

Keeping Up With Conventions

Weak Two-Bids

BY DAVID LINDOP

This series of articles looks at how to fill out the standard convention card that lists all the partnership bidding and defensive carding agreements.

In the last article we started looking at opening bids at the two level, beginning with strong two bids and the artificial 2♣ opening. The area of the convention card used for two-level suit opening bids is shown in Diagram 1.

The big advantage of using the artificial 2♣ opening for all strong hands is that it allows the other two-level opening bids in a suit—2♦, 2♥, and 2♠—to be put to other uses.

Weak Two-Bids

What would you open with this hand? If the answer is 2♥,

you are with the main stream of today's players. This is a typical weak two-bid, showing a good six-card suit but less than the values for an opening bid at the one level.

Since a weak two-bid is a natural bid—showing length in the suit bid—it is not alertable. If you open 2♥, how will the opponents know whether you are showing a very strong hand or a weak hand? The answer is that they won't ... even though they might suspect you have a weak hand if they are holding a strong hand. The opponents will have to look at your convention card, or ask your partner, to know for sure. The reasoning is that an opening bid at the two level is a form of alert in itself. It becomes the opponents' responsibility to inquire if they are unsure.

	DESCRIBE	RESPONSES/REBIDS
2♣ _____ to _____ HCP Strong <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> 2♦ Resp: Neg <input type="checkbox"/> Waiting <input type="checkbox"/>		
2♦ _____ to _____ HCP Natural <input type="checkbox"/> Conv. <input type="checkbox"/>		2NT Force <input type="checkbox"/> New Suit NF <input type="checkbox"/>
2♥ _____ to _____ HCP Natural <input type="checkbox"/> Conv. <input type="checkbox"/>		2NT Force <input type="checkbox"/> New Suit NF <input type="checkbox"/>
2♠ _____ to _____ HCP Natural <input type="checkbox"/> Conv. <input type="checkbox"/>		2NT Force <input type="checkbox"/> New Suit NF <input type="checkbox"/>

Diagram 1 - The Convention Card for Opening Suit Bids at the Two Level

Weak two-bids have become so common in club and tournament play that they are “standard” practice. If you are playing with your friends in a social game, however, it is courteous to tell them beforehand that you are using weak two-bids. In some circles, weak two-bids are still unpopular.

Only 2♦, 2♥, or 2♠ don't require an alert as weak two-bids. If your partnership has chosen to use 2♣ as a weak two-bid ... or as anything other than a strong bid ... that is alertable. Without an alert, the standard assumption is that 2♣ is strong and forcing.

The Range for a Weak Two

Current ACBL regulations restrict weak two-bids to a maximum range of 7 high-card points (HCP) for the majority of events. Most partnerships take maximum advantage of this by listing the range as 5-11 HCP. If your partnership prefers a narrower range, such as 6-10 HCP, then that is what you should fill in on the card.

An upper range of 11 HCPs bothers some players. Many players add 1 length point for each card above four in a suit when valuing a hand for opening the bidding. Wouldn't a hand with 11 HCPs and a six-card suit meet the requirements for an opening bid at the one level? True,

but factors such as judgment and position at the table can influence the choice of whether to open at the one level or two level.

Consider this ♠ A Q J 9 8 5 hand. There are 11 ♥ 4 3 HCPs plus 2 ♦ Q J length points for ♣ J 8 5 the six-card suit, for a total of 13. You could choose to open this hand 1♠. Some players, however, would downgrade the doubleton ♦Q-J and ♣J and prefer to open 2♠, promising a good suit but not a good hand. Also, you rarely open a weak two-bid in fourth position since you have the option of passing the deal out. If you do choose to open this hand after three passes, 2♠ may be more effective than 1♠. It will describe the hand to partner and make it more difficult for the opponents to compete for the contract.

Let's look at ♠ 8 6 the other end of ♥ Q J 10 9 6 2 the scale. What ♦ 8 4 would you do with ♣ 10 9 7 this hand as dealer non vulnerable? If you would always open 2♥, you'll have to revise the range on your convention card. If you might open 2♥ once in a blue moon and partner will be as surprised as the opponents after seeing your hand, then you can leave your range as 5-11.

