

Benjaminised Weak Twos



Weak Twos in the majors, as part of the Benjaminised Acol system of bidding, have become very popular at club level; they are a pre-empt at the two-level rather than the three-level.

Two important things to note before we start our journey into Benjaminised Acol are:

1. You have to agree that you are playing Weak Twos with your partner – if you do so, then you need to show Strong Twos in a different way, as we shall see. (Note, however, that this article is not designed to show you how to bid strong hands, although for the sake of completeness all two-level bids are described.)
2. The rest of your system (one-level and three-level openings) remain the same – that is, you still open a weak three with 5-9 pts and a seven-card suit.

Benjaminised Acol (Acol with Weak Twos)

The system of Weak and Strong Twos described below was the invention of Albert Benjamin, hence the name “Benjaminised Acol” (or ‘Benji Acol’ for short). This is the system:

- 2♣ ‘Acol Two’ in *any* suit
- 2♦ 23+ points or Game Force (equivalent to the Acol 2♣)
- 2♥ 6-10 points, six-card heart suit
- 2♠ 6-10 points, six-card spade suit

The 2♣ Bid

The 2♣ opening bid is used to show any hand worthy of a Strong Two opening in any suit; in traditional Acol that is defined as ‘A strong hand that can make eight tricks by itself’. The same guidelines are used in Benji Acol, although, if the strong suit is a minor, it should be a trick stronger, because, as you will see, you have to show it at the three level.

In response to the 2♣ opening, your partner closes his eyes and bids 2♦ (a relay), and then you can show your suit:

- 2♥ 8 playing tricks in hearts
- 2♠ 8 playing tricks in spades
- 3♣ 9 playing tricks in clubs
- 3♦ 9 playing tricks in diamonds

Yes, it really is worth closing your eyes as responder, because this allows the system to work smoothly. The 2♦ response is *not* a negative bid, it is just a relay which allows partner to show his hand.

After opener has shown his hand, then responder can bid as he would if partner had opened a Strong Two. For instance, if the auction has gone 2♣ – 2♦ – 2♥ (i.e. opener has a strong two in hearts), now responder can pretend that his partner simply opened ‘2♥ strong’, which means that the negative is still 2NT.

This is quite a system, for it allows you to show your Strong Twos in the majors at the same level as in standard Acol. The only disadvantage is that you have to bid to 3♦ to show strong diamonds, but this is coupled with the advantage of being able to show a strong hand with clubs.

It is worth repeating, however, that on many strongish hands with long minors it is preferable to open at the one level; only if you have nine tricks in your own hand, should you open with the 2♣ bid.

Here are two simple examples:

♠ A K Q J 10 4		♠ 8 6 3
♥ Q 9 2		♥ 4 3
♦ A K 6		♦ 4 3
♣ 2		♣ A 10 9 7 6 3

West	East
2♣	2♦
2♠	4♠
End	

Eight playing-tricks in spades, so West shows a strong two by opening 2♣. East responds 2♦, obediently. Now West shows his spades, and East simply raises this to game: he has no ambitions to go further, but he does have enough for two tricks to add to partner’s eight.

♠ 9		♠ K Q 7 6 3
♥ A 9		♥ K 3
♦ A 8 6		♦ 9 4 3 2
♣ A K Q J 7 4 3		♣ 6 2

West	East
2♣	2♦
3♣	3♠
3NT	End

Nine playing tricks in clubs, so West uses the 2♣ opening and rebids 3♣ over the relay. Now East rebids 3♠ naturally and West can bid the obvious 3NT.

The 2♦ Bid

The 2♦ opening is used as your *strongest opening bid*. It shows 23 or more points, or a hand that can make game by itself. The bid is used in exactly the same way as in traditional Acol, except that in Benjaminised Acol the negative response (0-7 points) is 2♥. It really is as straightforward as that!

Let us consider just one example:

♠ AK J		♠ 7 6 3
♥ A 9 2		♥ K 3
♦ A 8 6		♦ 9 5 3 2
♣ A K 4 3		♣ Q 6 5 2

West	East
2♦	2♥
2NT	3NT
End	

With 23 points and a balanced hand, West opens 2♦ as the system dictates. Partner responds with the 'new' negative

of 2♥. The 2NT rebid shows 23-24 points balanced as in normal Acoll and East can comfortably raise to 3NT.

