

Natural Weak 2H and 2S bids and the Multi 2D

Let us first of all define the term “Weak 2”. This means simply any hand with less than opening points (12) and holding one or other 6 card major. The term “weak” is somewhat misleading. If you were playing in hearts or leading against no-trumps, this hand would be far from weak: ♠72 ♥AKQJ54 ♦93 ♣987. Defending against a spade contract, it would indeed be as weak as dishwater.

Natural Weak 2H and 2S bids and the Multi 2D bid are all used to show precisely a SIX card major. The fact that you own such a six card major is an extremely important fact for your partner to know. This is because of something you might have heard of called The Law of T.N.T.(the total number of trumps). In a grossly simplified explanation, the Law says that with a combined total of 8 trumps between you and your partner, you are good for the two level. With 9 trumps you are good for the three level and with 10 you should be at the four level. If you know that partner’s suit is exactly 6 cards long, you can do the sums and bid accordingly.

There are essentially three different methods of telling your partner that you have a 6 card major. You and your partner have to play just one of them, so you have to choose one and both agree to play it. We call these three methods The Multi 2D; The Obstructive 2H or 2S; The Constructive 2H or 2S.

Let us take a sample hand and see how each of these methods handles it.

♠72 ♥AJT974 ♦A93 ♣98

This hand would be acceptable in any of the three methods. Let’s describe it.

It has a moderately good 6 card heart suit which contains 2 of the 4 honours. It has 9 HCP which falls within the range 4 -11 and also within the range 6-10. It has one Ace in a non-trump suit, the Ace of diamonds. Another way of saying that is to state that it has a maximum of one Ace(or King) in outside controls. It doesn’t have any wasted queens or jacks in outside suits. Another way of saying that is that the hand is pure. It doesn’t have 4 cards in the other major.

Now, whatever method you use, your hand ought to match the above description pretty closely. If it doesn’t, maybe you should be bidding

something else. Whenever you look at a hand , even though you might not verbalize your thoughts, your brain should be thinking along such lines, regardless of the method you use.

Just as a complete aside, if your partner announces 6 cards in a major, you should practically always finish up playing in his suit at one level or another. If you choose to play in some other suit, you might completely devalue your partner's hand.

Many partnerships will open 2D on this hand. This bid announces that the bidder has either a strong balanced hand of 19-20 HCP (the point count varies with different partnerships) OR a weak two with either major. Actually, as the weak two option is more frequent than the big flat hand, a more honest description might be: A weak two in either major or a big flat hand. If you don't have any interest in bidding, then you shouldn't be asking what the 2D bid means, and if you have very few points, you could suspect the big hand anyway. If you intend to bid, you are of course entitled to ask what the 2D means and then you should bid, otherwise you are simply alerting your partner to the fact that you have enough points to bid and simultaneously suggesting that the 2D bidder therefore does not have a big hand and now your action becomes rather unethical.

2D bidders would claim that the smokescreen of a possible big hand lurking about is an advantage of the bid, but not really, because if you have enough strength to overcall, it is highly unlikely that they have the big hand (but it can of course happen.) It is true that the opposition can not make a true takeout double of an artificial 2D, but natural overcalls of 2H and 2S are both available. Note, that if 2S had been opened instead of 2D, a 2H overcall would no longer be possible.

To offset the possible advantage of an undeclared suit are a couple of enormous disadvantages with the 2D opening. Because the partner also does not know the strength or shape or even the suit of the 2D hand, he cannot raise the major pre-emptively (Based on the Law) on a weak hand with a 3 card fit to the three level. Also the partner with moderate values sometimes chooses to make a bid that puts the partnership to the wrong level. This could happen if he bids 2S which says that he quite likes hearts but will settle for a 2S

contract if he has to. The 2D bidder with hearts has to bid 3H and now they could potentially miss out on game or already be too high. Also, consider the situation when 2D is opened and the opposition come in with 3C or 3D. The 2D bidder might never get to mention his suit.

So, why do some partnerships choose to play the Multi 2D? One reason is, that the use of this bid frees up the opening bids of 2H, 2S and 2NT for other meanings. 2H and 2S could be used for strong 8 playing trick major hands, or else 2H and 2S could be used to show weak hands with 5 of the major and 4+ of another suit. If you use the Multi 2D, then your no-trump ladder could look something like this.

12-14 HCP: open 1NT.

15-16 HCP: open 1 of a suit and rebid 1NT.

17-18 HCP: open 1 of a suit and rebid 2NT.

19-20 HCP: open 2D and rebid 2NT.

21-22 HCP: open 2NT.

23-24 HCP: open 2C and rebid 2NT.

Things don't work quite as neatly if you don't use the Multi 2D.

However, remember, that, when you open 2D, much more often you will hold a Weak Two rather than a big flat hand and it seems to me a rather poor state of affairs to give up sensible bidding of Weak Twos just to free up your no-trump ladder.

As always these are my personal views and prejudices and you are more than welcome to disagree with me, preferably in writing so we can add your views to the discussion. I personally think that the Multi 2D is a poor bid, but let's move on and discuss Obstructive and Constructive Weak Twos.

When you make any bid, your partner has to know what the Average Expectation of the bid is. It will have an agreed HCP range. 6-10 is frequently cited, but 5-11 is possible. The possible range of a 6 card heart suit is obviously anything between 765432 and AKQJT9. If you have zero HCP in your trump suit then you could have anything from J up to AAK in the outside suits. If you have 10 HCP in your trump suit then obviously the most you could have outside is a J. Everybody agrees that if you permit the complete range of these possible

hands for your Weak Two, your partner will find it extremely difficult to judge how to respond to you. So everybody, obstructivists and constructivists prune the range down to manageable proportions.

