



2nd April, 2008

Convention of the Week

WEAK TWOS (Part 1)

In today's "standard" methods, an opening bid of 2♣ is used as an artificial bid showing a very strong hand. The other 2-of-a-suit openings usually show weak hands, typically with 6 cards in the bid suit, and a HCP range of around 5-10. Weak Twos are preemptive bids, of course, and their primary goal is to disrupt the opponents' auction by taking away their bidding space.

♠ AQT765 ♥ K5 ♦ J72 ♣ 98

A classic Weak 2♠ bid ... a good 6-card suit, and 10 HCPs. This is at the top end of the range, if the hand were any stronger we'd prefer to open this 1♠.

♠ KQT965 ♥ 8 ♦ 97 ♣ 9852

Another Weak 2♠ bid ... good suit, but only 5 HCPs, so a minimum for the bid. This is exactly how we like our preempts to be ... good offensive values, with little or no defense. In fact, this one is so pure a preempt that we would be tempted to open it 3♠, certainly when non-vulnerable.

♠ Q76432 ♥ A873 ♦ -- ♣ A75

As we shall see in a moment, this hand is a poster-child for when *not to* open a Weak Two ... the suit is weak, the hand is too strong, way too much stuff outside, a 4-card major ... we might be able to overlook the odd flaw here and there, but this hand has too many.

We mentioned an upper limit of 10 HCP's, but many partnerships prefer 11 HCP's. That is inconsistent with the Rule of Twenty, so if you like slightly light opening bids, then it is logical that your Weak Twos should not have 11 HCP's.

Criteria for Weak Twos

Looking beyond the obvious criteria of a long suit and that 5-10 point range, here are some of the other factors that go into the decision as to whether or not to open with a Weak Two bid.

Suit Quality: Some partnerships have quite rigid requirements for the quality of the trump suit, such as 2 of the top 3, or 3 of the top 5. Of course, it improves the accuracy of our bidding if we can count on a specific trump quality, but, on the other hand, the more rigid the requirements, the less frequently we will get to use the bid. We prefer to be more laissez-faire when it comes to suit quality, viewing it as just one on several factors. Sure, we prefer to have a good suit when we preempt, but that is not always what we are dealt.

Defensive Values: The ideal preempt contains not much in the way of defense. In the case of a Weak Two, it's fine to have an outside Ace somewhere, but, with much more than that, the hand starts to become more suited for defense, less suited for offense. In other words, less like a preempt.

Suit Length: Normally, a Weak Two has a 6-card suit, no more, no less. With 7 you would be more inclined to open a 3-bid, and with 5 you would be open with a 1-bid (if strong enough) or Pass. Opening a Weak Two with a 5-card suit is really not a great idea unless all the other conditions are right.

Four-Card Major: Some players make it a hard and fast rule never to open with a Weak Two holding a 4-card major side-suit, for fear of losing their 4-4 fit in that major. They have a point, of course, but we rate it as only a small minus, nothing that would prevent us from preempting the auction if the rest of the hand was right.

Vulnerability: This is a major factor in the decision on whether or not to preempt. Not vulnerable, we're emboldened to preempt more frequently, at a higher level, and on hands which may not be picture-perfect. But, it's not only *our* vulnerability that matters, the *opponents'* vulnerability is also a factor. For example, when they are vulnerable and we are not (the so-called "favorable" vulnerability), we'll bend over backwards to get into the auction, and all those niceties about suit quality and suit length get pretty much thrown out of the window!

Position: There's a difference between preempting in 2nd seat and preempting in 3rd seat. In 3rd seat Partner is a passed hand, so we can preempt more freely, knowing that the disruption caused will be to our LHO, not to our Partner. Accordingly, we feel free to mix it up a bit, and our preempt need not be ideal, our passed Partner gives us some leeway. But in 2nd seat we must be more circumspect. Partner is an unpassed hand, and, if we throw in a dubious preempt, he may be the one who is inconvenienced by our antics. So, in 2nd seat, it pays to be quite well-behaved! How about 1st seat? Again, Partner is not a passed hand, but we also have *two* unpassed opponents ... the odds are 2 to 1 on an opponent having the best hand at the table. To summarize, 3rd seat is best for wild and woolly preempts, 2nd seat preempts should be more disciplined, and 1st seat preempts are somewhere in between.

Examples

OK, enough theory, let's put it into practice. Here are some sample hands, which we'll put under the microscope in three different situations:

A. **2nd seat, Red versus White:** in this inhospitable situation, our bids will need to be rock-solid!

B. **1st seat, Red versus Red:** In 1st seat, we're more inclined to preempt than in A, and the opponents are vulnerable, which also favors action by us. But let's not go crazy, we are also vulnerable, some caution is therefore indicated.

C. **3rd seat, White versus Red:** Hold onto your horses, it's perfect preempting situation!

For mnemonic convenience, let's call A, B, and C, respectively, Adverse, Between and Congenial.

♠ KQJT76 ♥ 8 ♦ T962 ♣ 84

Even though we have a paltry 6 HCPs, the suit is so good that we have no qualms about 2♠ even when Adverse. But, when we get to Congenial, we'd say that 3♠ is the least we can do.

♠ KJ8743 ♥ 82 ♦ 96 ♣ K42

Not really up to snuff for Adverse action, OK in other situations.

♠ QT9542 ♥ A954 ♦ -- ♣ A86

Yes, regardless of the conditions, this hand is just a plain old one-bid, just too good (and defensive) a hand with which to be preempting. At Congenial, some players might feel constrained to preempt. but

this is not a good idea in our opinion. We would rather bid constructively, game is not out of the question (even opposite a passed hand), and we don't want to shut out Hearts as a place to play.

♠ Q97654 ♥ A87 ♦ K8 ♣ T6

With a weak suit and substantial stuff outside, only preempt with this one under Congenial conditions.

♠ KQJT7 ♥ 8 ♦ QJT6 ♣ 83

If you have to open a Weak Two with a 5-card suit, then this is it ... nice shape, good playing strength, very little defense. Even so, we would not bid 2♠ at Adverse, and would be iffy about bidding when Between. But, at Congenial, no problem!

♠ QJT954 ♥ KJT6 ♦ 87 ♣ 3

That Spade suit is preempt-perfect suit, but we'd also be nervous about that chunky 4-card Heart suit when Partner remains an unpassed hand. This one is awfully tempting, even at Adverse, consider us in-between on this one. If the conditions are Between, we'd bid 2♠. But, by the time we reach Congenial conditions, this is a full-blooded 3♠ preempt, even 2♠ is not enough!

♠ QJT954 ♥ 87 ♦ KJT6 ♣ 3

This is the previous hand with the red suits reversed. Now the hand is more preempt-suitable, that (relatively minor) defect of the 4-card major being removed. So, it's 2♠ at Adverse, 3♠ at Congenial, and whichever of the two you prefer when the conditions are Between.

Summary

What does all of this tell us? Hopefully, that there are no hard-and-fast rules when it comes to opening a Weak Two, and that it's not sufficient to look at just our hand, we must also be aware of the conditions (vulnerability and position).

As for the follow-up to Weak Twos, and also the defense to Weak Twos, we'll have to leave those to another time. Considering the number of times that these situations come up in real life (4 or 5 times a session?), it's worth some partnership time. Visit www.wednesdaygame.com for more on the subject.

Happy preempting, it drives the opponents crazy!