Two things to note here are that 2♦ is your new strongest opening bid and secondly that 2♥ is a real *negative* response – unlike the relay response of 2♦ to 2♣.

Weak Twos

Now that your 2♥ and 2♠ openings are weak pre-emptive bids, let us start our discussion of Weak Twos by considering how many points and what kind of suit they show .

A. HIGH-CARD-POINT STRENGTH: 6-10.

The higher limit is obvious, because with 11 points and a six-card suit you have enough strength to open. The lower range can be stretched down to 5 points if all the points are in the long suit, with a little extra inner strength, i.e. K-Q-10-9-4-3 and A-J-10-9-4-3 are worth opening even with no points outside (except if you are vulnerable against non-vulnerable opponents, when it pays to be less optimistic!).

B. STRENGTH OF SUIT: it is important to have a certain amount of strength in your suit. Do not open a Weak Two if your suit is horrible: you are simply mis-describing your hand.

Below is an outline of how strong your suit should be, but these are only guidelines; as you get used to playing this system you will be

able to decide for yourself how strong or weak you want to play your suits. You should have:

TWO of the **TOP FOUR HONOURS**, or **THREE** of the **TOP SIX CARDS**.

A-K-9-8-7-6
K-Q-J-7-6-5
A-J-10-5-4-3
Q-J-10-5-4-3 } are excellent suits

K-J-7-6-5-4
A-10-9-4-3-2
Q-J-8-7-6-5
J-10-9-7-6-5 } would just qualify

Q-7-6-5-4-3
J-10-7-4-3-2 } would *not* qualify

A-10-7-6-5-4 } would be

K-10-8-7-6-5 borderline

Note that when you are non-vulnerable you can be more flexible.

Responding to Weak Twos

The most common response to a Weak Two is 'pass'.

Remember that Weak Twos are pre-emptive bids, so to respond to them you need a similar strength to that required to respond to a weak three:

- Without support you need at least 16 points to make a strong response.
- With support, however, you can sometimes respond with nothing.

There are three different types of response other than pass:

1. The main strong option over a Weak Two is 2NT, which is a conventional response (the 'Ogust' convention) that will ask the opening bidder to describe his hand accurately.
2. A change-of-suit response is *very* unusual, and is usually made with a very strong hand that does not want to play in the opened suit; a change of suit is *forcing* for one round showing at least a good five-card suit. This is very similar to a

change-of-suit response to a three-level pre-empt. It is a very rare response and I will not discuss it further here.

3. Finally, a raise of the Weak Two is *weak* and *pre-emptive*, not *invitational* (this is important): it simply extends the pre-empt and, as the example hands will show, this can make life very difficult for your opponents.

Responding to the 2NT Enquiry

As suggested above, the 2NT response to a Weak Two is *strong* and *conventional*; it usually shows 16+ points and it asks opener to describe his hand. The opening bidder responds according to the table

below, describing the strength of his suit and the number of points he holds.

I promise that this is the last convention involved and, as you can

imagine, it does take a little getting used to. Bear with it – it is worth it in the long run!

2♥ – 2NT } Over the forcing 2NT
2♠ – 2NT } the responses are:

	SUIT QUALITY	HCP
3♣	weak	weak
3♦	strong	weak
3♥	weak	strong
3♠	strong	strong

They are not quite as difficult as at first might seem: with a very bad hand you bid the lowest response, 3♣ and with a very good hand you bid the highest, 3♠. To remember the two responses in between, I usually think like this: 'the higher you bid the more points you need' and thus 3♦ shows good suit, but bad points, whilst 3♥ the higher bid, shows the good points, but bad suit.

There is one other possible response to 2NT: 3NT, which would show specifically A-K-Q-x-x in the major suit.

This does seem a bit convoluted but what it means is that you can bid very accurately over a Weak Two, which is why the system is so popular. Unlike over a weak-three opening from your partner when you often have to guess the final contract, over a Weak Two you can have an educated auction and, more often than not, reach the best final contract.

