

BIDDING 23 – REPLYING TO WEAK 2s

2♥ 2NT

After opening a weak 2, most good partnerships use 2NT as some sort of ask as to the quality of the weak 2 opening. The bid is usually used to find if there is sufficient for game or not – if the weak 2 is minimal we stop at 3 of the major, if it is maximal we go to game in 4 of the major.

One advantage of this is that we can use the raise to 3 of the suit (eg 2H 3H) as a weak action designed to get in the way of the opponents, rather than as an invite. Consider this hand:

♠ Q43 ♥ A10876 ♦ 8 ♣ 9876

Say partner opens 2♠ and your right hand opponent doubles for take out. We know the opponents probably have game because we have only 6 points and partner has 6-9 points which leaves more than 25 points for the opponents. With 9 trumps between us (partner has 6 for the opening and you have 3) it is usually safe and effective to compete to the 3 level despite a point deficiency. However, just be a little careful when vulnerable or with a very weak flat hand.

A 3♠ raise on this hand puts the opponents under maximum pressure and takes away their bidding room. 4♥ might be quite wrong due to the break. 3NT might be wrong because of the stopper situation. 5 of a minor might be too high but 4 of a minor might not be high enough. It gives your opponents tough problems to solve.

Coming back to the 2NT ask, it is played in a number of ways (eg Ogust, feature ask). I think it is best played as a SHORTAGE ask. So, if I opened 2♥ and partner bids 2NT, these are the responses:

3♣/♦/♠ = singleton or void in the bid suit
3♥ = minimum hand (6-7ish) without a shortage
3NT = maximum hand (8-9) without a shortage

Consider these 2 hands:

- (1) ♠ QJ10943 ♥ Q6 ♦ Q8 ♣ Q98
- (2) ♠ AQ10943 ♥ 87 ♦ 8 ♣ 9876

Hand 1 with its 9 HCPs would be described as a maximum on most systems. However, it's not a very nice hand – the queens by themselves in the side suits are easy prey and it's an 8 ½ loser hand which is usually a little weak to open a weak 2 on.

Hand 2 with its 6 points would be described as a minimum on most systems. However, the 6 points are working together in a suit and the shortage makes the hand a 7 loser.

A SHORTAGE ALMOST ALWAYS MAKES THE WEAK 2 A MAXIMAL HAND.

My young opponents (trained by international professional Alex Smirnov) used this system to good effect against me in the recent Gold Coast teams:

Dealer: W
Vul: N/S

	♠ 8		
	♥ KQJ763		
	♦ 763		
	♣ K64		
♠ AK93		♠ J10765	
♥ 854		♥ 102	
♦ 108		♦ J94	
♣ 9832		♣ Q75	
	♠ Q42		
	♥ A9		
	♦ AKQ52		
	♣ AJ10		

W	N	E	S
P	2♥	P	2NT
P	3♠ (1)	P	4NT
P	5♣ (2)	P	5♦ (3)
P	6♣ (4)	P	6♥
P	P	P	P

- (1) Shortage in spades
- (2) 1 keycard – definitely the ♥K as you shouldn't respond with a shortage bid with a singleton ace
- (3) Where's the trump Q?
- (4) I have the trump Q and the ♣K.

Only 10/70 pairs in a very strong field found this 29 point slam. My South opponent, knowing that the losers in spades were confined to 1, could see the potential slam possibilities on the hand – perhaps 6 hearts, 5 diamonds and the ♣A. A Roman Keycard Blackwood sequence found the ♥KQ and the ♣K giving an easy 11 tricks (6 hearts, ♦AKQ, and ♣AK) with an almost certain further trick in diamonds for 12.