

The ABC of Bridge
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The series of ABC articles was inspired by my Wednesday evening social bridge game at my condominium. The men in this group have been playing bridge for 40-50 years, yet none have more than 20 master points. At the age of 73, they call me “the kid.” I noticed for the most part, my Wednesday evening bridge player friends were playing on automatic giving very little thought to Counting and Communicating. They did, however, exhibit a healthy amount of Curiosity. Thus began the 3 “Cs” of the ABC of Bridge.

What I noticed was that each player used the very popular 2D waiting response to the strong 2C opening bid. When I observed the difficult time they had in exploring and reaching the best slam contracts, I recognized that many duplicate players also use the generic 2D response and often struggle in their slam bidding.

As a result, I thought I would focus on the Communicating “C” of the ABC of Bridge and share with you a step response system for handling those 2C openers. I was introduced to this step response system about 25 years ago at a national tournament. Since then I have embellished the system and call it the Enhanced Step Response system on my convention card.

The responses to a 2C opener with no interference is as follows:

- 2♦ = 7 HCP or more that includes at least an A and a K or 2 aces
- 2NT = 7 HCP or more with the inability to bid 2D
- All other bids show 0-6 HCP as follows:
- 2♥ = 0-6 HCP which is the “default” bid. It may or may not contain hearts.
- 2♠ = 0-6 HCP with 4 or 5 spades
- 3♣, 3♦, 3♥, 3♠ = 0-6 HCP with 6 or more cards in the suit

The advantage of this step approach is that bidding space is conserved when the responder has a very good hand. Subsequent bidding takes place normally. For example, 2C - 2D:

- 2NT, 3♣ (Stayman)
- 3♦, 3♥ (Transfers)
- 3♠ (minor suit Stayman)

Several years ago I enhanced the basic structure to encompass Ace and King identification, initiated by the opener. When the 2♣ opener bids 4♣ following any response, the 4♣ bid seeks specific information pertaining to Aces held by the responder.

2♣ - 2♦ - 4♣:

4♦, 4♥, 4♠, 5♣ = only the Ace in that suit

4 NT = 2 Aces

2♣ - 2NT - 4♣:

4♦, 4♥, 4♠, 5♣ = only the Ace in that suit

4NT = No Aces

2♣ - 2♥, 2♠, 3♣, 3♦, 3♥, 3♠ - 4♣

4♦, 4♥, 4♠, 5♣ = only the Ace in that suit

4NT = No Aces

The King-asking feature only applies when the responder bids 2♦ and the opener initiated the 4♣ inquiry. Look at the following hand, which I held in a Florida tournament last winter. Think of the information you would like to elicit from your partner if you both could verbalize questions and answers.

♠ –

♥ AKQJ10742

♦ K7

♣ AQ109

Look at four possible responding hands and then examine the appropriate auctions.

(a) ♠ A7542

♥ 865

♦ 865

♣ K8

(b) ♠ 97542

♥ 865

♦ A65

♣ K8

(c) ♠ A7542

♥ 86

♦ A65

♣ K85

(d) ♠ 97543

♥ 86

♦ 865

♣ 872

(a) 2♣ 2♦

4♣ 4♠

5♣ 6♣

6♥ P

(b) 2♣ 2♦

4♣ 4♦

5♣ 6♣

7♥ P

(c) 2♣ 2♦

4♣ 4NT

5♣ 6♣

7NT P

(d) 2♣ 2♠

4♣ 4NT

5♥ P

By the way, Janis had hand (b) and we got an excellent score for bidding and making 7♥.

Anticipating the manifestation of the third “C” (Curiosity), let me address the obvious question – how do I handle interference of the 2♣ opener? A KISS solution is as follows: When the interfering bid is at the 2 or 3 level, double shows the value of a positive 2♦ response, thus allowing the opener to initiate the 4♣ query. A suit bid shows the value of a 2NT response with 5 or more cards in the bid suit. A cue bid shows a VOID with 7 or more HCP. If the interference is at the 4-level or higher, a double is for penalty and shows at least 2 defensive tricks, most likely in the opponent’s suit. If the 2♣ bid is doubled, responder bids as if there was no double except in the case when responder has 4 or more good clubs with fewer than 6 HCP in which case a redouble is made. Opener is free to take appropriate action.

Try adding this step response method to your bidding system and see if it helps.