How do you know when a suit is strong?

This is very simple: a suit is strong *if, and only if*, you hold *two of the top three honours*. So K-Q-6-5-4-3 counts as a strong suit, whilst A-J-10-9-8-7 counts as a weak suit.

The reason for this is that it is so important to know about the top three

trump honours, because if you and your partner have an eight-card fit and hold all the top honours, you can be pretty hopeful of six tricks in the suit.

What about points?

STRONG = 9 or 10 points

WEAK = 6 or 7 pts

With 8 points you have to judge whether the point-count is good or bad. For example:

Hand A	Hand B
♠ K Q 10 7 6 5	♠ J 10 9 5 4 3
♥ Q 7 5	♥ A K 7
♦ J 6	♦ 8 6 5
♣ 7 6	♣ 4
GOOD SUIT BAD POINTS 3♦	BAD SUIT GOOD POINTS 3♥

You open 2♠ on both *Hands A* and *B* above and your partner responds 2NT. What is your reply?

Well, the question about the suit is simple (strong in *Hand A* and weak in *Hand B*), but what about the points? Both hands have 8 points, so you need to judge whether they are strong or weak.

On *Hand A* you are going to say that you have a strong suit, so take a look outside the suit and see if you think the hand merits a ‘good points’ response. Certainly not: you only have a meagre jack and queen, both unsupported – so respond 3♦. *Hand B*, conversely, has two certain tricks outside its ‘bad’ suit, as well as holding ♠10-9 to bolster the suit, hence it is worth a ‘strong’ response – bid 3♥.

The 2NT Enquiry

in Action

If you are thoroughly confused by now, what you really need are plenty of examples; well, that is exactly what you are going to get!

Our first example shows how accurate the bidding can be:

♠ K Q J 10 9 7	♠ A 2
♥ 8 7 6	♥ A 3 2
♦ 7 6	♦ A 9 8 3 2
♣ 6 4	♣ A 10 3

West	East
2♠	2NT
3♦	3NT
End	

West has a good hand for a Weak Two. East has a lovely hand, and thus inquires with the 2NT bid. West describes his hand: *good suit, poor points* – hence 3♦. Now clever East can count nine tricks, because with his ♠A and West’s promised ♠K-Q there are six spade tricks to go with his three other aces; so he bids 3NT, rather than 3♠ or the forlorn 4♠.

The next two diagrams show how the 2NT response is normally used:

Diagram A	
♠ Q 10 9 8 7 3	♠ J 2
♥ J 7 6	♥ A K 2
♦ K 6	♦ A Q J 3 2
♣ 6 4	♣ Q 8 3

West	East
2♠	2NT
3♣	3♠
End	

Diagram B	
♠ K Q 10 9 8 3	♠ J 2
♥ J 7 6	♥ A K 2
♦ K 6	♦ A Q J 3 2
♣ 6 4	♣ Q 8 3

West	East
2♠	2NT
3♠	4♠
End	

In these two examples, the responding hand is the same: it is strong, but cannot be sure of game. Bidding 2NT asks the Weak-Two bidder to describe his hand.

In *Diagram A*, West has a *weak* suit and *poor* points, so bids 3♣.

In *Diagram B*, West has a *good* suit and *good* points, so bids 3♠.

East uses these responses to stay out of game in *Diagram A*, and to bid on to game in *Diagram B*. As you can see, the only difference between the two West hands is the king of spades, so in *Diagram A* there are four simple losers (the ace and king of spades, and the ace and king of clubs), whereas in *Diagram B* there are just the three losers: the ace of spades, and the ace and king of clubs.

Basically, by finding out how strong your partner is, you can decide whether game is on, hence you do not need the 3♠ response to be invitational, which leads us on to the next point.

Raising the Ante

Let us now look at the idea of raising the Weak Two and thus *extending the pre-empt* (or raising the ante!).

This is a very important aspect of Weak Twos, and greatly increases the disruption they can cause. If your partner opens with a Weak Two and you have a weak hand with support, you can be pretty sure that your opponents will have a game on and you should thus make life as difficult as possible for them.

