

Your 2C Bidding Structure

http://home.comcast.net/~kwbridge/bb/b_2c.htm

Part 2 -- Special Problem Hands

The 1992 Fall NABCs in Orlando got off to a rousing start when this hand was dealt in the first session of the Open Pairs:

♠Void ♥6 ♦AKQJ98754 ♣832

In first seat, with both sides vulnerable, what's your call? The recommended opening with this type of hand is 5D, or perhaps a gambling 3NT for those who play that convention. Several creative souls, however, came up with more imaginative calls, including a strong 2C.

Is this a psych?

The result at many of these tables was a director call when the opponents questioned the legality of the 2C opening (this hand generated five committees after the session, all at tables where the auction began with 2C). ACBL laws forbid psyching an opening of a strong, artificial bid -- including a strong 2C and a Precision 1C -- so the question before the committees was: Is this a psychic 2C opening?

The answer depends in part on the bidder's intent. If a committee believes the opener chose 2C to intentionally deceive his opponents, they would probably rule it an illegal psych and adjust the score. But if opener could convince the committee that he honestly evaluated this hand as a legitimate strong 2-bid, the score might stand. In practice, a committee would probably give a novice the benefit of the doubt, but would expect an experienced player to know better.

Problem #1: Preempt-type hands

If you and your partner consider any 9-trick hand to be worth a 2C opening, then this hand might qualify as "legal". Whether or not it's a wise choice is another issue. This hand type -- lots of playing tricks, but little defense -- is one of several that create special problems when opened with a strong two-bid.

Opening 2C with a hand that most players would open with a 1-bid (or even a preempt) runs several risks. The more immediate one is deceiving partner. On the hand above, partner will average about 10 high-card points, and if he has a few quick tricks, you won't be able to stop him below slam. And if your next 2C opener is a 25-pointer, you'll have a hard time convincing partner that his scattering of kings and queens will make a slam this time.

If your 2C opening doesn't promise some minimum defensive strength, you'll also have some awkward problems when the opponents compete. Responder won't be able to take strong action until opener clarifies his hand type, and neither partner will be able to make a forcing pass or a penalty double with any certainty.

A third, and perhaps more serious, problem is that your non-standard opening may illegally mislead your opponents. So even if you get a good result, it may be overturned or you may incur a penalty for improper system announcement. To be sure your opponents are informed about your style, you should special-alert, or even pre-alert, this type of 2C opening (although there's no guarantee that this will appease all committees).

Problem #2: Two-suited hands

Two-suited hands, especially those with both minors, are some of the most difficult to bid with the 2C convention (and one of the reasons forcing-club systems were developed). Because 2C uses up so much bidding space, expert players will stand on their heads to avoid opening 2C with a minor two-suiter.

Consider a hand like ♠Q ♥AQ ♦AKJ53 ♣KQJ74. Your first instinct may be to open 2C, since you have 22 points and your quick tricks (4 ½) do outnumber your losers (4). An optimist might even count this as 9 ½ tricks, but the deciding factor here is your rebid problems. To show both your suits after a 2C opener, you'll have to go the 4-level, which may be too high. The best way to safely and accurately describe this hand is to open 1D, then jump-shift into clubs.

Even 5-4 and 6-4 minor-suited hands can cause problems. If you open 2C with ♠AQ ♥A ♦AJ109 ♣AQ10873 and follow with 3C, what do you do over partner's 3H, 3S or 3NT rebid? You could be missing an excellent diamond fit, but you don't have room to show your second suit or to get a good idea of partner's strength. Better to open this hand 1C, pray for a response, then reverse into diamonds.

Your strategy should be different, however, when you have a major two-suiter. Any of the hands above would be a good 2C opener if even one of the 5+-card suits were a major. Since your first rebid with these hands will usually be at the 2-level, you should have room to show both your suits after a 2C opening.

Problem #3: Minor one-suiters

You'll also want to make distinctions between majors and minors when you hold a strong one-suiter. For example, ♠Void ♥KQJ10865 ♦AK82 ♣KQ, has 4 quick tricks, only 3 losers, and counts to 9 playing tricks -- all adequate for a 2C opening with a major.

Switch the diamonds and hearts, though (to ♠Void ♥AK82 ♦KQJ10865 ♣KQ), and you'll fare better with a 1D opening. One reason is that when you open 2C and show a minor suit, partner will count on you to have at least 9 ½ tricks. Another important consideration is that a 2C opener makes it very difficult, and sometimes impossible, to find a 4-4 major-suit fit, which is a real danger on this hand. If partner has 4 hearts, a 1D opening may be the only way you'll get him to bid the suit.

Problem #4: Three-suited hands

The real bane of the 2C bidder's existence is the strong 4-4-4-1 pattern. Players solve this problem in a number of ways, one of which is to open 2NT. This works best when your singleton is an honor and it's in a minor suit. With a hand like

♠KQ93 ♥AQJ4 ♦AQ105 ♣K, 2NT is fairly safe -- partner isn't likely to be bidding a club game, and your singleton king does offer a feeble stopper for notrump. Add a queen to this hand, and you would open 2C and rebid 2NT.

However, change the hand to ♠3 ♥AK109 ♦AQJ4 ♣AK75, and an opening 2NT is more of a distortion. Since your singleton is a major, there's too great a chance that partner will have 6-card length and insist on game (or slam) there. Also, with all your honors outside the singleton, your hand becomes more suitable for a trump contract. Opening 2NT opening with this type of playing strength could cause you to miss a good slam.

The most common way to deal with three-suited hands of up to 22 points is to start with a 1-bid. With the hand above, if partner can't respond to your 1C or 1D opening, you probably haven't missed anything. Even if you have, you may still find it; the opponents, who rate to hold a fair number of spades, may overcall or balance.

Your real dilemma comes when you hold far too much strength to risk a 1-bid. With ♠3 ♥AKJ8 ♦AK86 ♣AKQ4, most players open 2C, then rebid 2H (or maybe 2NT, if the singleton is a minor). These auctions often require good guessing and skill in playing 4-3 fits, but thankfully, we see these 4-4-4-1 powerhouses only rarely.

There are some handy conventions to make this type of hand easier to bid. One is Roman 2D, which shows a 4-4-4-1 with 17-24 points; opener's rebids then identify his singleton. Another interesting approach is to play a jump rebid by the 2C opener shows this pattern with a singleton in the next higher suit (with the above hand, the auction 2C-2D-3H would show the singleton spade).
