

Opening 2♦

This chapter is a very slightly modified version of part of Chapter 10 "When Clubs are Blue" in *Slam Bidding* by Hugh Kelsey.

The idea of using the opening bid of 2♦ to show a strong three-suited hand was first hatched by the developers of the Roman System. The Blue Club version of this bid is as follows: the opening bid of 2♦ shows a hand of precisely 4-4-4-1 distribution (any singleton) and 17-24 HCP.

Such hands do not come up very often. Besides dealing effectively with them, the 2♦ opening bid removes such hands from the 1♣ opening. Hands of 4-4-4-1 distribution contain no 5+ card suit yet they are unbalanced. If such hands were included, they would have to be described by a suit rebid over the initial control showing response by responder (*i.e.*, 1♣-1♥-1♠ with ♠AKxx♥x♦KQJx♣AJ10x). The inference of a five+ card suit would be compromised.

After the 2♦ opening bid the responder is in complete control of the auction. He/she asks questions of the opener and places the final contract when sufficient information has been received.

(A) Responses to 2♦

There are four possible responses to 2♦; 2♥, 2♠, 2NT and Three of a suit. We shall consider each of these in turn.

(1) 2♥

This is the normal conventional relay response used on nine hands out of ten. It shows neither weakness nor strength, merely asking opener to clarify his/her holding.

(2) 2♠

This is a natural, negative response, showing in theory four+ spades and less than 6 HCP. The response may have to be made with three spades if the distribution is 4-3-3-3.

(3) 2NT

This is a semi-positive to positive response (6-10 HCP) showing a six card suit with at least two honors, one of which is the ace or king.

(4) Three of a Suit

These responses show weaker six card suits (those headed by the ace, king or queen-jack) in the same point range as 2NT.

(B) Developments after 2♦-2♠

(1) Showing Singleton and Range

With a hand in the lower half of the range (17-20 HCP) opener passes with four spades and rebids 2NT with a singleton spade, passing responder's next bid.

With a hand in the upper half of the range, opener bids the suit below his/her singleton.

- 3♣ with a singleton diamond
- 3♦ with a singleton heart
- 3♥ with a singleton spade
- 3♠ with a singleton club

Responder either passes or makes the final bid.

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>		
♠AKQx	♠Jxx	2♦	2♠
♥AQJx	♥xxxx	3♣	4♥
♦x	♦xxx		
♣AJxx	♣Q10x		

Responder does not have much, but his/her hand is improved by the knowledge that opener has a singleton diamond.

(C) Developments after 2♦-2NT

Irrespective of his/her strength opener rebids in the suit below his/her singleton. Responder then bids his/her suit and if this coincides with the singleton opener passes with 17-20 HCP and bids 3NT with 21-24 HCP.

An exceptional case occurs when the bidding starts 2♦-2NT-3♠. In order not to bypass the notrump game, responder must rebid 3NT when his/her suit is clubs. Opener then passes with 21-24 HCP and takes out to 4♣ with 17-20 HCP.

When a fit is revealed by responder's second bid, opener either goes straight to game or cue-bids at the cheapest level. In the latter event responder is expected to show any singleton he/she possesses.

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>		
♠AJxx	♠x	2♦	2NT
♥AKQx	♥10xx	3♠	4♦
♦Kxxx	♦AJxxxx	4♥	4♠
♣x	♣Jxx	6♦	

(D) Developments After 2♦-Three of a Suit

If his/her singleton coincides with partner's suit, opener passes with 17-20 HCP and bids 3NT with 21-24 HCP.

With a fit in responder's suit opener either raises to game or bids his/her singleton suit. This is the only occasion where opener rebids in the singleton rather than in the suit below. The responder rebids by steps to show his/her values.

- 1st step trumps headed by QJ
- 2nd step trumps headed by ace or king, no singleton
- 3rd step trumps headed by ace or king, side singleton

Opener can cue-bid if he/she wishes to discover where the singleton lies.

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>		
♠A	♠QJx	2♦	3♥
♥Axxx	♥K10xxxx	3♠	4♦
♦KQJx	♦xxx	4♠	5♣
♣Axxx	♣x	6♥	

The three step response of 4♦ shows the king of hearts plus a side singleton, and opener learns that it is the right singleton on the next round.

(E) Developments After 2♦-2♥

Opener's rebids are codified all the way and responder assumes complete responsibility for placing the contract.

