

Only open 2♣ when really necessary

NG34Bridge

A strong Acol 2♣ opening bid shows either any 23+ balanced or semi balanced hand, or a 16+ HCP hand with at least 9/10 playing tricks and a very good major/minor. For example, you can open 2♣ with this hand: ♠ - ♥AK86 ♦A2 ♣ AKQ1086, even though it has only 20 HCP.

However, a 2♣ opening bid should be made only when really necessary, because it takes up a lot of valuable bidding space before either partner any real idea of what sort of hand the other partner has. Use it only when there is a real possibility that game will be missed even if partner is too weak to scrape together a 1NT dustbin response to a your 1 level opening bid (i.e. he has 0-5 HCP). Ask yourself this - if he can't muster a response of any sort, what are your chances of making game? Then weigh up the risk of missing game if he passes your 1-level opening bid vs. the risk of ending up in the wrong contract if you open 2♣ with an awkward 21 HCP hand.

In standard Acol there are often more effective ways of describing a 19-21 HCP unbalanced hand by opening at the 1 level and making a rebid that quickly conveys the strength of your hand to partner. These are not conventions – they are as fundamental to Acol as knowing that 1♠ -2♥ shows 9+ HCP and five hearts - not something you would expect to have to agree with a pick up partner. But they are often poorly understood, if at all. Before discussing them, let's look at some examples of how inefficient a 2♣ opening bid can be when you have a highly distributional hand in the 19-21 point range.

Example 1:

Suppose you have ♠- ♥AK86 ♦A ♣AKQ10865. You have 20 HCP and nine playing tricks. The bidding goes 2♣ – 2♦ – 3♣ – 3NT - 4♥ - ? You have to bid at the **FOUR** level before partner has any real idea what sort of hand you have. And even then, if you are prepared to bid 2♣ with anything from 8/9 playing tricks to 11 playing tricks depending on the look of your hand, partner won't know what to do. Should he pass? Should he bid 4NT (RKCB)? Which suit is trumps – clubs or hearts?

And what do you know about partner's hand? If he must not stop bidding below game, he may have a bust. But he may have 7 HCP including the ♠A, ♥Q and three small clubs!!

You have no need to open 2♣. There is little risk of missing game, unless you bid badly. You need two tricks from partner to make 5♣. What are the odds on him having ♥QJxx, or ♥Q and ♦K, and no other points? With any other holding and fewer than 6 HCP he cannot give you more than one trick. And if he is void in clubs the odds are that the six outstanding clubs will break 4-2 and you will lose a club trick to the ♣J.

If you open 1♣ and then make a "jump shift" in hearts this describes your hand perfectly. – 19+HCP, a very strong 6+ club suit and a four card second suit. You now have lots of room to explore the best contract, including slam.

Example 2

You have ♠AK9 ♥AKQ1086 ♦Q32 ♣J. You have 19 HCP and eight playing tricks. Supposing the auction goes 2♣ – 2♦ – 2♥ – 3♣ - ? What do you bid next? You should not open 2♣ - it is unnecessary and risky. Even if you played strong 2's you would not need

to open 2♥. There is no risk of missing game if you open 1♥. If partner has only five points he can only deliver one trick (♦A or ♣A).

Open 1♥. If partner responds at the 1 level, bid 4♥. This shows 19+ HCP. If partner responds at the 2 level, jump rebid hearts – 1♥ – 2♣ – 3♥. This shows 16+ HCP – game forcing as the partnership has enough points for game. This leaves plenty of room for communication to find the best contract, including slam.

Some ways of avoiding having to open 2♣ with a marginal distributional hand

If you open in a suit at the 1 level and partner responds 1NT or in a new suit, the following rebids let partner know your strength and shape right away :

1. Bid game in partner's major after a 1 level response: 1♥-1♠-4♠ : 19+ HCP
2. Jump raise partner's minor to the 4 level: 1♠ – 2♣ –4♣: 19+ HCP
3. Jump to game in your suit after a 1 level response: 1♥-1♠-4♥: 19+HCP & 6+ cards
4. Make a reverse bid 1♣-1♠-2♦: 16+ HCP unlimited
5. Jump in a new suit (jump shift) 1♥-1♠-3♣: 6+ very good cards in your first suit, 4+ cards in your second suit, and 19+ HCP unlimited after a 1 level response, 16+HCP unlimited after a 2 level response.

The last two (reverses and jump shifts) are among the least understood by intermediate level bridge players, although they are fundamental limit bids not only in Acol but in Standard American and other systems. **A 'jump shift' is unequivocally GAME FORCING.** After a 1 level response opener needs 19+HCP to jump shift, as partner has only promised 6 HCP. After a 2 level response a 'jump shift' only requires 16+ HCP, as partner has promised 9 HCP. The jump shift is a very powerful and efficient bid. After opener's second bid responder has a very clear idea of opener's strength and shape at the 2 level, leaving plenty of room for conversation about the best contract.