

2♣ 22+

2NT (22-23 balanced)

3♠ slam try

Pass

South

2♦ waiting

3♣ Stayman

3NT

Pass

Both pairs missed the slam! What went wrong? They were playing 2/1 with a poor hand evaluation method. Using the Optimal Point Count (OPC) method we see that

North has 24.5**HLD** [7.5+7.5+6+1L+4.5-1AK honor doubleton]

South has 6**HL** [0+0.5+5.5+0]

OPC method (Modified Optimal 2/1-Club System)

North

1♣*= 18+**HLD**

2♦ Natural

4♥ (Kickback)

6♦

South

1♦= 0/7 or 13+**HL**

3♦ =10 **HLDF** [+1F + 1(♦J-semi fit) +2D singleton]

4♠ = 1/4 keycards

Pass

The slam is easily bid!

Playing “traditional” 2/1 it is often difficult to get to the correct contract when a very strong hand faces a very weak hand using dialogue bidding and ignoring fit.

For those playing Precision, the bidding went:

North	South
1♣* = 16+HCP	1♦* = 0-7 HCP
2NT	3NT
Pass	Pass

The result was no better than playing 2/1 since only HCP were counted.

Example 2:

I now consider a second example from the same tournament.

North ♠A1053 ♥A10862 ♦-♣KJ98

South ♠94 ♥7 ♦AKJ876 ♣AQ107

Pair 1

North	South
1♥	2♦
2♥	3♦
3NT	Pass

Pair 2

North	South
1♥	2♦
2♥	3♣
3NT	Pass

OPC method (Modified Optimal 2/1-Club System)

North has 18**HLD** [4.5+4.5+1L+4D+4]

South has 17**HL** [0+0+8.5+1L+7.5]

North	South
1♣*	1♦* 0-7 or 13+
2NT=18-20	3♠ Transfer

3♦	4♣
5♦ ERKCB	5NT=1 with Q
6♣	Pass

Once again slam was bid. One pair using the following bidding sequence playing 2/1 did bid the slam!

Pair 3

North	South
1♥	2♦
2♥	3♣
4♣	4♦ Minorwood
4NT=2	6♣
Pass	Pass

The Precision pairs did no better than most of the 2/1 pairs since they only counted HCP and opened 1♥ = 11-15HCP.

Example 3:

North ♠KQJ3 ♥KQ52 ♦A96 ♣AK

South ♠A865 ♥A9643 ♦Q73 ♣2

Pair 1 – 2/1 bidding sequence

North	South
2♣ 22+	2♦ waiting
2NT	3♣
3♥	3♠ = relay to 3NT
3NT	4♣ = shortness
4♦ = control	4♠ = 1430
5♣ = 0/3	5♦ = Q ask
5♠ = yes ♠K	5NT = confirm all keycards
7♥	Pass
Pass	

Pair 2 – 2/1 bidding sequence

Pass	Pass
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Both pairs played in a grand slam, but got too high; What went wrong? They were again playing 2/1 with a poor hand evaluation method. Using the Optimal Point Count (OPC) method we see that

North has 22.0**HLD** [6+5+4.5+7.5-1AK honor doubleton]

South has 10.5**HL** [9+1L +1.5-1 no K]

and to make slam you need 32-33**HLDF** points.

North

1♣* = 18+**HLD**

2♥ = have at least 3

4♥ = How good are your hearts?

6♣ = control

Pass (not enough for Major suit grand slam)

Yes, the method allows one to stop short of a grand slam.

South

2♦ = Hearts 7-12**HL**

3♥ = 4 controls

5NT = 5 with one honor (A/K/Q)

6NT

Pass

Example 4

South opens 1♥

West holds ♠105 ♥7 ♦ AJ975 ♣ QJ1032 and partner holds:

East: ♠AQ ♥A106 ♦ KQ10 ♣ K9765

West has 12.5**HLD** [0+2D for singleton +4.5+1+1L+4+1L-1 no K] +1 Sig Heart =13.5**AOC** and bids 2NT as unusual.

East has 20.0**HHL** [6.5-1 for doubleton+4.5+6+3+1L] and bids 3♥ asking for a heart stopper (Western cue). Adding 20 to 12 = 32 points, East next bids 5♣. West with a near max of 14**AOC** points bids 6♣.

Playing 2/1 most West hands passed with 8H points, at several tables the bidding went:

South West North East

1♥ Pass Pass 2NT
Pass 3NT Pass Pass

South West North East

1♥ Pass Pass X
Pass 2♦ Pass 2NT
Pass 3NT Pass Pass

South West North East

1♥ Pass Pass X

Pass	2♦	Pass	2NT
Pass	3♥	Pass	4♣
Pass	5♣	Pass	Pass

Not one pair playing 2/1 found the club slam!

Example 5:

Playing 2/1 many pairs open a balanced hand with 20-21 HCP; although Goren recommended some time ago to use 22-24 HCP points. Why? The bid of 2NT for a balanced hand is too high since one needs more protection.

