

BIDDING CONVERSATIONS - WEEK 6
STRONG TWO OPENING BIDS AND RESPONSES

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INTRODUCTION

So far we have developed bidding guidelines that can be used to decide how to open the bidding for hands with 7 to 21 declarer points. But about one out of every one hundred hands will contain 22 or more declarer points. When we adopted the *Weak Two* convention, we reserved the **2♣** opening bid for strong hands.

OPENING THE BIDDING

Strong hands will fall into two basic types:

• **Unbalanced - initial goal is a suit contract**

Hands with a good five card or longer suit. A five card suit should have two of the top three honors but a six card or longer suit can be much weaker.

| DECLARER POINTS | OPENING BID |
|-----------------|---|
| 22+ | Open 2♣ then rebid the good suit |

• **Balanced - initial goal is a no trump contract**

Hands with no singletons or voids, at most one doubleton, and stoppers in all four suits.

| HIGH CARD POINTS | OPENING BID |
|------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 20-21 | Open 2NT |
| 22-24 | Open 2♣ then rebid 2NT |
| 25-27 | Open 3NT |
| 28-30 | Open 2♣ then rebid 3NT |

For example, the hand on the right has 20 good high card points and 2 long suit distribution points in hearts for a total of 22 declarer points. This hand is too strong to open **1♥**. Although it has 20 high card points, this hand can not be opened **2NT** because it is unbalanced and does not have stoppers in all four suits.

Open this hand with a *strong artificial 2♣* and plan to rebid the hearts on the next round.

| SOUTH - YOU |
|----------------------|
| ♠ K Q 6 |
| ♥ A K J T 6 3 |
| ♦ A K |
| ♣ T 4 |

The hand on the right is balanced with 23 good high card points and stoppers in all four suits. This hand is too strong to open 2NT but not strong enough to open 3NT.

Open this hand with a *strong artificial* 2♣ and plan to rebid 2NT on the next round.

| |
|-------------|
| SOUTH - YOU |
| ♠ K Q 6 |
| ♥ A K J T |
| ♦ A K |
| ♣ Q J T 4 |

RESPONDING TO A TWO CLUB OPENING BID

The *Strong* 2♣ opening bid is *artificial* and does not limit the maximum strength of opener's hand. It is also a *forcing* bid and **responder can not pass** regardless of the shape or strength of responder's hand.

Since the responder does not know if opener has an unbalanced hand with a good suit or a balanced hand with stoppers in all four suits, responder must *wait* for opener's rebid to describe the shape of opener's hand. In most situations the responder will have 0-7 points and will bid an *artificial* 2♦, a *waiting bid*. Then opener will **either**:

- ✓ bid a suit to describe an unbalanced hand **or**
- ✓ bid no trump to describe a balanced hand.

For example:

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|-------|------|---------|------|----|------|---------|--|--|--|--|-------|------|-------|-----------|------|------|----|--|-------------|------|----|--|--|------|-------|------|-----------|------|----|------|-----|------|----|--|---------|--|--|--|--|-------------|--|--|--|-------|--|--|--|-----------|--|--|--|-------|--|--|--|---------------|--|--|--|
| 24 DECLARER POINTS (24 HCP + 0 LSP) BALANCED HAND | 22 DECLARER POINTS (21 HCP + 1 ♠ LSP) UNBALANCED HAND | 24 DECLARER POINTS (22 HCP + 2 ♣ LSP) UNBALANCED HAND | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <table border="1" style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr><td colspan="4">SOUTH - YOU</td></tr> <tr><td colspan="4">♠ K Q 6</td></tr> <tr><td colspan="4">♥ A K J</td></tr> <tr><td colspan="4">♦ K Q T</td></tr> <tr><td colspan="4">♣ A Q T 4</td></tr> </table> | SOUTH - YOU | | | | ♠ K Q 6 | | | | ♥ A K J | | | | ♦ K Q T | | | | ♣ A Q T 4 | | | | <table border="1" style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr><td colspan="4">SOUTH - YOU</td></tr> <tr><td colspan="4">♠ K Q J 5 3</td></tr> <tr><td colspan="4">♥ A K Q 7</td></tr> <tr><td colspan="4">♦ 5</td></tr> <tr><td colspan="4">♣ K Q J</td></tr> </table> | SOUTH - YOU | | | | ♠ K Q J 5 3 | | | | ♥ A K Q 7 | | | | ♦ 5 | | | | ♣ K Q J | | | | <table border="1" style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr><td colspan="4">SOUTH - YOU</td></tr> <tr><td colspan="4">♠ A K</td></tr> <tr><td colspan="4">♥ A K J 7</td></tr> <tr><td colspan="4">♦ 5 2</td></tr> <tr><td colspan="4">♣ A K 9 5 3 2</td></tr> </table> | SOUTH - YOU | | | | ♠ A K | | | | ♥ A K J 7 | | | | ♦ 5 2 | | | | ♣ A K 9 5 3 2 | | | |
| SOUTH - YOU | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ♠ K Q 6 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ♥ A K J | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ♦ K Q T | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ♣ A Q T 4 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SOUTH - YOU | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ♠ K Q J 5 3 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ♥ A K Q 7 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ♦ 5 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ♣ K Q J | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SOUTH - YOU | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ♠ A K | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ♥ A K J 7 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ♦ 5 2 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ♣ A K 9 5 3 2 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| South | West | North | East | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2♣ | Pass | 2♦ | Pass | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2NT | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| North | East | South | West | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Pass | Pass | 2♣ | Pass | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2♦ | Pass | 2♠ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| East | South | West | North | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Pass | 2♣ | Pass | 2♦ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Pass | 3♣ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Responder's rebid will depend on the type of opener's rebid:

