

Lesson 5 by Roger Lord

Two Clubs Strong Artificial Opening

The strong forcing artificial opening bid of two clubs was originated by David Burnstine, the ACBL's first Life Master, in 1929. Except for fans of strong artificial one club systems, and the "demand-bid" holdovers of a few dinosaurs, the two club convention is universal. Yet, most people do not play, or know, the best methods of handling strong openings, responses and rebids. This lesson will present some of these methods. Be aware that other versions are popular as well. Partnerships should always try to agree to their own meanings of bids.

The opening bid of two clubs is artificial (nothing to do with length or strength in clubs). It covers all unbalanced (suit oriented) hands which are too strong for one-bid openings, and it covers some strong balanced (notrump oriented) hands.

The majority of unbalanced hands which qualify for two clubs are single-suited. The two club opener follows with a bid of his real suit. Some two club opening hands are two-suited, and a very few contain three suits.

To allow room for opener to describe his hand, responder temporizes with two diamonds on all but a rare, specific type of hand. This artificial two diamond response is known as a "waiting bid." It keeps the auction as low as possible so that the big hand has bidding space to say what kind of hand it is. The bid is not "negative," it is totally unlimited.

Opener's first rebid can be his only suit, or it can be the longer (or equal) of two suits, or it can be one of three suits. It is a natural bid—that is, 2 Clubs—(Pass)—2 Diamonds—(Pass)—Two Hearts shows a heart suit.

The two primary requirements for opening two clubs on unbalanced hands are:

1. Nine or more playing tricks. For the type of hand that is likely to end up in five or higher of a minor (totally unsuitable for notrump), the playing trick requirement is closer to ten.

We gauge playing tricks under the assumption that partner's (responder's) distribution will be reasonably normal, even though he may have few or no high cards. To count playing tricks in each suit, we start with top-card tricks and add long-card tricks. The fourth and further cards of each suit are designated as tricks, because, with normal distribution, suits of four or more cards usually can be established. Thus, AKQxxx would be counted as six tricks, while Axxx would be counted as two tricks.

2. Four or more quick tricks. The dual objectives of this requirement are to assure partner that adequate controls are held for slam bidding and that sufficient defensive tricks are available in case the opponents enter the auction. Quick tricks are: Ace-King = 2 quick tricks; Ace-Queen = 1 ½ quick tricks; Ace = 1 quick trick; King-queen = 1 quick trick; K = ½ quick trick (with at least one more card).

Hands which can take nine or more tricks but which contain fewer than four quick tricks should be opened with a one-bid or a high-level preempt. We also prefer a hand that does not have two suits which lack an ace or king, and which does not have two top losers in any suit.

There is one type of hand on which we advocate opening two clubs despite the absence of a good, long suit and the uncertainty of taking nine tricks. Overriding the nine-trick rule is the possession of six quick tricks and so many HCP that the danger is grave that no one will have enough to keep a one-bid open.

Here are some hands for strong opening bids:

1. S AJ3 H AKJ1076 D KQJ C A

Opener	Responder
2 Clubs	2 Diamonds
2 Hearts	?
9½ playing tricks, 5 quick tricks	

2. S AKQ53 H Q D A6 C AKJ104

Opener	Responder
2 Clubs	2 Diamonds
2 Spades	2 Notrump*
3 Clubs	?

2 good suits, very few losers. When opener bids a suit, the cheapest rebid by responder is artificial and negative, showing fewer than 7 HCP and fewer than one quick trick. Any second-round bid by responder other than the cheapest is natural and forward-going. To clarify this scheme, with opponents' passes left out, these second-round bids by responder are negative: 2 Clubs – 2 Diamonds – 2 Hearts – 2 Spades; 2 Clubs – 2 Diamonds – 2 Spades – 2 Notrump; 2 Clubs – 2 Diamonds – 3 Clubs – 3 Diamonds; 2 Clubs – 2 Diamonds – 3 Diamonds – 3 Hearts.

3. S AKQJ1095 H 6 D KQJ6 C 3

Opener	Responder
1 Spade	?

Game in hand, but fewer than 4 quick tricks. After an opening one-bid, because there are so many hearts, clubs and honor cards in the other three hands, it is virtually certain that someone will take action so that the bidding will be kept open and, when this happens, opener's further action should be relatively easy.

4. S 3 H --- D AKJ107654 C QJ108

Opener	Responder
5 Diamonds	?

No defensive prospects. Try to make your first bid the last bid.

5. S AKJ H A4 D KQJ105432 C ---

Opener	Responder
2 Clubs	2 Diamonds
3 Diamonds	?

Plenty of tricks and controls.

6. S A3 H A7 D AKQJ83 C A74

Opener	Responder
2 Clubs	2 Diamonds
3 Notrump	?

Bid the nine-trick game (and, if playing rubber bridge or Chicago, be sure to collect 150 honors!)

7. S AKJ10 H AKQ8 D 4 C AK53

Opener	Responder
2 Clubs	2 Diamonds
2 Spades	?

6 quick tricks. A one club opening might be passed out. Bidding spades first allows all three suits to be shown in the most economical order. If a fit is not found, you may have to try notrump.

8. S AKJ9 H AK D 3 C KQ10976

Opener	Responder
2 Clubs	2 Diamonds
3 Clubs	3 Diamonds
3 Spades	?

Show good 4-card second suit before rebidding 6-card club suit.

9. S AQJ1083 H A D AQ C K1052

Opener	Responder
2 Clubs	2 Diamonds
2 Spades	2 Notrump
3 Spades	?

Bid and rebid long, strong spades before showing weak clubs. You can play in spades opposite a singleton or even a void, but you would not wish partner to prefer clubs with any three cards or even with a weak four-card holding.

10. KQ H AQJ874 D AQJ C AQ

Opener	Responder
2 Clubs	2 Diamonds
2 Hearts	3 Hearts
4 Notrump	?

A direct raise (one level) of the 2 club bidder's suit is a positive response. Hence, opener should bid Blackwood. If opener denies an ace, opener should go on to 6 hearts. If partner shows the spade ace, opener should bid 5 notrump in a try for a grand slam.

Instead, over 2 hearts, if responder jumps to 4 hearts, opener should pass. The 4 heart bid is natural, but negative in value, depicting heart support but denying any first or second round control (no ace, no king, no void, no singleton).

11. S --- H AKJ1054 D AKQJ8 C A3

Opener	Responder
2 Clubs	2 Diamonds
2 Hearts	2 Spades
3 Diamonds	?

After partner's negative 2 spade bid, you do not need to jump, even though 3 diamonds does not fully portray your enormous two-suiter. Your change of suits compels partner to keep the auction alive, and you will follow with a slam try such as a cuebid of the club ace.

12. S J10754 H 64 D 85 C 9532

Opener	Intervenor	Responder
2 Clubs	(2 Spades)	Double

You are responder this time. Your partner has opened 2 clubs and your RHO has overcalled 2 Spades. Since your hand is worthless for any contract except defending spades, you can send that message by doubling for penalty. Incidentally, in a different auction, if opener gets the chance to double an intervening bid, we relish the opportunity to do so with good trumps. Note that many players use these doubles for other purposes, about which we couldn't comment properly on TV.

The auction 2 Clubs - (Pass) - 2 Diamonds - (Pass) - 2 Notrump announces a balanced or semi-balanced hand with 23-24 HCP or a good 22. We will save this discussion for the future lesson about strong balanced hands.