



Adventures in Bridge

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This Week in Bridge

(26) Responding to 2NT Opening Bids

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Level: 1

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General

When partner opens 2NT, our response structure is similar to when partner opens 1NT – it is just moved one level higher. 3♣ is Stayman. Our Jacoby Transfers now occur at the 3-level and our Texas Transfers still occur at the 4-level.

One of the major complexities that comes up when we open 2NT is that the second-round bids we used to show a second suit that occurred at the 3-level now have been pushed to the 4-level. This means that many shape-showing (natural) bids now take us beyond our favorite contract of 3NT. Thus, we are more conservative about showing our second suit. We are much more likely to just search for a Major suit fit, and if we do not find one, settle on 3NT.

Note: With 5-4 in the Majors we bid Stayman and then if partner bids 3♦, we show our 5-4 shape by bidding our four-card Major at the 3-level (like Smolen, but without jumping).

Going Beyond 3NT

Let's look at the auctions that do take us beyond 3NT. But before we go into these details let's clarify a common mix-up for many partnerships – Gerber over 2NT. Since we cannot show ♣ naturally at the 3-level (like we can when partner opens 1NT), 4♣ on the second round of bidding is needed as a natural bid. 4♣ is only Gerber over 2NT when we jump directly to it.

Examples

2NT 3♣

3♥ 4♣ This is a slam try with 5+♣ and an unbalanced hand. We will usually have 4-card ♠ on this auction (since we bid Stayman first.)

2NT 3♥

3♠ 4m 5+ card ♠, 4+ card minor. Unbalanced and usually a slam try. Responder would generally just bid 3NT (even with a 5-5 hand) with a minimum hand that is not at all interested in slam.



2♣ Auctions

2♣ 2♦* (Game Force) 2NT
2♣ 2♥* (Bust) 2NT

We play both auctions exactly like when Opener starts with an opening bid of 2NT (with the only difference being that Opener shows 22-24 points.)

(Advanced) Minor Suit Slam Try

When partner opens 2NT we can make a minor-suit-oriented slam try by using 3♠*. This bid is otherwise undefined. Here is how it works: 3♠ is a puppet to 3NT (forces partner to bid 3NT.) Over 3NT we have the following structure:

2NT 3♠*
3NT __??

- 4♣ 6+♣ slam try (natural)
- 4♦ 6+♦ slam try (natural)
- 4♥* 5-5 minors, 0-1♥ (shortness), slam try
- 4♠* 5-5 minors, 0-1♠ (shortness), slam try

Over these bids Opener will do one of the following:

- Cuebid - when we are interested in slam,
- Bid game - when we are not interested in slam, or
- Bid slam - when we like our hand for slam.

4NT is no longer keycard – it is to play (showing a bad hand for slam – lots of values in other suits.)

When partner opens 2NT we have very little space to show minor suit oriented hands – so this is a valuable tool for exploring slam!

Conclusion

When partner opens the bidding with 2NT they have eaten up much of our valuable bidding space that could have been used to search for a fit or to explore for slam. Responder is faced with only one level of bidding below 3NT to try to accomplish both goals. This can lead to some difficult and complicated bidding options for Responder. Knowing that is the case can help Opener empathize with Responder's problems and be helpful in trying to get to the best final contract.