

# Rick's Tricks

## COPING WITH THE 2 CLUB BLUES

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Every bridge player loves to pick up a bridge hand brimming with Aces and winners. Almost as enthralling as a woman, lucky enough to be living with Robert Redford in the 1970's, discovering that his favorite pastime was folding freshly washed laundry.

However, when you announce to the world that you have a rock crusher and open two clubs (with abject apologies to Precision fans), some pitfalls need to be avoided.

You hold this hand:

♠J109 ♥1054 ♦K85 ♣AK103

Pard opens 2♣ and you are excited! Momentarily, you have to curb your enthusiasm and decide to bid 2♦, waiting in your methods. Pard jumps to 4♥. Decide what you would bid before reading on.

I thought we had enough assets to be in slam but I lacked a Spade control. I contented myself with a 5♣ Q bid. Pard returned the favor with 5♦. I was sad that my 5♥ bid ended the auction. But not NEARLY as sad as I was 20 seconds later as the opponents cashed 3 Spades to sink our contract.

Pard's mitt:

♠ 854 ♥ AKQJ862 ♦AQJ ♣ void

Disappointed, I chided Pard, "You only have 17 high card points." Pard's quick retort was, "I have 9 tricks." I responded that when 2♣ gets bid in such situations, the partner of the 2♣ bidder will often overvalue their hand as I did here.

Pard, now on the defensive, said "I would make on any other lead." I did not have the heart to point out that on our auction, a Spade lead would be crystal clear even to somebody with -32 IQ.

I am a fan of 'heavy' opening 1 bids as opposed to an iffy 2♣ opener. One of the corollaries to this philosophy is that Pard should strive to keep the bidding alive, even if lacking the traditional 6 points to respond.

You hold:

♠xx ♥QJ ♦AKQ10xx ♣AKQ

Would you open 2♣? You have 21 HCP and, quite likely, 9 tricks in your own hand. I would not dream of opening 2♣ as I would not be a party to one of the worst auctions in bridge unless I had a gun pointed at my head: 2♣-2♦-3♦.

If you choose to open 2♣ and rebid 3♦, have fun! Congratulations, you have self-preempted your partnership. Your Partner will have little idea what to do on a wide variety of hands.

On this hand, a 2♣ opening bid, followed by a 3♦ rebid would be my fourth choice. 1♦ would be my first choice. Opening 2♣ and rebidding 2NT would be #2. Opening 2NT is ridiculously heavy with this moose but I would even prefer that to 2♣-2♦-3♦. One of the underlying themes in choices #2 and #3 is that the defense is more difficult when the strong hand is not coming down as dummy.

Let's look at another potential horror hand to bid, continuing on the theme on the strong hands with Diamond suits:

♠A ♥AKxx ♦AK10xxx ♣Ax

One tool can help, the Herbert convention. After your 2♣ start and a 2♦ response by Pard, a rebid of 3 of a major shows 4 of that major and longer Diamonds.

Another partial antidote is the use of Namyats:

4♣ opener is a strong hand with Hearts

4♦ opener is a strong hand with Spades

3NT opener is a 4 of a minor preempt

If you held:

♠xx ♥AKQ10xxxx ♦x ♣AK

If you open 4♣, Namyats, you achieve two objectives. You show a strong Heart hand and make entry into the auction for the opponents more difficult.

I previously mentioned one partial antidote to overuse of 2♣ openers: heavy 1 bids. I offer some helpful structure after 1 of a major is opened that features an artificial followup. Suppose Pard bids 1NT. I feel certain that use of a 2NT rebid as an artificial game force is best and have been a tireless advocate of this approach for 20+ years.

The follow ups by the 1NT bidder after the artificial 2NT is employed:

**3♣:** "Nothing special to say, Pard." Please finish your description.

**3♦:** If opening bid was 1♠, you show 5+ Hearts, If the opening bid was 1♥, you show at least 55 in the minors

**3♥:** Balanced limit raise of opener's major

**3♠:** clubs

**3NT:** diamonds

**4♣:** unbalanced limit raise of opener's major

**4 of opener's major:** weak raise that was not robust enough for direct raise to 2 of opener's major

If the opener makes an immediate jump shift to the 3 level over 1NT, at least 55 is shown. To differentiate jump shifts with only 4 cards in the 2nd suit is quite important.

Suppose you are dealt:

♠AKQ10xx ♥KJx ♦AQx ♣x

After your 1♠ opener, Pard rebids 1NT. In standard methods, your rebid is quite awkward. However, if you deem this hand worth a game force, you can rebid 2NT, forcing. Suppose Pard “punts” with 3♣, you can rebid 3♠, leaving the final choice to Pard. If Pard instead rebids either 3♦ (showing hearts) or 3NT (showing diamonds), not only have you struck gold but you can right side a suit contract.

What is the cost of giving up a natural 2NT rebid? Not much, in my view. With a balanced 19 HCP, you rebid 3NT. With a balanced 18, you rebid 2 of a minor. If the auction does not die, you can bid 2NT at your next opportunity.

Remember that opening 2♣ is not unlike having power tools: Very, very useful except if in the hands of the uninformed. ♣