Dealer: West. N/S Vul.	
♠ 10	♠ 8 5 3
♥ Q J 9 7 6	♥ 2
♦ J 10 8 7	♦ K Q 6 5 4 3
♣ A 10 7	♣ J 8 2
♠ A K 7 6 4 2	♠ Q J 9
♥ 5 4 3	♥ A K 10 8
♦ 9 2	♦ A
♣ 6 3	♣ K Q 9 5 4

West	East
2♠	3♠

West starts with 2♠ and North passes. East is very weak, but he has great support for spades and good shape. Now is the time to bid 3♠ – pre-emptive – as

this makes South’s life a misery! South could double for take-out, but this will take his side beyond 3NT, so he might try 3NT instead. This will not be a disaster because it will make at least eleven tricks, but +660 is not very good compared with +1430 for 6♥!

Had East passed the 2♠ opening, then North and South would have much more room to explore: South might start with a double and, after North's jump to 4♥, they may well have reached 6♥.

You might ask about the risks about such bidding. Well, on this hand the vulnerability was in our favour and this always makes quite a difference. However, more poignant is your distribution and the size of your fit. Whenever you have a big fit with a little distribution you will find you can make an amazing number of tricks relative to your strength. On this deal, East-West have only a combined 13 points, but seven easy tricks.

In fact, here East might even have risked a 4♠ bid straight away, again leaving South in a pickle; even if doubled, this will only give away 500 points – less than the 600+ available for any game, let alone a slam.

Basically, you can raise the pre-empt on any hand with reasonable support and some distribution. However, try not to consider raising on flat hands: you will contribute very little to the play, whereas with a singleton – as on the deal above – you are sure of making extra tricks if your side is declaring, where there will be none in defence.

Just one more example:

♠ 7 6 5		♠ AK 4
♥ K Q J 5 4 3		♥ 2
♦ 6		♦ K Q 7 3 2
♣ K 6 4		♣ Q J 8 3

West	East
2♥	Pass

It is important to remember how much strength that you need to respond to a Weak Two without support for your partner's suit. East must pass on this type of hand – even with his partner turning up with a maximum hand (Good suit & Good points), 4♥ is likely to be defeated by the expected 4-2 break in trumps.

An Optional Add-on

That is a lot to take in and so I have left this last optional add-on to the end.

OPTIONAL BALANCED HAND BIDDING

NEW OPTION	STANDARD ACOL
2NT = 19-20	2NT = 20-22
2♣-2♦-2NT = 21-22	2♣-2♦-2NT = 23-24
2♦-2♥-2NT = 23-24	

NOTE: over all of these no-trump rebids, your normal conventions can be used.

You will have noticed on page xx that after your Benji 2♣ opening followed by the 2♦ relay, there was a rebid missing: we considered rebids of 2♥, 2♠, 3♣, 3♦, but not 2NT. This can be used to show a strong balanced hand, so that you can have a system such as the one outlined in the 'New Option'.

In the 'New Option' scheme, you still have available a 23-24 2NT rebid, but the suggested system allows you to have two new 2-point ranges which are slightly more accurate.

There is no need to have these extra bids: opening 2NT on just 19 points is a little dangerous and remembering which bid means what can be difficult, but they just show the flexibility of the Benji System.

Here is an example of bidding a 22-point balanced hand in this new system:

♠ K Q 3		♠ 2
♥ AJ 7 6		♥ K 9 8 2
♦ AK 6		♦ Q 5 4 3 2
♣ AJ 4		♣ 8 3 2

West	East
2♣	2♦
2NT	3♣*
3♥	4♥
End	

* Stayman

A look at the table above, shows you should open 2♣ and then over the 2♦ relay rebid 2NT. Now your partnership can use your conventions and here East employs Stayman to which West replies 3♥ and the partnership find the much better major-suit game.

All new systems take a lot of getting used to, so bide your time. Your results may well take a dip at first, but eventually you will find Weak Twos an invaluable tool, both for getting good results and also for entertainment value. ■