- ✓ *If opener rebid a suit:* Opener's strength is still unlimited. Responder must bid again regardless of shape or strength.
- ✓ *If opener rebid 2NT:* Opener's strength is limited. Responder is the bidding captain and, with appropriate reduction in the number of required points, can use all of the typical responses to no trump opening bids including the *Stayman Convention* and the *Transfer Convention*. Responder can pass if a game is not possible.

STRONG TWO CLUB BIDDING CONVERSATIONS

The ***Strong Two Club*** convention is used to open hands with 22 or more declarer points. Because opener has most of the points, the responder will usually have 0-7 dummy points.

| PLAYER | BIDDING |
|--------|---------|
|--------|---------|

Opener Opens the bidding:

| | |
|-----------|---|
| 2♣ | <i>Artificial, forcing.</i> Promises either 22+ total points and a good five card or longer suit or a balanced hand with 22-24 HCP and stoppers in all four suits. |
|-----------|---|

Responder With 0-7 points, make a **negative response**:

| | |
|-----------|--|
| 2♦ | <i>Artificial.</i> A waiting bid. |
|-----------|--|

Opener With an unbalanced hand:

| | |
|-----------|---|
| Best Suit | <i>Forcing.</i> Promises a good five card or longer suit. Bid the higher -ranking of two equal length suits. |
|-----------|---|

With a balanced hand:

| | |
|------------|--|
| 2NT | Promises 22-24 HCP and stoppers in all four suits. |
|------------|--|

IF OPENER REBID A SUIT AFTER A 2♦ WAITING BID

| PLAYER | BIDDING |
|--------|---------|
|--------|---------|

Responder With 0-3 points, make a ***cheaper minor negative rebid***:

| | |
|-------------|---|
| 3♣ | <i>Artificial.</i> Cheapest minor if opener rebid 2♥ or 2♠ . |
| 3♦ | <i>Artificial.</i> Cheapest minor if opener rebid 3♣ . |
| 3NT | <i>Artificial.</i> If opener rebid 3♦ . |
| 4Maj | If opener rebid 2♥ or 2♠ and have four-card support. |

With 4-7 points, make a **positive rebid**:

| | |
|------------|---|
| Raise Open | Promises three or more card support in opener's suit. |
| New Suit | Promises a good five card or longer suit. |
| 2NT | If opener rebid 2♥ or 2♠ . |

Opener Sets the final contract or begins to confirm a slam.

IF OPENER REBID NO TRUMP AFTER A 2♦ WAITING BID

| PLAYER | BIDDING |
|------------------|---|
| <i>Responder</i> | 3♣ <i>Artificial, Stayman.</i> Promises 2-7 HCP and a four card major. |
| | 3♦ <i>Artificial, forcing.</i> Promises five or more hearts. <i>Directs opener to bid 3♥.</i> Opener says "transfer" immediately. ¹ |
| | 3♥ <i>Artificial, forcing.</i> Promises five or more spades. <i>Directs opener to bid 3♠.</i> Opener says "transfer" immediately. ¹ |
| | 3NT Promises 2-7 HCP and no four card or longer major. |
| | Pass With less than 2 HCP. |

Opener Makes an appropriate convention rebid or passes if responder rebid 3NT.

