

RESPONDING TO A WEAK-TWO OPENING

When your partner opens 2♠, 2♥, or 2♦, he should be showing a hand with a good 6-card suit and from 5 to 10 HCP. He is pre-empting your opponents, hoping to get them into the wrong contract; or perhaps finding a good contract for your side.

The definition of a good suit varies, depending on position at the table and vulnerability. The suit should be very good in the second position. It should have 2 of the top 3 honors or 3 of the top 5 honors. Here is an example of a 2♥ opening in the 2nd seat:

♠54 ♥KQJ932 ♦109 ♣QJ3

It doesn't have to be as good in the first position. In the first position, you are pre-empting two of your opponents and your partner. That's a 2:1 probability that you won't be messing up your own acution; just your opponent's. Here is an example of a 2♥ opening in the 1st seat:

♠54 ♥QJ10932 ♦109 ♣KQ3

In third position, after your partner has already passed, anything goes. You can be very creative. This hand might suffice in 3rd position if not vulnerable:

♠54 ♥QJ10932 ♦109 ♣QJ3

In 4th position, you don't want to pre-empt at all. You don't want to risk getting set when you could just pass out the hand and get a zero score. Actually, 2-level openings in the 4th position show a minimum but full opening hand with a 6-card suit. Here is a typical 2-level opening in 4th position:

♠A4 ♥KQJ932 ♦109 ♣QJ3

Vulnerability play a role in your partner's weak-two decision. Your partner should have a better hand when your side is vulnerable. Getting set 2 tricks gives your opponents a better score than any part score they can make.

The real essence of the weak two opening is the responder's bid. The pre-emptor has descibed his hand and shouldn't have any more to say. That is, under normal conditions, he isn't expected to bid again. It's the responder who needs to make decisions. He has to decide when to probe for a game; when to just bid game; when to further the pre-empt and raise partner's bid; when to bid another suit; and when to just pass. In this article, I'm going to discuss how the responder makes those determinations.

The responder can assume his partner will provide 5 tricks, mostly from the trump suit. If the responder has 3 or more trump support and 5 quick outside tricks, he should just raise to game. This will be rare. Usually, he has a good hand but can't be sure he can take the required tricks. Mel Colchamiro has popularized his Rule of 17, used to determine if responder's hand is strong enough to probe for game. If the sum of his HCP's and his cards supporting the trump suit is 17 or greater, he bids 2NT; otherwise he either passes or raises the pre-empt. This conventional 2NT bid is an inquiry about the strength of his partner's hand. If he has 5-8 HCP, he rebids 3 of his suit; if he has 9-11 HCP he bids 3 of a suit with an ace or king (sometimes a queen). If he has a trump suit headed by AKQ or AKJ, he rebids 3NT. The responder uses that information to place the contract. Here is an example of a responder's hand that would bid 2NT to partner's 2♠ opening.

♠K4 ♥AQ93 ♦A954 ♣QJ3

This hand hold 16 HCP and 2 spades; 18 "Mel" points. A decision on game should rely on the rebid to responder's 2NT asking bid. If partner simply rebids his spade suit, he should pass. Any other bid by the opener is worth a 4♠ rebid.

If the responder has less than 17 "Mel" points, he should raise the pre-emptive bid to the level consistent with The Law of Total Tricks. If he has 3 trump, he should raise to the 3 level. If he has more trumps, he should raise the pre-empt to the 4 or 5 levels. Even though he knows the contract is going to be set, he uses The Law to protect against a larger negative score from the opponent's game contract. It is important for the responder to raise at his first opportunity. A double by his LHO is for takeout and his RHO will be forced to bid and relieve him of the doubled contract. If he first passes and then raises on the next round, LHO's double will be taken as a penalty double and the pre-emptor could suffer a catastrophic loss.

This is an example of a hand that would raise partner's 2♦:

♠KJ4 ♥A1093 ♦954 ♣QJ3 Respond 3♦

♠109 ♥1093 ♦109854 ♣QJ3 Respond 5♦!

Another way of responding with a good hand is by bidding your own good suit. This change of suit is forcing so the bid must be made with caution. It often leads to a game contract – either in the new suit or in opener's original suit.

Take a look at the following deal. South dealt and opened 2♠.

11		N North		W N E S			
D		♠ 1094		X	3♠	P	2♠
		♥ QJ		X	P	P	P
		♦ KQ63					
		♣ K1062					
W West		E East					
♠ -		♠ QJ73					
♥ A853		♥ 9642					
♦ AJ9542		♦ 7					
♣ AJ7		♣ Q543					
		S South					
		♠ AK8652					
		♥ K107					
		♦ 108					
		♣ 98					
				3♠ S NS: 0 EW: 0			

West doubles for takeout and North makes the key bid of 3♠. East doesn't know what to do. He could mention the 4-card heart or club suits, but he has to do it at the 4-level and he has only 5 HCP. He decides to pass which comes back around to West. West doubles again, urging East to bid something. Again, East is in a quandry. The only good thing in this hand is the 4 spades. He decides to pass and convert his partner's takeout double to a penalty double.

You can see that this decision leads to disaster. The defenders can only take the three aces and one spade giving South +530. Had North passed West's initial double, East would have bid 3♥, which makes, or gone to 4♥ which is down only 1 trick. If North had been pushed to 4♠ doubled, that would have given East/West a positive score of 100.

You can see how this hand should be played by clicking on this link: <http://tinyurl.com/yaonshu3>, or copy and paste it into your browser. Click on the "Next" button on the bottom to advance through each trick. Alternatively, by clicking on "Play" you can play all four hands and see if you can make the hand on your own.

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