Opener's first duty is to show his/her range and singleton, done with the following rebids:

<u>Rebid</u>	<u>Range (HCP)</u>	<u>Singleton</u>
2♠	17-20	Major suit
2NT	"	Club
3♣	"	Diamond
3♦	21-24	Heart
3♥	"	Spade
3♠	"	Club
3NT	"	Diamond

The 2♠ rebid is the only one that does not immediately define the singleton. Responder makes a relay bid of 2NT to ask whether a singleton spade or heart is held and to ask for a closer definition of the range.

After 2♦-2♥-2♠-2NT:

- 3♣ shows a singleton heart.
- 3♦ shows a singleton spade, 17-18 HCP.
- 3♥ shows a singleton spade, 19-20 HCP.

When opener shows a singleton heart, responder can make a further relay in hearts to ask about the range.
After 2♦-2♥-2♠-2NT-3♣-3♥:

- 3♠ shows 17-18 HCP.
- 3NT shows 19-20 HCP.

When opener has shown 17-20 HCP and a singleton club or diamond, responder can again bid the short suit to ask for a closer definition of the range, *i.e.*:

2♦	2♥	2♦	2♥.
2NT	3♣	3♣	3♦
3♦	shows 17-18 HCP.	3♥	shows 17-18 HCP.
3♥	shows 19-20 HCP.	3♠	shows 19-20 HCP.

After a 2♥ response to 2♦ any bid by responder, apart from a further relay in the short suit, ends the auction. The only exception is that a bid of Four in a minor invites opener to continue to game if he/she has two honor cards in the suit.

Let's see some examples:

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>		
♠x	♠xxx	2♦	2♥
♥AKxx	♥Jxxx	2♠	2NT
♦AKxx	♦Qxxx	3♥	4♥
♣KQxx	♣xx		

When responder hears that opener has 19-20 HCP with a singleton spade he/she judges game to be worth bidding. If on the third round opener had rebid 3♦ to show 17-18 HCP, responder would have closed the bidding with 3♥.

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>		
♠AKQx	♠xx	2♦	2♥
♥KJxx	♥xx	3♣	
♦x	♦Q9xxx		
♣Axxx	♣Q9xx		

Responder has no reason to bid again.

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>		
♠AQxx	♠KJx	2♦	2♥
♥x	♥10xxx	2♠	2NT
♦KJxx	♦Qxxx	3♣	3♥
♣AKJx	♣xx	3♠	4♦
		5♦	

After discovering opener has 17-18 HCP and a singleton heart, responder invites game in diamonds. Opener accepts on the strength of his two honor cards in the suit.

(1) Asking for Controls

When opener's first rebid shows a hand in the 21-24 HCP range, responder does not attempt to obtain a closer definition of the range. A relay bid in the short suit now asks for controls, as does a further short suit relay by a responder who has already learned the exact HCP range of a 17-20 HCP opener. Responder should, of course, see some prospect of slam before he/she asks for controls.

Counting an ace as two controls and a king as one, opener bids by steps to show the number of controls held. A singleton ace in the short suit is counted as two controls; a singleton king is not counted at all. The steps start with four controls in the 17-20 HCP zone, and with six controls in the 21-24 HCP zone, *i.e.*:

2♦	2♥	2♦	2♥
2♠	2NT	3♥	3♠
3♣	3♥	3NT	six controls
3NT	4♥	4♣	seven controls
4♠	four controls	4♦	eight controls
4NT	five controls	<i>etc.</i>	
5♣	six controls		
<i>etc.</i>			

The number of controls shown by opener will often enable responder to identify the holding precisely.

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>		
♠AQJx	♠Kx	2♦	2♥
♥AKxx	♥Q9xxx	3♣	3♦
♦x	♦Jxx	3♠	4♦
♣AJxx	♣Kxx	5♣	6♥

The seven controls shown by opener can only be three aces and the king of hearts. Thus, opener must have at least one queen to bring his/her point total to 19.

Responder does not need much strength to become slam-minded when opener show the 21-24 HCP range.

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>		
♠AKxx	♠Qxxxx	2♦	2♥
♥AKxx	♥Qxx	3♠	4♣
♦AKJx	♦x	4NT	6♠
♣x	♣Jxxx		

When opener shows a singleton club and nine controls, responder knows that the slam is good.

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>		
♠AJxx	♠Kx	2♦	2♥
♥x	♥Axx	3♦	3♥
♦AKJx	♦10xxxxx	4♣	7♦
♣AKJx	♣xx		

Opener's eight controls suffice to take care of all the losers in responder's hand.

(2) Further Relays

When partner's controls do not quite fill all the gaps, responder may make yet another relay bid in the short suit to ask for queens, but the wholesale showing of queens will not always be helpful. To place the contract with accuracy responder may need to know not just how many queens are held but *which* queens are held.

