

A MENAGERIE OF TWO-DIAMOND OPENINGS

There are many different things you can do with a 2♦ opening, but you must choose among them. Before describing them, I shall introduce a new term: *rattlesnake*, meaning a hand with three 4-card suits and a singleton. Norbert Jay of New York City coined it in 1960 because "four-four-four-one" reminded him of the sound of a rattlesnake's rattle.

(a) Strong 2♦ (old-fashioned Standard American). If you take care to use a 2♥ response (rather than the "standard" 2NT) as your artificial negative response, then the Strong 2♦ works very well on the hands for which it is designed. Using an artificial 2♣ for such hands works very poorly, for the bidding usually starts 2♣-2♦; 3♦, a sequence that not only gobbles up great globs of bidding space but makes responder (the weaker hand) declarer in diamond contracts. The only trouble with the Strong 2♦ Bid is that hands for it arise very seldom, perhaps only 20% to 25% as often as hands for a Strong 2♥ bid, because a 10-winner requirement is about four or five times as hard to meet as the 9-winner requirement that is appropriate for a Strong Two in a major.

(b) Weak 2♦ (as most American pairs now play). Many experts recognize that a Weak 2♦ is less effective preemptively than a Weak 2♥, and much less effective preemptively than a Weak 2♠. Few recognize that hands for a Weak 2♦ occur less often than hands for a Weak 2♥. This is true for two reasons. First, a 6-4-2-1 pattern is highly suitable for a Weak Two, but not if the 4-card suit is a *major*... unless it is a *weak* 4-card major in a hand with a *strong* six cards in the *major* suit opened. Thus hands like ♠83 ♥AJ10972 ♦QJ103 ♣9 and ♠J1082 ♥KQJ1062 ♦6 ♣Q4 make good Weak 2♥ Bids, but hands like ♠83 ♥QJ103 ♦AJ10972 ♣9 and ♠J1082 ♥6 ♦KQJ1062 ♣Q4 do not make good Weak 2♦ Bids. Second, because some pairs play Weak Twos *only in the majors*, and because some bridge players (quite reasonably) are willing to open slightly more freely with a major suit than with a minor, the holder of a hand suitable for a Weak 2♥ Bid is less likely than the holder of a hand suitable for a Weak 2♦ bid to see *another player* (opponent or partner) open ahead of him. Also, a Weak 2♦ is less likely to lead to a *game* than a Weak Two in either major, and less likely to lead to a *profitable* save than a Weak 2♠, because of the ranks of the suits and the scoring table. These arguments weigh heavily against playing Weak 2♦ Bids.

(c) Morgan 2♦. This artificial 2♦ shows a hand with an unspecified 4-card major and a longer suit (perhaps the other major) and "Acol Two-Bid" strength (not quite enough to force to game, but more than enough for a reverse or a jump shift). An article in the July 1987 *Bridge World* described it in detail. An article in the June 2002 *Bridge World* suggests that a player who adopts it won't have a suitable hand in ten years. No wonder: the range of strength is extremely narrow, so that most hands with the appropriate suit lengths are either too strong for the Morgan 2♦ or not quite strong enough.

(d) Blue Team 2♦. The Blue Team 2♦ embraces 17-24 HCP rattlesnakes. Its rationale is easy to understand. An ordinary one-bid risks missing game (responder may pass with a misfit for the suit opened but a splendid fit for one of opener's other 4-card suits), while an artificial forcing 2♣ (or artificial forcing 1♠, except in the *Shapely Club* system or one of its descendants) creates an awkward rebid problem. However, the range is far too wide, especially when a response and a rebid (and sometimes a second bid by responder) may be necessary just to find a fit. Forget about it!

(e) Roman 2♦. This solves one problem by cutting the too-wide range of the Blue Team 2♦ in half (17-20 HCP) but creates another problem by including 5-4-4-0 hands. When responder's only length is in opener's void, it may be vital to play in a 5-3 fit rather than a 4-3 fit. Because the Roman 2♦ calls for *natural responses, even in cheap 3-card suits* when responder is weak, the partnership may occasionally wind up in a 4-3 fit instead of a 5-3, 4-4, 5-4 or 5-5 fit that exists in some other suit.

(f) Miles 2♦. Marshall corrected a defect in the Roman 2♦ by using the 2♥ response as an artificial weakness bid that asks opener to rebid in his short suit (2NT if short in hearts). Though that was an improvement, it left a glaring weakness: the requirement to play in 4♣ after 2♦-2♥ (weak); 3♦ (short in diamonds) when responder's only length was in the minors (e.g. with a 2=2=5=4 hand).