In summary, you can indicate that you play weak two-bids by checking “Natural” and filling in the range like this:

2♦	5 to 11	HCP	
	Natural <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Conv. <input type="checkbox"/>	
2♥	5 to 11	HCP	
	Natural <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Conv. <input type="checkbox"/>	
2♠	5 to 11	HCP	
	Natural <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Conv. <input type="checkbox"/>	

Some players save time by simply filling out the details for 2♦ and then using an arrow to indicate that this applies to 2♥ and 2♠ as well:

2♦	5 to 11	HCP	
	Natural <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Conv. <input type="checkbox"/>	
2♥	_____ to _____	HCP	
	Natural <input type="checkbox"/>	Conv. <input type="checkbox"/>	
2♠	_____ to _____	HCP	
	Natural <input type="checkbox"/>	Conv. <input type="checkbox"/>	

The Quality of the Suit

Would you open 2♠ with this hand? ♠ J 9 8 6 5 3
 2♠ with this hand? ♥ 5
 If so, you are playing *undisciplined* ♦ A 10 2
 weak twos ... the quality of the suit ♣ K 7 5

doesn't matter. Some partnerships prefer a more disciplined approach, especially in first or second position ... or fourth ... since partner may have to decide what to respond.

A typical agreement might be two of the top three honors in the suit, or three of the top five. If that's your agreement, you can write it in the area under “DESCRIBE.” If you don't have a firm agreement, you can leave this area blank.

The Length of the Suit

Would you open 2♥ with this hand? ♠ 9 2
 with this hand? ♥ K Q J 9 5
 Most partnerships ♦ J 7 5 3
 prefer that a weak ♣ 6 4

two promises a six-card suit. Even so, you might occasionally open with a good five-card suit, especially in third position ... when partner has already passed.

That's fair game but, if your partnership frequently opens a weak two-bid with a five-card suit, you should write something like “5 or 6 cards” under “DESCRIBE.”

The 2NT Response

What would you ♠ 7 5 2
 respond with this ♥ Q 7 5
 hand if your partner ♦ A K 7 3
 opens 2♥ and the ♣ A Q 3
 next player passes? You may have enough for game if opener has the top of the range for the weak two-bid but you may belong in partscore if opener has a very weak hand.

The standard approach is to use a response of 2NT to a weak two-bid as an artificial bid asking for a further description of opener's hand. This is not alertable.

After responder's 2NT bid, one popular style is for opener to show a feature in another suit ... typically an ace or a king ... by bidding that suit with the upper range for the weak two-bid. With a minimum, opener simply rebids the original suit. With a maximum but no outside feature, opener rebids 3NT. This style of rebids is not alertable and would be indicated under “RESPONSES/REBIDS” this way:

	Feature
2NT Force <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	New Suit NF <input type="checkbox"/>

If the partnership uses undisciplined weak two-bids, another popular approach is “Ogust.” Opener uses the following step responses to the 2NT inquiry:

- 3♣ 5-8 points; bad suit.
- 3♦ 5-8 points; good suit.
- 3♥ 9-11 points; bad suit.
- 3♠ 9-11 points; good suit.

Since each of these step responses is totally artificial, these rebids are alertable. If your partnership uses this approach, you would write “Ogust” instead of “Feature” but would have to be prepared to explain in more detail if an opponent asks after your side alerts.

Responding in a New Suit

What would you ♠ A K Q 8 3
 respond with this ♥ A K J 7 5
 hand if partner ♦ 8
 opens 2♦? Standard ♣ 9 4
 practice is to treat a new suit as forcing after a weak two-bid ... in the same manner as a new suit response

to a one-level opening bid. With this hand you could respond 2♠ and, if partner doesn't like that suit, bid 3♥ at your next opportunity.

Using this approach, both 2NT and a new suit are forcing responses to a weak two-bid. This is often referred to as “RONF” ... **R**aise is the **O**nly **N**on **F**orce and this is written in the section under “RESPONSES/REBIDS”:

	Feature	RONF
2NT Force <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	New Suit NF <input type="checkbox"/>	

RONF is actually a bit of a misnomer. It's true that a raise of a weak two-bid ... to the three level or to game or higher ... is not forcing. In fact, opener is expected to pass, having already described the hand. However, there are other non-forcing responses. A jump to 3NT or to game in another suit is non-forcing. Responder is setting the contract and opener is expected to pass.

RONF is considered standard and is not alertable. If you do want to treat a new suit as non-forcing, then you must check the “New Suit NF” box. This is in red, so you must alert when partner bids a new suit in response to your weak two-bid.

Other Two-Bids

Even if you use 2♣ for all strong hands, you don't have to play weak two-bids. Most partnerships do use 2♥ and 2♠ as weak two-bids but 2♦ is put to many different uses.

For example, some partnerships use 2♦ to show a hand of about 11-15 HCPs with four spades and five hearts (Flannery 2♦) ... an awkward hand to describe using standard methods. Some prefer to use 2♦ to show a strong hand with 4-4-4-1 distribution (Roman 2♦) ... another awkward hand to describe using standard methods.

If the partnership does decide to use 2♦, 2♥, or 2♠ as something other than a natural weak two-bid or strong two-bid, it is alertable and you must mark the box beside “Conv.” in the appropriate spot on the convention card. 