

THE SUNSHINE COAST OPENING 2C

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When I moved to the Sunshine Coast, I was struck at how commonly used is a 2C opening to show a 19-21 HCP hand. I had rarely seen it elsewhere, but presume it has been taught locally in the past. At the risk of making myself unpopular, I must say that I find this a terrible convention. Take a hand like this, where you have opened 2C, partner responds 2D and you rebid 2NT:

♠ AKQ ♥ AJ93 ♦ K85 ♣ K73

LHO leads the ♠ J from J1094, gets a discouraging signal from his partner. Dummy goes down with no HCP. You are already far too high. Against good defence you will manage 4 tricks or at best 5, off 3 or 4, when opponents have nothing to make. Opponents, once they see dummy, will know you are in trouble. They will simply continue with spades. You will have to lead every time from your own hand. A combined 26 HCP will normally make 3NT, but only if they are distributed between the two hands. Many hands with 26 HCP will fail opposite a Yarborough unless there are 9 top tricks.

Similarly, if you rebid a suit e.g. 2C - 2D - 2S, you may already be too high, especially if dummy has no spade support. Even if partner has some values, you are already too high to usefully exchange information to find the best spot. In modern bidding practice, opening 2's are weak "spoiler" bids designed to make life difficult for the opponents. When we use this 2C bid, we are pre-empting against ourselves. Furthermore, it is quite unnecessary.

Let me suggest a simple scheme that works.

For opener, there are HCP ranges to remember:

Minimum = 12 - 15

Intermediate = 16 - 18

Strong = 19 - 20

Super = 21+. There are further ranges within this group (21-22, 23-34, 25-26, 27-28, 29-30)

Rule: Save your strong 2 level openings for super hands where game is a good chance, even if partner has less than minimal responding values.

Open a major with a 5 card suit. Give up on better minor, and open 1D on 4 or more. Open 1C on any other 12 - 20 hand. Partner will respond only if he has 6+ HCP.

16 - 18 Open 1NT

21 - 22 Open 2NT (if you are wedded to the multi-2D, the 2NT rebid shows 21 - 22)

2C opening shows either 8 playing tricks in a suit or 23+HCP.

2D opening is game forcing and shows 9+ playing tricks or 25+ HCP.

2C - 2D - 2NT = 23 - 24 HCP

2D - 2H - 2NT = 25 - 26 HCP

2C - 2H - 3NT = 27 - 28 HCP

2D - 2H - 3NT = 29 - 30 HCP

Again, if using multi-2's, you will have to rely on 2C for the really big hands, and possibly miss the occasional slam.

So: after 1C - 1S, you bid 1NT with 12 - 15, 2NT with 19 - 20 (this is now safe because partner has promised 6+ HCP). This is forcing to game. You could rebid 3NT but this removes some bidding space. (See Checkback Stayman below).

Warning: if playing a 'short' 1C, don't be tempted to respond without responding values 'in case opener may be left in 1C.' You are likely to find yourself in an unmakeable game in your suit or in 3NT. Simply pass. Much of the time, opponents will compete or opener will have clubs, but, if not, can make 1C by dint of top cards.

Further caveat: After partner's two over one response e.g. 1S - 2C, don't rebid 2NT unless you have 15 HCP (or a very good 14). Instead bid a good three card minor or at worst rebid 2S (doesn't promise 6 card suit but a minimum hand).

Checkback Stayman:

Example: After 1C - 1S - 1NT.

After opener's 1NT, bid 2C, asking 2 questions:

1. Do you have 3 cards in my major or 4 in the other major, and
2. Are you minimum(12 to a poor 14) or maximum (good 14 - 15)

Your answers: 2D: I have both and minimum (3D for maximum)
 2H: I have a heart suit and minimum (3H for maximum)
 2S: I have 3 spades and minimum (3S for maximum)
 2NT: I have neither and minimum (3C for maximum)

After opener's rebid of 2NT, similar response, but only at the 3 level, (no range answers).

Caveat: you should use checkback only if you have the values to invite to game.

This is just an outline of an essentially natural system. If any readers are interested I'm happy to discuss this further. rbusch@ozemail.com.au