(g) Kleinman 2♦. In the early 1960s, I corrected the defect in the Miles 2♦ by having opener reply to the artificial 2♥ weakness response in the suit just above his shortness (with 2NT substituting for 3♥, so that after 2♦-2♥ (weak), 2♠ showed spades and the minors, 2NT showed hearts and the blacks, 3♣ showed hearts and the minors, and 3♦ showed diamonds and the majors). The Kleinman 2♦ eliminated the need to reach the 4-level in the worst-case scenario. A slight further improvement is possible by having opener's 2NT rebid show hearts and the minors, and his 3♣ or 3♦ rebid show that minor and the majors.

My criticism of all these strong 3-suited 2♦ openings, even the Kleinman 2♦, is that the hands for them seldom arise, and that when they do, *natural* 1♠ and 1♦ openings work very nicely except facing hands too weak to respond at all, while facing those same weak responding hands, the strong 3-suited 2♦ opening will just as often get the partnership too high as reach a making game that others miss.

(h) BiColor 2♦. This remedies the defect of the Strong 2♦ by adding a second hand-type for the 2♦ opening to encompass: the big notrump (two strong for the usual 2♣-2♦; 2NT sequence). A 2NT rebid shows the big notrump, while a 3-level rebid (whether in diamonds or opener's second suit) shows primary diamonds. Over 2♦, responder bids an artificial 2♥ (negative) or 2♠ (positive). This has the merit of simplicity, and is what I recommend to most clients. (The big notrump hands are extremely awkward for most pairs because the first natural bid is usually 3NT, making it very hard to find the right game. An alternative solution, the *Kokish* 2♥ rebid after a 2♣-2♦ start (or better still, the *Kleinish* 2♥ rebid) is satisfactory but too complex for most players.)

(i) TriColor 2♦. This adds a third hand-type for the 2♦ opening to encompass: game-forcing rattlesnakes (22 HCP or more in the three 4-card suits), shown by a 2♠ rebid. To permit opener to bid 2♠, the 2♥ response is automatic, not negative. The original version of the TriColor 2♦ appeared in the December 1998 *Bridge World*. Since my first version, however, I have devised a simpler version, so that after 2♦-2♥; 2♠ (strong rattlesnake)-2NT (automatic unless responder has a suit playable opposite a singleton), opener rebids in the suit *just above* his singleton (responder's next bid in opener's singleton shows a *strong raise* of opener's last bid).

Though the TriColor 2♦ provides the best means of bidding the otherwise hard-to-handle hand-types it encompasses, these hands are still rare. Recently, I came to believe that another kind of 2♦ opening is superior (for matchpoints, at least) on grounds of frequency: a 2♦ opening that *fills the gap* between (strong) 1NT and 2NT openings.

(j) Mexican 2♦. George Rosenkranz created it to fill the gap between 1NT and 2NT, but unfortunately he designed it with the 1NT and 2NT ranges of an earlier era in mind, and specified a 19 to 21 HCP range. With most pairs nowadays using 15 to 17 HCP 1NT openings and 20 to 21 HCP 2NT openings, the Mexican 2♦ no longer serves its original purpose.

(k) George 2♦. I designed a version, the George 2♦, that can be used with whatever range each partnership desires and provides an optimal set of responses. Because I favor a *good* 15 to 18 HCP range for 1NT, and a 19 to 20 HCP range for

2NT, I recommend a 19 to 20 HCP range for the George 2♦, but others may prefer other ranges, e.g. a *good* 18 to 20 HCP. The hands embraced by the George 2♦ are easy to bid *without* the George 2♦ (open one of a suit, usually a minor). However, standard 1♣ and 1♦ openings usually don't work as well as the George 2♦: sometimes 1♣ or 1♦ gets passed out when a better partscore exists in some other strain, at other times responder stretches to bid 1♥ or 1♠ and the partnership reaches the right strain but too high a level, and at other times a standard auction leads to a normal 4♥ or 4♠ *played from the weaker side* when a George 2♦ (with its elaborate set of Stayman and transfer responses) would right-side the contract.

(l) Funny 2♦. That was David Ashley's name for the *very weak* Rattlesnake 2♦ (less than standard opening-bid strength) we used when we played together from about 1964 to 1967. I didn't think it particularly effective, but David did. Its main intent was obstructive, and it worked well when it goaded opponents into overbidding, but when opponents bid soundly, it helped them declare contracts better (they knew early in the play how all suits were splitting). I believe that Rattlesnake 2♦ openings, if played at all, should be part of a bidding structure geared to *bidding one's own side's hands effectively*.

