

Strong Opening Bids

Sometimes we get a hand that is so strong we might be able to make a game contract even if partner has less than 6 points.

To eliminate the risk of partner passing we open a strong bid which virtually forces partner to make a response.

These are the strong bids in Benji Acol:

2NT – Used for balanced hands with 20-22 points

2C – Used for either balanced hands with more than 22 points, or strong hands with a good suit

2D – Used for any hand where opener can guarantee to make a game contract even if partner has no points and little or no trump support

Let's look at them in detail.

2NT

In principle this shows a balanced hand with 20-22 points.

Because there are only 3 strong bids available, and the bidding starts at a high level, we have to be more flexible about what we considered balanced.

Thus a 2NT might contain a 5 card major, or a 6 card minor, be a 5422 hand, or have a singleton Ace. The important things are that it won't contain a 6 card Major, nor have any suit completely unguarded.

Typical 2NT Openers:

- ♠ KQ T6
- ♥ KQ 43
- ♦ A J 4
- ♣ A J 3

A classic 2NT Opener

- ♠ KQ T 6 4
- ♥ KQ J 3
- ♦ A J 4
- ♣ A

A singleton, but an Ace so the suit is guarded

- ♠ K 3 2
- ♥ A 5
- ♦ A J 4
- ♣ A K J 8 6 4

A six card Minor, but all suits are guarded

Hands on which you would NOT open 2NT:

- ♠ KQ32
- ♥ AQ4
- ♦ Q
- ♣ AKJ86

The diamond suit is unguarded

- ♠ KQJ32
- ♥ AKT74
- ♦ A
- ♣ K6

The two 5 card Majors make it more sensible to open 2C (or possibly even 1S).

Responses to 2NT

They are similar to 1NT responses but with a different point range.

3♣ is Stayman and works exactly the same as 2♣ over 1NT.

3♦ and 3♥ are Transfers to 3♥ and 3♠ respectively (the same as 2♦ and 2♥ over 1NT).

If you have less than 4 points, either Pass or use Transfers to make a weak takeout in Hearts or Spades. Do not try to make a weak takeout in a minor.

If you have 5+ points, either use Stayman / Transfers to find a major fit, or bid 3NT.

2C

This is a general catchall for hands where you may be able to make a game contract even if partner has less than 6 points. They are typically shapely and single suited, or balanced (as defined in the 2NT bid) hands with more than 22 points.

Typical 2C Openers:

- ♠ KJ532
- ♥ AKT7
- ♦ A2
- ♣ AKJ

23 points, balanced

- ♠ AKJT532
- ♥ 5
- ♦ A2
- ♣ AK6

Partner only needs ♠ Q (or 3 spades, or ♥A, or ♦K, or ♣Q...) for game to make.

Responses to 2C

Bid 2♦. This allows partner to further describe their hand, rebidding NT with a balanced hand and a suit with a strong single suiter. In the case of the first hand above partner would rebid 2NT, and in the second, 2♠. This 2♦ bid is called a relay and you must bid it (unless the opposition intervene).

2D

A hand on which you would bid 2♦ is very similar to a 2♣ bid hand, only with more points / extreme shape.

Typical 2D Openers:

- ♠ AKJ5
- ♥ AKT7
- ♦ AQ5
- ♣ AT6

25 points, balanced

- ♠ AKQJT532
- ♥ –
- ♦ A2
- ♣ AK6

10 Tricks in this hand alone.

Responses to 2D

Bid 2♥. This allows partner to further describe their hand, rebidding NT with a balanced hand and a suit with a strong single suiter. In the case of the first hand above partner would rebid 2NT, and in the second, 2♠. This 2♥ bid is called a relay and you must bid it (unless the opposition intervene).

Whenever partner opens 2♦, it is forcing to game (you cannot pass if the contract is at game level), with one exception:

The sequence 2♦-2♥-2NT sequence shows 25-26 points, so with no points pass the 2NT.

Stayman and Transfers

It is a matter of partnership agreement, but it is a good idea to play Stayman and Transfers over the sequences 2♣-2♦-2NT and 2♦-2♥-2NT.

Although they are not actually opening NT bids they effectively act like them because unlike (say) 1C-1H-1NT no natural suits have been bid.

Strong Balanced Hands

Point Count	Bidding Sequence
20-22	2NT
23-24	2♣-2♦-2NT
25-26	2♦-2♥-2NT
27-28	2♣-2♦-3NT
29-30	2♦-2♥-3NT
31+	Panic!