¹ In duplicate, opener must announce use of the transfer convention.

| EXAMPLE 1: UNBALANCED HAND - NEGATIVE REBID | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|-----------|------|-------|------|-------|------|---|-------|
| WEST | | | West | North | East | South | EAST | | |
| ♠ | A | K J 8 7 5 | 2♣ | Pass | 2♦ | Pass | ♠ | 6 | 3 |
| ♥ | K | Q T | 2♠ | Pass | 3♣ | Pass | ♥ | J | 6 3 |
| ♦ | A | K 7 | 3♠ | Pass | Pass | Pass | ♦ | T | 6 4 2 |
| ♣ | J | | | | | | ♣ | 8 | 7 5 3 |

- **West:** Has an unbalanced hand with 23 declarer points (21 HCP + 2 ♠ LSP) and a good six card spade suit. West opens a strong *artificial 2♣*.
- **East:** Only has 1 point but can not pass a strong 2♣ opening bid. East responds with an *artificial 2♦* (a waiting bid) to describe a hand with 0-7 points.
- **West:** Rebids 2♠ to describe an unbalanced hand with at least 22 declarer points and a good five card or longer spade suit. This bid forces East to bid again.
- **East:** Rebids an *artificial 3♣* (the cheapest minor) to describe a hand with 0-3 points. This is a negative rebid.
- **West:** Has three sure losers (a heart, a diamond, and a club). Because East made a negative rebid, West knows that there is a reasonable chance that a spade trick will also be lost to the ♠Q. Since a game is doubtful, West decides to set the contract at 3♠.

If East-West is not vulnerable, an experienced player might risk a 4♠ bid in the hope that the ♠Q will fall under the ♠A or the ♠K.

East's negative rebid only promises 0-3 points, so West must assume there is probably no way to get to the dummy to try a finesse against the ♠Q. But as the cards lay, West might get to the dummy by driving out the ♥A and leading the ♥T to the ♥J. A smart defender can ruin this plan by holding up the ♥A.

| EXAMPLE 2: UNBALANCED HAND - POSITIVE REBID | | | | | | |
|---|--|-------|------|-------|------|-------------|
| WEST | | South | West | North | East | EAST |
| ♠ A K Q T 8 4 | | Pass | 2♣ | Pass | 2♦ | ♠ J 7 3 |
| ♥ A Q | | Pass | 2♠ | Pass | 3♠ | ♥ J 8 6 5 3 |
| ♦ 6 3 | | Pass | 4♠ | Pass | Pass | ♦ K 7 2 |
| ♣ K Q J | | Pass | | | | ♣ 7 5 |

- **West:** Has an unbalanced hand with 23 declarer points (21 HCP + 2 ♠ LSP) and a good six card spade suit. West opens with a strong *artificial* 2♣.
- **East:** Responds with an *artificial* 2♦ (a waiting bid) to describe a hand with 0-7 points.
- **West:** Rebids 2♠ to describe an unbalanced hand with at least 22 declarer points and a good five card or longer spade suit. This bid forces East to bid again.
- **East:** Rebids 3♠ to describe a hand with 4-7 dummy points, at least three spades, and no interest in exploring for slam.
- **West:** Now knows that the partnership has 27-30 (23+4 to 23+7) total points and a nine card spade fit. Since a slam is unlikely, West sets the contract at 4♠.

| EXAMPLE 3: BALANCED HAND | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--|------|-------|------|-------|-----------|
| WEST | | East | South | West | North | EAST |
| ♠ K J 7 5 | | Pass | Pass | 2♣ | Pass | ♠ Q T 8 3 |
| ♥ A 8 5 | | 2♦ | Pass | 2NT | Pass | ♥ Q 9 7 3 |
| ♦ A K Q J | | 3♣ | Pass | 3♠ | Pass | ♦ 9 6 2 |
| ♣ A J | | 4♠ | Pass | Pass | Pass | ♣ T 4 |

- **West:** Has a balanced hand with 23 HCP. This is too strong to open 2NT so West bids a strong *artificial* 2♣.
- **East:** Only has 4 high card points and can not make a positive response. So East responds an artificial 2♦ (a waiting bid) to describe a hand with 0-7 points.
- **West:** Rebids 2NT to describe a balanced hand that is limited to 22-24 HCP.
- **East:** Has enough high card points to ensure a game, but given the worthless club suit and two four card majors, East thinks it might be better to play for a game in a suit contract. East bids an *artificial* 3♣ to initiate the *Stayman Convention* which directs West to bid a four card major.
- **West:** Rebids 3♠ to indicate a four card spade suit.
- **East:** Now knows the partnership has 26-28 (22+4 to 24+4) HCP with an eight card spade fit. East bids the 4♠ game.