(m) Precision 2♦. This shows a minimum-strength 4=4=1=4 opening hand specifically. As part of the *Precision System*, it fills a gap, obviating any need for the *nebulous 1♦ opening* that many strong-clubbers use. It works well because responder can set trumps immediately. However, it is not needed in standard systems, and the hands for it are rare. Perhaps that is why many "Precision Clubbers" have expanded its use to minimum-strength opening hands with *any* 4-4-4-1 pattern; in doing so, however, they reduce substantially its effectiveness in leading to good contracts.

(n) Noisicerp 2♦. This (a brainchild of the creative William Schramm) shows a minimum-strength opening hand with *four diamonds* and two other 4-card suits. Because it promises diamonds, the Noisicerp 2♦ can be often be passed safely (unlike other Rattlesnake 2♦ openings which can be passed only when responder has a weak diamond 1-suiter). The effect of promising diamonds is to disable sophisticated defenses to the Rattlesnake 2♦ that assign special meanings to *delayed* interventions.

(o) Red Rattlesnake 2♦. You don't really need any special bid for many minimum-strength 4-4-4-1 opening hands. With a 4=4=1=4 pattern, you can open 1♣, intending to raise a major-suit response or rebid 1♥ over a 1♦ response. With a 4=1=4=4 hand, you can open either 1♣ or 1♦ (though some partnerships have "rules" governing which of two 4-card minors to open, it's sensible to open the stronger minor, giving the nod to diamonds if the suits are roughly equal), intending to raise a 1♠ response or rebid 1♠ over a red-suit response. The only troublesome hands are 4=4=4=1 hands (a 2♣ response to 1♦ creates an awkward rebid problem) and 1=4=4=4 hands (1♦-1♠; 2♣ invites a preference to diamonds and normally shows five), especially those with *weak diamonds*.

If you want play a 2♦ bid that shows a minimum-strength rattlesnake opening, the Red Rattlesnake 2♦ is the best of the bunch. In response to a Red Rattlesnake 2♦:

(1) Game bids are to play; opener must pass.

(2) Bids in red suits are natural and non-forcing (invitational only at the 3-level).

(3) 3♠ and 4♣ jumps are natural and invitational, based on suits that are playable opposite the (expected) singleton. Opener may raise with a maximum and singleton support. With 4-card support, opener should make a move towards slam.

(4) 2♠ asks opener to pass with spades, else correct (to 2NT with a minimum, or 3♣ with a maximum).

(5) 3♣ asks opener to pass with clubs, else correct (to 3♦ with a minimum, or 3♥ with a maximum).

(6) 2NT asks opener to bid 3♣ with a singleton club, else bid 3♦ (minimum) or 3♥ (maximum). After opener's 3♣ reply, responder can bid a natural invitational 3♦, 3♥ or 3♠; sign off by bidding any game; force in diamonds with 4♦ to suggest a diamond slam; or bid an artificial 4♣ (a puppet to 4♦) as a prelude to seeking slam in the suit he bids next. After opener's 3♦ or 3♥ reply, responder can place the contract or bid an artificial 3♠ (a puppet to 3NT) as a prelude to seeking slam in the suit he bids next.

A good way for opener to encourage slam is by making a "Roman Key-Card" *reply* in support of the suit responder bids. For example, after 2♦-3♣, opener's 3NT shows 0 (or more likely) 3 keys, 4♣ shows 1 or (a barely possible) 4 keys, 4♥ shows 2 keys without the ♠Q and 4♠ shows 2 keys with the ♠Q.

(p) Flannery 2♦. The Flannery 2♦ shows exactly five hearts and four spades in a minimum-range opening hand. It has a wider range of *distributions* than a Rattlesnake 2♦ that also promises two specific suits, and for this reason, doesn't work as well on the hands for which it is designed. For example, a Rattlesnake 2♦ that promised both majors would encompass only two patterns, 4=4=4=1 and 4=4=1=4. In contrast, the Flannery 2♦ encompasses five patterns, 4=5=4=0, 4=5=3=1, 4=5=2=2, 4=5=1=3 and 4=5=0=4, making it harder for responder to discover how well the partnership hands fit and mesh without getting overboard.

Like the Precision 2♦, the Flannery 2♦ fills a gap in a *system*: a system that requires five cards for a 1♥ opening and uses a forcing 1NT response to 1♥. In such a system, minimum-range opening hands with a 4=5=2=2 pattern have no good rebid over a forcing 1NT response. If the Flannery 2♦ were restricted to hands with 4=5=2=2 and 4=5=3=1 patterns, it would work much better, and still fill the system gap. However, even the hands that Flannery handles best, the 4=5=2=2 hands, can be handled more easily by *swapping* the meanings of the (forcing) 1NT and 1♠ responses to a first- or second-seat 1♥.

