

2♣
Bill Jacobs

Your methods after you open a strong artificial 2♣ are no damn good – I will bet on it. I will *certainly* bet on it if you follow “standard” principles, which is that a 2♦ response is either negative or waiting.

“Waiting” actually means “waiting for the ensuing disaster”.

I’ve been wanting to write this article for years, but what pushed me into it was reading a recent entry in the Daily Bridge Calendar (a terrific product which has sadly ceased in 2008). It was by one of my favourite authors, Mike Lawrence.

Lawrence posed the following three hands all in response to an opening 2♣:

- 1) ♠ Q107653 ♥ K ♦ 832 ♣ Q95
- 2) ♠ Q87 ♥ QJ8 ♦ K832 ♣ K93
- 3) ♠ 6 ♥ 8763 ♦ 10874 ♣ J763

His recommendation is to respond 2♦ on all these hands!

On 1), he says: “Do not bid 2♠. Most players reserve a 2♠ bid for a better suit. My suggestion is that you almost always bid 2♦, which leaves more room for partner to bid something”.

On 2), he says: “The other choice is 2NT, which is as vile a bid as your partner would ever want to hear.”

And on 3): “Not much point to this hand other than to show you what many 2♦ bids can look like”.

Responding 2♦ on each of those hands, all wildly different in their own way, turns responder’s bid into a meaningless noise, giving opener the chance to describe the nature of his force. Superficially attractive that might be, but it’s a mirage. It implies that responder needs to find out as much as possible about opener’s hand, whereas the reverse is true. It’s the strong hand that needs to find out about the weak hand, because it’s rare that a 2♣ opener can impart

enough data for the responding hand to take control.¹

I won’t delve into the myriad ways in which the auction can fall apart after the meaningless 2♦ response. Suffice to say that the failure of responder to impart meaningful information puts the auction “behind the game”.

Some partnerships go the reverse route with CAB responses. This is an artificial step response showing the number of controls: 2♦ = 0 or 1 control, 2♥ = 2 controls, etc. I’ve had only limited experience with CAB, but have little doubt that it is superior to “2♦ negative or waiting”.

The method that has worked for me over the past 10 years or so was first pioneered by the great American theorist Alvin Roth. It uses three tiers of strength in response:

Negative:	0-4 points
Semi-positive:	5-8 points
Full positive:	9+ points

You see the concept of “semi-positives” in a lot of strong club methods. Here’s how the responses are structured (all the point counts here refer to high-card points):

2♦	Any 9+, or 5-8 without a 5-card suit
2♥	Any 0-4
2♠	5-8, at least 5 spades
2NT	5-8, at least 5 hearts
3♣	5-8, at least 5 clubs
3♦	5-8, at least 5 diamonds

After a 2♦ response, responder can clarify his hand as follows (let’s assume the 2♣ opener names a suit next):

New suit:	9+, natural
Min NT:	5-8, no support
Jump raise:	5-8, with support
Single raise:	9+, with support
Jump in NT:	9+, no support (forcing!)

It’s a very simple and natural scheme, with little ambiguity in the bids. No 2♦ bids that can range from 0 to 11 points and beyond.

¹ This reminds me of the “Irish jump cue bid overcall”. Over an opposition 1♥ opening, a 3♥ overcall is the Irish ask. It says: “partner, I have a heart stopper – bid 3NT if you have 8 solid tricks to go with it”.

And the ability to immediately name a suit with limited values has paid off for me time and time again – when the 2♣ opener has 3-card support and moves to game or slam in responder’s suit.

Try it – you’ll like it.

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Dealer: S	♠ 852		
Vul: All	♥ K83		
	♦ AK76		
	♣ A54		
♠ AKQ106		♠ J943	
♥ 42		♥ 10986	
♦ 8543		♦ QJ10	
♣ J8		♣ 63	
	♠ 7		
	♥ AQJ7		
	♦ 92		
	♣ KQ10972		

West	North	East	South
			1♣
1♠	2♠	Pass	3♥
Pass	4♥	All Pass	

An adage bridge teachers like to tell,
If you bid badly --- you must play well.

With novice defenders, the story goes,
North-South were a pair of nasty pros.
Pros are pros, they sure play cute.
East-West could merely follow suit.

The spade king is led and it will hold,
The queen is next – the hand is cold.
Our expert declarer is not trump rich,
So on the spade he takes a pitch.
A third spade, this too will win.
Our expert discards with a grin.

Against any return the hand will make.
How well he handled the 4-2 break.
“I’m a pro,” he said with a sigh.
“You’ll never be as good as I.”

The expert declarer just made his game,
While the novice hides his head in shame.
Said the novice, “That was just grand,
I’d have ruffed and lost the hand,
For I’m a novice and make lots of flubs,
But with your cards – I’d make six clubs.”

SETTING TRICK – SOLUTIONS
Ian McCance

Problem 1:

Dealer: S	♠ 62		
Vul: Both	♥ J4		
	♦ QJ1086		
	♣ AKJ2		
♠ KJ107		♠ AQ5	
♥ 3		♥ K82	
♦ A7543		♦ K2	
♣ Q43		♣ 109876	
	♠ 9843		
	♥ AQ109765		
	♦ 9		
	♣ 5		

You may or may not have a trick in ♦K but the principal task is to set this contract. Partner must have ♠K so you have two tricks there to go with ♦A, and the safest line is to force dummy to trump a spade.

You should play to retain control of the defence – partner can’t see that ♥K – and by rights South should have it! Win this trick with ♠Q. Then you can cash ♠A and continue with a third spade, ensuring the setting trick.

Problem 2:

Dealer: S	♠ 9		
Vul: N/S	♥ KQ4		
	♦ 96542		
	♣ 6543		
♠ Q10872		♠ J43	
♥ 962		♥ 10873	
♦ K7		♦ 108	
♣ AQJ		♣ K1082	
	♠ AK65		
	♥ AJ5		
	♦ AQJ3		
	♣ 97		

One card partner is unlikely to hold is ♦A – he would probably have popped it to return a spade (you know he has at least three). If declarer has ♦A, he seems to have 9 tricks: 4 diamonds, 3 hearts and 2 spades.

So the solution is that this must be cashout time – the only suit for the defence is clubs. Start from the top.