STRONG RESPONSES TO A STRONG TWO CLUB

Although a rare event, responder will sometimes have more than seven dummy points which means that the partnership has at least thirty total points. The partnership should try to determine if a slam is likely. Instead of making a **2♦** waiting bid, responder should try to bid a new suit or no trump to describe the extra strength.

| PLAYER | BIDDING |
|--------|---------|
|--------|---------|

Opener Opens the bidding:

| | |
|-----------|------------------------------------|
| 2♣ | <i>Artificial, forcing.</i> |
|-----------|------------------------------------|

Responder With 8+ points, try to make a **positive response**:

| | |
|------------|---|
| 2♦ | <i>Artificial. A waiting bid.</i> Unbalanced hand without a good suit. |
| New Suit | Promises either a good five card suit or a six card or longer suit. <i>Slam interest.</i> |
| 2NT | Promises a balanced hand. <i>Slam interest.</i> |

Opener With an unbalanced hand:

| | |
|-----------|---|
| Best Suit | <i>Forcing.</i> Promises a good five card or longer suit. Bid the higher ranking of two equal length good suits. |
|-----------|---|

With a balanced hand:

| | |
|------------|---|
| 2NT | Promises 22-24 HCP and stoppers in all four suits. |
| 3NT | Promises 28+ HCP and stoppers in all four suits. |

Responder Starts confirming a slam.

- ✓ Control bid an Ace
- ✓ Initiate ***Gerber*** for a no trump slam
- ✓ Initiate ***Blackwood*** for a suit slam

| EXAMPLE 4: UNBALANCED HAND - STRONG RESPONSE | | | | | | | | | |
|--|---|---------|------|-------|------|-------|------|---|-------|
| WEST | | | East | South | West | North | EAST | | |
| ♠ | A | K 3 | Pass | Pass | 2♣ | Pass | ♠ | Q | J T 5 |
| ♥ | A | K Q 8 3 | 2NT | Pass | 3♥ | Pass | ♥ | 9 | 6 4 |
| ♦ | J | 6 | 4♥ | Pass | Pass | Pass | ♦ | K | Q 8 |
| ♣ | A | Q 8 | | | | | ♣ | J | T 6 |

- **West:** Has a balanced hand with 23 good declarer points (22 HCP + 1 ♥ LSP) plus a very weak high card point for the ♦J6 doubleton. West opens a strong *artificial* 2♣.
- **East:** Has 9 high card points and wants to alert partner to a possible slam. East responds with a positive 2NT to describe a hand with at least 8 points but without a good five card suit. This response is *forcing to game*.
- **West:** Rebids 3♥ to describe an unbalanced hand with at least five hearts.
- **East:** Rebids 4♥ to show trump support (at least three cards) but not enough points to start confirming a slam.
- **West:** Estimates the partnership strength at 31-32 (23 plus 8-9) total points, a little short of the strength needed for a small slam. West also has a spade loser, two diamond losers, and at least one club loser. West doubts that East can cover enough of the losers to make a small slam. West is chicken and decides to pass.

With both hands exposed, it is easy to see that East can cover the spade loser and through promotion, one of the diamond losers. So a small slam is possible if the ♣K is in the South hand to allow a successful finesse. But the safest way to make the small slam is to draw trump, develop the diamonds, and then discard the ♣Q and the ♣8 on the extra spade and diamond winners in the dummy.

HANDLING INTERFERENCE

In the unlikely event that a strong 2♣ opening bid is doubled or overcalled, responder should pass. Opener will get another chance to bid.

If responder's 2♦ waiting bid is doubled or overcalled, opener can:

- Make the normal natural bid.
- Double or redouble for penalty.
- Pass to force responder to either bid or double for penalty.

REFINING STRONG TWO CLUB OPENING BIDS

Remember that we are developing bidding guidelines, not bidding rules. There are some hands with 22 declarer points that are not worth a strong **2♣** opening bid and some hands with less than 22 declarer points that are worth a strong **2♣** opening.

For example, the hand on the right does have 22 declarer points (21 **HCP** + 1 **♦ LSP**). But the singleton **♣K** is not worth 3 points, the diamond suit is too weak for a strong opening bid, and you can not bid no trump with a singleton.

Open **1♦**.

- If partner does not respond, it is unlikely that your partnership could make a game contract.
- If partner does respond, you can jump bid to show your strength.

| SOUTH - YOU | |
|-------------|-----------|
| ♠ | A K Q T |
| ♥ | K Q J |
| ♦ | Q J 7 5 2 |
| ♣ | K |

This hand only has 20 declarer points (18 **HCP** + 2 **♥ LSP**). But it might be able to take 6 heart tricks and 4 club tricks.

- If you open **1♥** you might not get another chance to bid.
- If you open **4♥** partner will assume a preempt and pass.

Open a strong **2♣** to force your partner to respond. If partner makes a **2♦** waiting bid showing 0-7 points, you will know partner does not have the two missing Aces so there is very little chance for a slam.

| SOUTH - YOU | |
|-------------|-------------|
| ♠ | 4 2 |
| ♥ | A K Q T 9 5 |
| ♦ | 7 |
| ♣ | A K Q T |