(q) Multi 2♦. Several versions exist, but the common element that defines 2♦ as Multi is that it may be based on a Weak Two-Bid type hand in either major. Other hand types that may be embraced are big notrump hands, big 3-suiters, and Strong Two-Bids in clubs and diamonds. To handle the ambiguities involved, responder must tread carefully, using *Crash Landing* responses in the majors and a 2NT bid that asks "Which major?" and "Minimum or maximum?" In versions that include strong hands, these responses can impede constructive bidding. The more hand types embraced, the less efficiently the 2♦ bid works. Because the weak hands can be based on either hearts or spades, responder can seldom "continue the preempt" successfully (as he can over a Weak 2♥ or 2♠ Bid). Because the opponent next to bid can expect another turn, defenses against the Multi 2♦ can incorporate different meanings for *direct* and *delayed* interventions. Of course an advantage of the Multi is the absence of a proven effective defense against it, but this advantage may disappear as experience accumulates. Multi 2♦ users gain by assigning meanings (other than "Weak Two") to their 2♥ and 2♠ openings. Some play 2♥ and 2♠ as *Acol* Two-Bids (strong, but forcing only for one round), some as weak and 2-suited or as other specialized bids.

(r) Two-Way 2♦. Invented long ago, by Ira Rubin and me independently, a Two-Way Two-Bid shows either a Strong Two in the suit opened or a Weak Two in the suit above. The best of both worlds? Not quite. As usual with ambiguous openings, responder cannot deal efficiently with either possibility, and must waste bidding space and time to cater to both, while the opponents can adopt defenses that distinguish usefully between *direct* and *delayed* interventions. Until opponents acquire sufficient experience defending against Two-Way Two-Bids, however, the advantage will lie with the *offense*.

(s) "Tahitian" 2♦. In the mid-1960s, as part of the Strange Spade (a forcing 1♥ system), the Red Spade (a forcing club system) and the Shapely Club (a forcing club system), I invented opening two-bids that show limited one-suited opening hands. (With extra playing strength, but not the extra high-card strength needed for the forcing opening, the opening in each of these systems is 2NT.) Though I invented these limited openings, it was somebody else who named them *Tahitian* Two-Bids.

(t) *Phantom Hamilton* 2♦. At a tournament in the 1980s, when I played the *Hamilton* Notrump Defense with many partners, I was all set to overcall the dealer's possible 1NT opening with 2♦ to show both majors (in a hand not quite strong enough to open the bidding). However, my RHO preempted my hoped-for *Hamilton* 2♦ overcall by passing, so I had to pass too. Out of frustration, I invented the 2♦ opening for which the obvious name was *Phantom Hamilton*.

(u) "Sharing" 2♦. In the 1980s, I realized that the Omnibus 2♣ embraced too many hand types to describe conveniently, so I thought of sharing the burden of powerhouse openings between 2♣ and 2♦. 2♣ covered balanced 23-24 HCP hands, hands with clubs or hearts, and game-forcing rattlesnakes. 2♦ covered bigger balanced hands and hands with diamonds or spades. Powerhouse hands with four hearts and longer minor suit opened 2♣ and rebid in the minor. Powerhouse hands with four spades and a longer suit opened 2♦ and rebid in the longer suit. Game-forcing rattlesnakes opened 2♣ and rebid 2♣, a relay to 2NT, followed by a bid just above the singleton. I played it briefly with one tournament partner.

(v) *Phantom Michaels* 2♦. A couple of years ago, one of my clients noticed that his Weak 2♦ Bids weren't producing good results. I suggested that we switch to the BiColor 2♦, but he objected that it was too complex. So I devised a 2♦ opening similar to a 2♦ Michaels Cue Bid: five hearts and five spades, either weak (10 to a bad 13 HCP) or quite strong (17-19 HCP). Responder can either bid a major at the appropriate level (on the assumption that opener has a weak hand), or inquire with 2NT. In reply to 2NT, opener bids a 3-card minor if he has one, 3♥ (10-11 HCP) or 3♠ (12-13 HCP) if he does not, with a weak hand; with a strong hand he bids 3NT or jumps in a 3-card minor. I still play the *Phantom Michaels* 2♦ with that client, and it has worked adequately the few times that hands for it have come up, which is only slightly more often than the *Phantom Hamilton* 2♦. Neither the frequency of hands for it, nor its usefulness when it occurs, is large enough to warrant adopting it.