The philosophy of the obstructivist camp is that the Weak Two is essentially a pre-emptive bid which will make life difficult for the opposition.

The philosophy of the constructivists is that the Weak Two is a clearly defined bid that will aid the partnership in finding the right contract.

This, if you remember, is our sample hand: ♠72 ♥AJT974 ♦A93 ♣98

This would be an acceptable Weak Two to both the obstructivists and the constructivists. It's in the Goldilocks zone, not too weak and not too strong. Obstructivists will open on a much weaker suit than the sample hand, suits such as A97654 or QJ8432. They might still have to pay lip-service to a certain point count range such as 6-10 so they would expect a bit of outside strength to go with their poor suit. But for even the most dyed in the wool obstructivist there comes a point where they balk. I don't think many would open with a suit of J98643 or poorer. Because they do open on relatively poor suits, that sets up an expectation with their partner. He will consider a hand like the sample hand about the maximum he could expect and fear a lot worse.

Obstructivists have a tendency to prune the top of the range entirely, so they will neither open a Weak Two on, nor expect one from the bidding with ♠72 ♥AKQJ82 ♦J93 ♣98 or ♠72 ♥AQJT74 ♦K93 ♣98. Obstructivists tend to open 1H on such hands and therefore miss out on some perfect pre-emptive opportunities. If you have AKQJ86 in hearts, do you think you can do much to hinder their potential spade contract. Ironically, the better your suit is, the better it is to bid pre-emptively.

As explained earlier, the best thing about opening a Weak Two is that it immediately informs your partner that your suit is six cards long, so that with 4 card support he can raise you to a making game contract. This will all backfire if a) the trump suit is not of a certain quality, or b) if the few points you hold are in defensive tricks in outside suits. In my experience the Weak Two hands held by Multi-2D openers mostly fall into the obstructive category.

I personally don't approve of the obstructive approach to Weak Twos.

Disagree with me by all means, but make sure that you and your partner are

on the same wavelength. That is more important than the style you choose to play.

Now let's move on to constructive Weak Twos. Opening at the two level cannot help but have a pre-emptive effect, but that is the secondary purpose here. We open 2H or 2S to tell partner that we have a hand that fulfils some very strict criteria.

- The hand must contain a major of **exactly** 6 cards.
- The hand will not also have 4+ cards in the other major.
- The hand will contain between 5 and 11 HCP and whatever points it has will be predominantly in the trump suit.
- The suit must be **at the worst a reasonable** 6 card suit. At the worst it should be QJTxxx or KJxxxx, and if it is that poor a suit the hand must contain an outside Ace. Typically the trump suit will be headed by at least 2 of the top honours (AKQ)
- The hand may only contain one outside control, that is just one ace or king and not both.
- The hand should contain between 5 and 11 HCP, but if the HCP count is 11 it may not be specifically AKxxxx,A as that particular holding is just too strong. It may be AKQxxx,Q or even AKQJxx,J because all that strength in the one suit makes it very weak in defence and very suitable for a pre-empt.
- The majority of the points should be in the major. Avoid hands with useless queens and jacks in the side suits.
- The hand should not contain a void.

Because, when partner opens a Weak Two, we know with absolute certainty that he has a hand that fulfils the above criteria, with a weakish HCP hand we can raise him to the 3 or the 4 level in his suit merely because we have a 3 or a 4-card fit with his major. Remember $6+3 = 9$ and TNT says that is good enough for the 3 level. A raise to the 3 level is not invitational but pre-emptive.

Partner must not now bid 4. This 3-level raise is simply to make life incredibly difficult for the opposition. Their first chance to squeak is at the 3 level! If you have 4 cards in partner's trump suit, do not hesitate for a moment to raise him to game. The Law justifies this action. The Law does not guarantee that you

will make game, but that the move will be profitable. If you can't you're your game, then they will make theirs if you allow them to bid it.

If partner has opened a weak two and you have a powerful hand with a doubleton or a singleton in his suit, the only contract you should contemplate is 4 of his major.

When your partner has opened a Weak Two, he has very little extra to say. Sometimes however the partner really needs to know a little more about that Weak Two bid and a special device is available to help him. This is called the Ogust 2NT.

The Ogust 2NT bid over a Weak Two.

Over 2H or 2S, 2NT asks for the quality of the trump suit AND the outside strength. Suit comes First and Outside strength second. These are the responses:

1. 3C: bad Suit, bad Outside [BAD/BAD]
2. 3D: bad Suit, good Outside [BAD/GOOD]
3. 3H: good Suit, bad Outside [GOOD/BAD]
4. 3S: good Suit, good Outside [GOOD/GOOD]

Note that the above responses of 3H and 3S have nothing to do with Opener having already bid 2H or 2S.

You can use Ogust with obstructive and with constructive Weak Twos. You have to agree with your partner what constitutes bad and good both with the suit and with the outside strength.

Playing constructive Weak Twos, this is the agreement I have with my partner: Our definition of a *good suit* is a six-card suit that contains the Ace and either the King or the Queen or both. Our definition of *good outside* is the presence of a control. By control we mean an Ace or a King in a side suit. These particular responses are only possible because our Weak Two bids follow the strictures set out above.

Long live STRUCTURES with STRICTURES!