

Fifth Chair



Weak Two Bids

By Sue Himel

When Weak 2 bids first became popular in the 60's, they were used as a mild preempt that was supposed to be semi-constructive. Various rules about your trump holding and distribution were very restrictive. These days a much looser approach is used. I teach students criteria for opening a Weak 2 somewhere in between the original criteria and today's style. Since Nov/Int students are learning to visualize their partner's hand during the auction, I like to have students use a reasonable approach to Weak 2's so that partners will not have such a wide range of hands to cope with. As you gain experience and expertise, you and your favorite partners will develop your own style and criteria for these bids.

Criteria for opening a weak 2 bid:

1st and 2nd Chair

- 2 of the top 3 or 3 of the 5 honors
- a 6-card suit
- no side 4-card major
- most values in your suit
- 6-11 HCP (although if 11 it should not meet the criteria for an opening hand)

2 of the top 3 or 3 of the 5 honors

This is rather self explanatory. Of course, your suit can be better than this. These are minimum suit requirements. You may wish to make exceptions, depending on the Vulnerability, form of scoring, your position at the table, strength and style of your opponents, etc.

For example: QJ9xxx This does not strictly meet the requirements for 3 of the 5 honors, but it is a pretty good suit. If you have a decent card outside (A or K) open with a Weak 2 since most of the field will also.

In second chair I am most conservative about preempting. In first chair your odds are 2:1 that you are preempting the opponents; in second chair, after RHO passes, the odds are only 50-50 that you are preempting the opponents instead of partner.

A 6-card suit

I know that players are experimenting with 5-card Weak 2 bids. I rarely do this in 1st or 2nd chair. Bidding at the 2-level on a 5-card suit is dangerous - and not just because we may go set. Partner will count on a 6-card suit when deciding to further the preempt, sacrifice, or double the opponent's contract. Competitive bidding is challenging enough without giving partner another uncertainty to deal with.

No side 4-card major

When your hand is 6-4 with a 4-card major and another 6-card suit, your hand will make a wonderful dummy if partner has 4 cards in your 4-card major. By opening a Weak 2 in your 6-card suit, you lose the 4-4 fit. That could be a disaster at MP's. Unfortunately, after an opening Weak 2 bid, there is no way to

uncover the 4-4 fit. I recommend you pass initially on hands with a side 4-card major and then make a jump overcall later, if the auction lends itself to that action.

Most values in your suit

Suppose you hold: Axx,QJTxxx,Kxx,x Your hand meets the suit quality and HCP criteria for a Weak 2 bid. But, what will you do if partner bids 2NT over your 2H bid? Will you show the S A? Partner may not need that card - he may need to know about the D K. Similarly, if you show the D K, he may need to know about the spade honor. And, you hold 1 1/2 defensive tricks outside of your heart suit. Partner will not count on that if the opponents get too high in the bidding. Especially at MP's, it is important to double when the opponents are going down 2 tricks.

6-11 HCP's (although if 11 should not meet the criteria for an opening hand)

If you hold: Axx,AQJxxx,xx,xx This hand contains 2 1/2 defensive tricks and also meets the Rule of 20 criteria for opening the bidding. (Rule of 20: If the HCP's and Number of Cards in your 2 longest suits add up to 20, open the bidding). If you were to open with 2H on this hand, partner would never know your hand was this good. Remember, your hand could be as bad as xxx,KQJxxx,xx,xx. How is partner to tell the difference?

Opening with a Weak 2 in 3rd Chair

Once partner is a passed hand, if you can tell from your hand that the chance for game is negligible, you are free to break the rules for opening a Weak 2.

P:P: And you hold: xx,KQTxxx,xx,xxx At favorable vulnerability, you can open this with 2H. The opponents probably have a game, so make them work to find it by bidding 2H here.

P:P: And you hold: KJxxxx,Ax,Qxx,xx Your suit does not meet the Weak 2 requirements and you have most of your points outside of the spade suit. You could open with 1S here (a light 3rd seat opener) but 2S is better. This will give the opponent's more difficulty. You and partner are not likely to have a game unless partner has an unusual distributional hand. And, with wild distribution, partner will likely bid a game anyway to keep the opponents out of their game.

P:P: And you hold: KQJTxx, xx, Axxx,xx In 3rd seat I would open this 5-card spade suit with 2S. The suit is good, I am not balanced, and we are unlikely to have a game. Partner may err in a competitive auction here, but on this hand, in 3rd seat, I am willing to risk it for the preemptive value of the 2S bid.