To overcome this problem the following method is recommended. After checking on controls responder may ask about queens in the three known suits by bidding the short suit or 4NT, whichever is cheaper. Opener springs to attention as follows:

With one queen names the suit	
With two queens	bids the short suit
With none or three	bids notrump

At first glance it may appear dangerous to bid notrumps (perhaps skipping several steps) with no queen, but in practice it is not so. Opener's strength is always known within a point or so, and responder can have no reason to ask for queens if a negative response is both possible and embarrassing.

This is the sort of hand on which responder needs to know which queen is held.

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>		
♠x	♠xxx	2♦	2♥
♥AQJx	♥K10xx	3♥	3♠
♦AKxx	♦QJ	4♦	4♠
♣AKxx	♣J10xx	5♥	6♥

After learning that opener has a singleton spade, 21-24 HCP and eight controls, responder asks for queens by bidding 4♠. When opener promises the queen of hearts responder bids slam in that suit, secure in the knowledge that his/her club losers will be discarded on the diamonds. If opener had shown the queen of clubs instead, responder could have bid the slam in that suit with equal confidence. Clubs would also have been the safer suit if opener had admitted to holding two queens.

A responder with grand slam aspirations will at times be worried about trump solidity. In the codified sequences that follow 2♦, no Trump Asking Bid is available since opener is not allowed to know the trump suit until the bidding is over. Asking for specific queens will usually solve the problem, however.

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>		
♠Axxx	♠KJxx	2♦	2♥
♥x	♥Axxx	2♠	2NT
♦AQxx	♦Kx	3♣	3♥
♣AKxx	♣QJx	3♠	4♥
		5♦	5♥
		6♦	6♠

Responder learns that opener has a singleton heart, 17-18 HCP and seven controls, and then asks for queens by bidding 5♥. When opener shows the wrong queen responder settles for six. Naturally responder would also have signed off in six if opener had bid 5NT to show no queen. But if opener had shown the queen of spades a good grand slam would have been reached.

When opener shows two queens, responder may still be in doubt about whether the queen of trumps is missing or not. In such cases a further relay in notrumps can be used to ask opener to name the missing queen.

This refinement helps on hands like the following.

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>		
♠AJxx	♠Kxx	2♦	2♥
♥AKQx	♥xx	3♣	3♦
♦x	♦Axx	3♥	4♦
♣QJxx	♣AKxxx	4♠	4NT
		5♦	5NT
		6♠	7♣

After learning about the singleton diamond, 17-18 HCP and five controls, responder uses 4NT to check on queens. Opener admits to two queens and the next bid of 5NT asks which is missing. Responder can count 13 tricks once he/she is assured that it is a major suit queen that is missing. Responder is in a position to pass a bid of 6♣, however, thus avoiding the grand slam when it is a dubious proposition.

That takes care of the queen position, but suppose it is the king of trumps that responder is worried about. We can cater for this by stipulating that a bid of 5NT by responder, when not preceded by an enquiry for queens, asks opener to name a missing king.

When opener has two kings there are no complications.

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>		
♠AKxx	♠Q	2♦	2♥
♥AJxx	♥Qxx	3♣	3♦
♦A	♦Jxx	3♠	4♦
♣KJxx	♣Axxxxx	5♦	5NT
		6♥	7♣

Responder learns about the singleton diamond and 19-20 HCP. When he/she discovers that opener has eight controls responder realizes that the grand slam must be on ice unless it is the king of trumps that is missing. Responder's bid of 5NT queries the missing king and opener puts his/her mind at rest.

When opener has only one king the position is not so simple, for he/she cannot afford to bid the king suit at the six level. The solution is for opener to bid the cheaper of the missing kings. If this is the trump suit responder passes. Otherwise he/she converts to trumps, expecting opener to pass without the trump king and bid the grand slam if he/she has it.

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>		
♠Axxx	♠x	2♦	2♥
♥AKxx	♥QJxxxx	2NT	3♣
♦AQxx	♦Kx	3♦	4♣
♣x	♣Axxx	4NT	5NT
		6♦	6♥
		7♥	

Opener reveals a singleton club, 17-18 HCP and seven controls. Needing to know about the king of trumps, responder asks with 5NT. Opener denies the king of diamonds, after which responder converts to the trump suit and leaves the rest to his/her partner.

The sequences that follow an opening bid of 2♦ are certainly complex and highly artificial, but if you examine them closely you will discover a logical basis for every manoeuver.