

Bridge: Two level openings

2 clubs as "strong unbalanced"



4441's | 2♦ | 2♥ | 2♠

Extending strong 2 clubs with ParadoX responses

A potted history of strong openings

The Acol (or Standard American) game-forcing 2♣ is a bit of a dinosaur. Its main purpose is to provide a top limit for your one level openings, allowing partner to pass these with less than 5-6 points. The downside is that your partnership starts strong auctions a full level higher.

In the 1930's traditions and methods diverged. In UK the 8-9 trick **strong two** emerged - Terence Reese once likened these to the Battleships of old. "rarely used, but reassuring by their presence". They took further pressure off our 1 level openings, and also off 2♣, as they dealt efficiently with these purer hand types.

Meanwhile Americans had developed Auction Bridge's preemptive **weak** two concept. This kept the ceiling high on their one bids and led to divergence of style. The 1950's saw UK players were making "Acol light openings" on hands that would have been 2 level preempts in ACBLland.

Elsewhere in the world other solutions were tried, with Stren's Austrian team using the (so useful) 1NT opening as its power bid, and various strong 1♣ solutions. The latter are a technically efficient way to bid up big hands, and also permit your one bid ceiling to fall to as little as 15-16 points. A great boon in competitive auctions where openings can be light, with a naturally well defined hand type.

Is strong club the ultimate? Not quite - strong **pass** systems allow about twice the system "bandwidth" (but are generally banned). A more important point is that all these methods are vulnerable to preemption when there are real opponents at the table.

For many years UK players were jealous of the weak two's seen elsewhere. A method of combining these into Acol was developed by the Scot, [Albert Benjamin](#) 2♦ in the 1970's. The use of 2♦ as a game force, and 2♣ as 8-9 tricks is now hugely popular in UK. However auctions such as ..

2♦ (big) - 2♥ (negative)

3♥ (suit) - 4♣ (??)

.. are simply horrid! I didn't like "Benji Acol" and sought for a means to put all such hand types through 2♣, with the bonus of freeing 2♦ for further preempts

Problems of fluidity in strong 2 club auctions

As seen above an intrinsic problem with 2♣ sequences is that bidding space can to be used up too rapidly - limiting the information exchanged. The partners can reach the 4 level in two rounds and no-one is quite sure when partner is cue bidding, or perhaps showing a natural new suit.

A popular 50's method of Ace showing **C.A.B** responses to 2♣ are fluent - when positive. But then

there is usually a slam on, so plenty of bidding space!

A 2♦ simple relay response also improves matters, allowing the big hand to start showing majors at the two level. It can still leave auctions such as 2♣ - 2♥(neg); 3♥ rather awkward.

Toward a solution

I wanted to combine 8-9 trick major hands into 2♣. The problem is then to stop low (ideally at the two level) when responder has no useful card. I got my inspiration from the "[Multi](#)" method. If game is unlikely you make **passable** negatives in majors you don't like! Your 2♦ response then becomes a light positive relay. There is also some pleasure in auctions ..

2♣* - 2♠* - all pass!

Viable inclusions into strong 2 clubs with ParadoX



The opening can now cover a much larger gamut of hand types.

- **A traditional game forcing unbalanced hands**
these will keep forcing until game is reached
- **A traditional 25+ balanced hand**
simply rebid 3NT - I like a [Multi](#) 2♦ opening to cover 22-24 and 27+ balanced hands - and add definition.
- **Near game (8-9 trick) major hands** - "Acol Major Two's"
the system allows these to rest in three, even two(!) of their major
- **Near game (10 trick) minor hands**
which may *in extremis* be passed out in a 4♣/4♦ rebid
Again I chose to relieve pressure by bundling 9-9½ trick minors in my "Multi"
- **Strong 3-suited hands with five or less losers**
Difficult to express via Approach Forcing, these are an optional extra . I express them as a [2NT opener's rebid](#) followed by artificial asking bids. Rare birds, but always a good result when they come up. However the main benefit is that you keep such awkward hands out of your approach forcing sequences.

<http://www.chrisryall.net/ryall.net/bridge/two/clubs.htm#system>

ParadoX responses



Thus the ParadoX concept emerged. Assuming a strong major two you make negative bids in the lowest suit that you **don't** like. Some examples will make everything clear.



- 2♣ - 2♥ - "Trash - or I may yet have a trick for spades"
♠xx ♥Qxxx ♦xxx ♣xxxx - real trash!
♠10xx ♥xx ♦x ♣Jxxxxxx - may later raise opener's spade rebid by one level
- 2♣ - 2♠ - "Worth a trick to "[hearts](#), but not to spades"
♠xx ♥xxxx ♦Jxxxx ♣10 - rock bottom! Any opener rebid will be passed.
However opener, holding an 8 trick spade hand may now safely pass himself!
- 2♣ - 2♦ - "Worth a trick for either major" (or better)
This is by far the most common response. As we should now be safe in three of opener's major it is naturally forcing to this level. I like 2♣-2♦ forcing to game **unless** responder rebids 2♠ or 2NT. Minimal example hands (note how light these are - the bid is essentially a relay)

♠xxx ♥xxxx ♦Kx ♣xxxx - any king will do!
 ♠xxx ♥xxx ♦Q10xxx ♣Qx - or a couple of queens
 ♠xxx ♥xxx ♦x ♣Qxxxx - trumps and a ruffing feature
 All of these hands will rebid 2NT to kill the game force.
 ♠Kxxx ♥xx ♦Jxxxx ♣xxx - planning a natural but not GF 2♠ over 2♥

The auction can then develop naturally with new suit forcing, four bids nearly always cues. Except that responder's force killing 2♠/2NT allows either partner to pass 3 of opener's major, or 4 of his minor. However responder may use these calls naturally, or "waiting" (2NT is forcing) to learn more of the strong hand's structure. Don't jump without reason!