Opening a Weak 2 in 4th Chair

Preempts in 4th chair show hands that are almost or just barely opening bids. Since the other 3 players have passed, there is no real reason to preempt on a weaker hand. Only open a Weak 2 with enough values that you expect to make 2 or 3 in that suit with some of the values marked in your partner's hand. Open a Weak 2 in 4th chair with the following types of hands:

AQTxxx, KQx, xx,xx

Qxx,KQJxxx,Axx,x

xx,QJx,AKxxxx,Jx

4th chair Weak 2 bids are very descriptive and the passed hand partner should pass with most balanced hands unless raising to the 3-level (with 3 card or longer trump support) to keep the opponents from balancing.

Responding to Partner's Weak 2 Bid

When partner opens with a Weak 2, she can hold a wide range of hands. When you, as the responder, hold a good hand, this can be a problem. Is partner on the TOP or BOTTOM of her bid? How good is the trump suit? Does partner have 3-card support for your major? For that reason, the 2NT response to a Weak 2 bid has been reserved as a Forcing bid, asking partner to further describe her hand. New suits are also forcing. When partner does open a Weak 2, if you plan to bid 2NT (or bid a new suit), be sure that your side will be safe at the 3-level. Nothing is worse than going down 1 at the 3-level when you could have passed. Bidding 2NT over partner's Weak 2 bid requests that she bid as follows:

- With a minimum (6-8) Weak 2, merely rebid her suit.
- With a maximum (9-11) show an outside feature (Ace or King) by bidding that suit or bid 3NT with a solid trump suit.

Frequently, students ask how many points they need in order to bid more over partner's Weak 2 opener. I really don't have a good answer to that question. What you need are tricks - and they may not all have to be in Aces and Kings. I usually "give" partner this hand as a starting place: KQJxxx,xxx,xx,xx. The 3-card suit is an arbitrary selection - but you get the idea. Now that you have an idea of what partner may hold, try to decide what to do with each of these hands after partner opens in 1st or 2nd chair with 2S.

xx, AKxx, KQJx, QJx

If partner has the hand I suggested, then we have 4 losers - 1 S, 1 D, and 2C's. BUT, if she has an Ace or a King outside of her spade suit OR solid spades, we will have only 3 losers. At any rate, I can afford to bid 2NT here since we should be safe at the 3-level unless this is a very unlucky hand. If partner shows a solid suit or a D feature, bid 4S. 3NT is not a good contract since the opponents may clear the C suit right away. Then you will make only 9 tricks in 3NT when 4S will make 4. If partner shows a C feature, I would risk 3NT at MP's, but bid 4S at IMP's.

Axx,KQxx,x,Axxxx

Visualizing partner's hand, it looks like we have 3 losers - 1 H, 1 D, and 1 C. Even if partner has a bad hand, we should have a good play for game. If she has a better hand, we may make 11 tricks, or with a little luck, 12. Bid 4S.

xxx,x,Axxxx, Axx

This time it looks like we have 4 losers, one in each suit. (I am hoping that partner has doubletons in the minors.) If partner actually has a minor suit King, we will probably make 4S. If he does not have one the opponents will probably make 4H (We can win the minor suit Aces and 1 S trick, at most, if the spades are divided 3-1 as expected.) Bid 4S here. You are not sure if it is to make or a good sac against the opponents' 4H contract, but it is right to bid 4S here.

xxxx,x,KJxxxx,xx

Well, the opponents surely have a game this time. We should have no more than 5 or 6 losers here. At favorable Vulnerability (They are-We are not) bid 4S. If partner has the worst possible hand, and they double, we might go down 1 too many against their game, but that would be unlucky. Even if we are going down 1 too many, they may make an error and bid too much. Be careful not to bid to the 5-level in spades with this hand - you just may convince the opponents to bid a very makeable slam in hearts.

Partner opens the bidding with 2D

KJx,AKJxx,xx,Axx

Well, you may want to bid a game here, but which game? Or, game may be out of reach if partner has a poor hand and a nonsolid suit. If partner has 3-card heart support, 4H is the place to play. If not, then if partner has the C K, then 3NT looks right. Bid 2H here. It is absolutely forcing for 1 round. Partner should raise your hearts with 3-card support, bid a feature (Ace or King) in a side suit with a max, or return to his D suit with a minimum, no support, and no feature. After partner's response to your forcing 2H bid, you will be in a much better position to know where to place the contract.

When partner opens the bidding with a Weak 2, visualize the hand I gave you. Then if you can make a game opposite that hand - bid it. If you can make a game opposite that hand PLUS another A or K, bid 2NT and ask for a feature. If you hold a good 5-card major and can visualize making a game if partner has 3-card support, then bid your suit.