

The Nebulous 2♣ 2/1 Response

1♠ - 2♥ and 1M - 2♦ guarantee a 5+ card suit and game-forcing values. Subsequent bidding is natural, and can follow either the Lawrence or Bergen styles, depending on your preference.

1M - 2♣ becomes a nebulous game-forcing call. Responder will have either:
Any balanced game-forcing hand with 2+ clubs
A traditional game-forcing hand with clubs

Responder will clarify later which of the two hand types he holds. After an initial 1M - 2♣ start, my response structure is outlined below:

After 1♠ - 2♣:

2♦ = a waiting bid showing either diamonds, or any 5-3-3-2 (with any doubleton) hand with insufficient stoppers for 2NT. Since the initial 2♣ response was artificial, opener cannot assume clubs are stopped, so 2NT is a fairly uncommon rebid.

2♥ = 4+ hearts. Unchanged from standard.

2♠ = 6+ spades

2NT = balanced min with some semblance of stoppers in all suits

3♣ = 4+ clubs

3♦/♥ = splinter raises of clubs

1♥ - 2♣:

2♠ = 4-spades and no extras promised, Bergen style. (otherwise opener rebids as above).

As you can see, opener rebids naturally for the most part.

- The 2M rebid promises a 6+ card major, providing the benefits of the Bergen-style 2M rebid.
- The 2NT rebid promises a NT-oriented, stopper-rich hand similar to a Lawrence 2NT rebid.

"Raising" clubs as opener promises 4 clubs. Think of it as rebidding a club suit of your own, not raising since responder frequently holds only 2-3 clubs. Since opener did not splinter, the 3♣ promises exactly 5-2-2-4 distribution.

With a splinter raise, opener is artificially describing his pattern as 5-1-3-4, 5-3-1-4 or 5-1-2-5, 5-2-1-5. Responder will be enthused if he holds a 5+ card club suit and if he does not, his knowledge of opener's precise shape will help him judge whether 3NT is a good contract.

When opener is 5-4-1-3 or 5-1-4-3, he always rebids a second suit planning to bid 3♣ later to complete the description of his pattern.

Even though opener has no idea what responder holds when he responds 2♣, this method works well when responder is balanced. Opener now has space to begin describing his shape before responder bids 2NT. For example:

1♠-2♣; 2♠-2NT; 3♣

Opener has a 6-card major and 3+ card support for clubs. He is probably short in a red suit. Note that opener has described two features of his shape at a low level: long spades and a club fragment. If the auction had begun 1♠ - 2NT, he could only show one of those features by this point in the auction.

1♠-2♣; 2♥-2NT; 3♣

opener is exactly 5-4-1-3 or 5-4-0-4.

1♠-2♣; 3♦(splinter)

Opener is exactly 5-3-1-4 or 5-2-1-5.

In the above cases, opener's description of his shape leaves responder well placed to assess where the contract belongs.

Responder's rebid after 1♥ - 2♣; 2♦

Since 2♦ leaves the most bidding room, it is most easily adopted as the "holder" for hands not easily described with a natural bid. 2♦ is bid with most of the 5-3-3-2 family of hands or with a major and diamonds; opener will clarify later. For example:

1♠-2♣; 2♦-2♠; 2NT

Opener showed a minimum hand in the 5-3-3-2 family.

1♠-2♣; 2♦-2♠; 3♣

Opener had exactly five spades, one heart, four diamonds and three clubs.

1♠-2♣; 2♦-2NT; 3♦

Opener was 5-5 in spades and diamonds.

Responder's Continuations after 2♦

Responder's primary goal after opener's nebulous 2♦ rebid is to communicate whether he holds the balanced or the natural 2♣ hand type. His continuations are natural with one exception.

1M - 2♣; 2♦ - ?

2M = 3+ card support for opener's major (either balanced or unbalanced)

2oM = (two of the other major) Artificial. Shows an unbalanced hand with 5+ clubs.

2NT = natural and balanced.

3♣ = Excellent rebiddable clubs, needing only minimal support (e.g., KQJxxx).

3♦ = 4 diamonds, 5 clubs and an unbalanced hand.

3M = picture bid. Good spades and clubs, slammish.

3NT = balanced, very notrumpy 16-17 HCP.

4M = picture bid, no outside A or K (added DL 12-20-12)

When responder's hand is balanced, he will either:

- Show 3-card support for opener's major
- Rebid in NT

When responder's hand is unbalanced with 5+ clubs, he can either:

- Raise at his second turn with a fit
- Bid something other than 2M or 2NT

When responder does not fit opener's major, he frequently bids the other major (artificial). For example:

1♠-2♣; 2♦-2♥

This call says only that responder is unbalanced and does not fit opener's major. He could have any side suit shape. The purpose is to allow opener to show 3-card support for responder's club suit, at the 3-level, if he has it. Without this convention, responder would frequently have to rebid 3♣ to show his real club suit and opener would then be forced to raise to 4♣ if he wanted to show a fit. By using 2 of the other major instead, opener can show his fit and still leave the 3-level for club/NT exploration.

1♠-2♣; 2♦-2♥; 3♣

After this auction, the partnership has taken a tortuous route to replicate a simple, standard 2/1 auction: 1M - 2♣ - 3♣. Subsequent bidding is similar to that familiar auction.

Review of Artificial Calls

Here is a review of the artificial calls. Other than these bids, bidding is natural and similar to standard 2/1 methods.

1M - 2♣ = either balanced or clubs

1M - 2♣ - 2♦ = either balanced or diamonds

1M - 2♣ - 2♦ - 2oM = unbalanced with 5+ clubs and no support for opener's major

Conclusion

The nebulous 2♣ convention allows the other 2/1 calls (2♦, 2♥) to promise 5+ cards in the suit clarifying responder's hand type. When responder holds a balanced GF hand, it leaves maximum room for opener to pattern out. Compared to responding in the better 4-card minor, the nebulous 2♣ improves bidding accuracy when responder holds either hand type. When responder holds an unbalanced GF hand with long clubs, the auction is occasionally more difficult than with the "standard" 2/1 approach. But the benefits of staying low on balanced hands and better descriptive 2♦ and 2♥ auctions far outweighs the drawbacks.

Extension

There is an alternative—really an extension/improvement on the Schuler shift idea—for the more adventurous which I will write about next month. Always use opener's cheapest rebid as the nebulous call. So using that method:

1♠ – 2♦ – 2♥ = nebulous or hearts

1♠ – 2♦ – 2♠ = 6+ ♠

1♠ – 2♦ – 2NT = natural

1♥ – 2♦ – 2♥ = nebulous or spades

1♥ – 2♦ – 2♠ = 6+ ♥

1♥ – 2♦ – 2NT = natural

1♠ – 2♥ – 2♠ = nebulous or 6+ ♠

1♠ – 2♥ – 2NT = natural

Reserving opener's 2NT rebid to show 17-19 balanced is a promising idea, definitely worth considering. The alternative is to use it as 2-way, either 12-14 or 17-19 with the big hand of course bidding again over a raise to 3NT.