To illustrate take the hand from the international World Championship:

North ♠AJ2 ♥KJ5 ♦AK65 ♣A107

South ♠765 ♥Q983 ♦Q82 ♣J54

At both tables the bidding went: 2NT=20-21HCP – 3NT Down 1!

South should have passed the 2NT bid since South has 3 points for 2 Q's (1.5 each), Jxx=0.5 points, -1 for no King and -1 for 4333 distribution = 1.5 **HLD** points and not 5 HCP and should have passed!

Note also that North has only 19.5 **HLD** points (-1 for not Q and -1 for 4333 distribution) using the Optimal Point Count method of hand evaluation and not 20HCP!

To avoid this problem playing The Modified Optimal 2/1-Club system opens all hands with 18+**HLD** points 1♣* (not precision club).

Example 6:

Playing 2/1 and 15-17 HCP, most bridge books say that to use Stayman requires at least 8HCP since if a 4-4 major suit fit is not found the pairs has at least 23HCP to play in 2NT and that there is no reason to consider game with less than 25HCP.

This is a serious mistake since it ignores "fit" points which may add 4 or 5 points for finding any 8-card fit.

Consider the two hands:

Opener ♠Axx ♥AQxx ♦Kxx ♣Axx Partner ♠x ♥Kxxx ♦QJxxx ♣xx

Opener has 16HCP and partner passes with 6HCP missing the 4♠ contract! A mistake!

Once a heart fit is found, Partner has 6HCP+1 Fit point (8-card fit) + 1 for heart King + 3 points for the spade singleton with 4-trumps=11HLD point. Clearly, enough for game. The OPC for the two hands is actually 28.5.

A final comment or observation.

Playing “traditional” 2/1 many say you may open with a hand light in either the 3rd or 4th positions since it may increase the probability of a part score. Other rules like having at least 4 spades when in the fourth seat or at least 3-cards in each major have been suggested. None of these guidelines work very well. Playing the Optimal Modified 2/1-Club System, all hands are opened with 12-17HLD points in **all seats**. There are NO GADGETS, like the Rule if 15 or the Rule of 20, etc.

Why this position? Using the 4-3-2-1, one expects a deck to have 40 points and if two have passed, there remains 20 points. Wrong. While the value of aces and kings are fixed, queens and jacks have variable values, and their combinations (of AKQJ) add up to between 9.5 and 10.5 points not 10! Hence, a deck has between 38 and 42 points and not 40!

The 4-3-2-1 system also ignores the values of 10’s and we know that a 10 accompanied with a Q or J is worth 1 full point. Hence, a deck has between 38 and 46 points. And because a negative value for 4333 hands is also ignored, it brings the point total to between 36-46 points.

Lastly, considering 5-card suits with at least 3H points and length points, **a full deck contains between 34 and 50 points. It is not a fixed number like 40!** Each hand has between 8.5 and 12.5 points not 10!

Looking at two hands: (A) ♠A854 ♥K52 ♦Q92 ♣J95 (B) ♠AJ104 ♥652♦KQ32 ♦92

Each has 10H points. Wrong! (A) has 8.5HLD points and (B) has 11.5HLD or changing (B) to hand (C) ♠AJ10 ♥652♦KQ432 ♦92 it would have 13.5HLD and you would open 1♦*.

Conventions like Drury, Reverse Drury, and Two-Day Drury are not needed playing the Optimal Modified 2/1-Club System.

To illustrate that a deck has more than 40 points we consider a problem in the January 2022 Bulletin – Problem 5 page 40.

West ♠A7 ♥KQ1052 ♦ A1084 ♣J6

South ♠K52 ♥- ♦ KQ3 ♣AKQ10542

Pair 1 – 2/1 bidding sequence

West

1♥

3♦

East

1♣

2♦

3NT

4♦
6NT

6♣
Pass

Pair 1 – 2/1 bidding sequence

West

1♦
2♠
4♣
5♦
5♠
6♣

East

1♣
2♦
3♣
4♠
5♥
5NT
Pass

The comment in Bulletin – Getting to a Grand Slam may be difficult without more sophisticated methods. Really! Let's see.

East 27.5**HLD** [3.0+4D+5+ 4.5+3+2+1+2L+3Q]

West 16.5**HL** [4.5+6+1L+4.5+0.5]

WOW 44 points! Clearly a grand slam!

Playing the Modified Optimal 2/1-club System the bidding would go:

West

1♦* 0-7 or 13+
3♥ = natural
4♦ cue bid
5♦ cue bid
5♠ cue bid
6NT
Pass

East

1♣* 18+**HLD**
3♣ = natural suit
4♣ good suit
4♠ cue bid
5♥ cue bid
6♣ to play
7♣ unbalanced hand
Pass

It is difficult to get to the best contract using the wrong hand evaluation method with any system that fails to allow a pair to reach an optimal final contract.

To quote Alan M. Sontag, an American professional bridge player, who has won six world championships, including two Bermuda Bowl wins; “Some people believe an expert can win using any system. This is simply not true. A player employing an inferior or outmoded bidding system – and bidding is 80 per cent of the game – is at an enormous disadvantage” as these examples tend to illustrate.