The 2♣ opener should naturally dominate such auctions and I believe his partner should only make higher bids with very special hand types. "A source of tricks and alternative trump suit"

<http://www.chrisryall.net/ryall.net/bridge/two/clubs.htm#responses>

Responder's suit, or suits



What should 2♣ opener's partner do with his own suit? Well, basically I believe that he shouldn't waste precious bidding space unless he really has something to say. So introducing suits like K10653, with some extras is out chez moi. I expect KQxxxx or KJ10xxxx minimum - a source of tricks opposite Hx, and a real alternative trump suit. A convention to show an AKQxxx+ solid suit is useful. Otherwise just let the strong hand express itself.

Gerben Dirksen posted a nice idea on **rec.games.bridge** that calls of 2NT-3♥ opposite 2♣ should be transfers showing semi-solid suits as above, and that 3♠ show unspecified solid suit "transfer to 3NT". I like that idea, which also right-sides say a later 6NT contract. But keep those such advances pure! A 4 card side suit is usually a flaw, needing a more measured approach

- 2♣ - 3 of a suit - pure in a "sound" suit (ie at least KQxxxx or KJxxxxx)
 ♠xx ♥Jxx ♦KQxxxx ♣xx
 (♠AQxxxx ♥x ♦Qxxx ♣xx - is **unsuitable** due to a side suit)
 Opposite Hx this can lead to some very light slams
- 2♣ - 2NT - a solid suit(rare) - ie AKQxxx AKJxxxx or better
 ♠x ♥xxxx ♦AKQxxx ♣Qx - don't worry too much about side features with this type.

The above would reply 3♦ and 3♠ respectively playing Gerben's transfer style - up to you. It simply doesn't pay to jump otherwise (except splinters). The whole idea is to keep bidding low and express the big hand naturally.

<http://www.chrisryall.net/ryall.net/bridge/two/clubs.htm#responder>

Slam suggestion



Although this gives fantastic control of deals worth about game there is some loss in more powerful auctions. Let's face it - 2♣ and standard positive response is commonly worth a slam! The answer is some sensitivity, using cue bids that raise the level as showing extra values. There are also some useful "catch up" bids.

2♣ - 2♦
2♠ - 3♠*

2♣ - 2♦
2♥ - 4♣!

2♣ - 2♦
2♠ - 4♠

Traditionally
an Acol single
raise promises
ace+, (or KK+)

<http://www.chrisryall.net/ryall.net/bridge/two/clubs.htm#slamtries>

I like to play
splinters in
the same way
A/KK+, shortage

Fast arrival
would have a
trump support
but a king at most

Establishing forcing auctions



2♣ - 2♦
3♦

Opener is at least 10
tricks in diamonds

2♣ - 2♠
3♠**

Opener is game forcing in
spades - partner denied
even one trick there

2♣ - 2♦
2♠ - 2NT*
3♣ - 3♠
4♣

Game forcing as
3♠ was passable

Opener's 3♠** suggests
an alternative play spot
as he have bid simply 4♠
! Basically in this method
opener establishes a
game force by calling a
minor, and expects a
rebid after partner's 2♦.
Unless that rebid is 2NT
we are game forcing and
can now take matters
gently ...

<http://www.chrisryall.net/ryall.net/bridge/two/clubs.htm#forcing>

Three suited hands and asking bids (optional extension)



These big 4441 three headed dogs are almost impossible to bid in standard methods. Partner will assume you are 5-4 when you make a forcing rebid, and when anyone introduces the fourth suit - well it's "fourth suit"! A strong 2♣ merely cramps the auction even further. I found the Roman convention handles them efficiently. [My method](#) is not for the squeamish, but to whet your appetite for the asking bids involved ..

2♣ - 2♦ **Interested?** Opener has shown a 4441 two loser hand short in clubs and nine
2NT - 3♣? Blue Club controls (A=2 K=1). You look at ♠ xxx ♥ Axxx ♦ Qx ♣ xxxx and
3♠ - 3NT? its now your call
4♠ - 5♣?

5NT - ? These are rare auctions involving a major memory overhead., but read more
in 2♣-2NT rebid showing a [strong 3 suiter](#)

<http://www.chrisryall.net/ryall.net/bridge/two/clubs.htm#threesuiters>

When opponents intervene



Worthy opponents will try to overcall, and if they can to preempt your strong club auctions. Some purity of style can help considerably. In my case 2♣ show a predictable 5 losers. I like agreements such as ..

- Responder's double as takeout, 2+ useful cards
- Responder's new suit as Kxxxx+ GF
- Responders NT as a stop rather than length, unless vul/nv
- Opener's double as takeout - 4441, 5440, or 25-27 NT and short.

- Opener's new suit forcing one round
- Opener's NT as natural; occasionally a solid minor and a stop
- Opener's cue as 2 suited

<http://www.chrisryall.net/ryall.net/bridge/two/clubs.htm#opponents>

Tip ♠ x Don't open these hands as 2♣ on simple 8 - 8½ trick 2-suiters. Prefer your
♥ AQJ9x (higher) major. This will rarely be passed out and well-trained partner should
♦ Ax raise on Qxx and a bust in any case. Should opponents pre-empt you can get
♣ AKxxx your second suit in. Good luck!



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