

## **Strong 2 ♣: Responder's obligations**

Once 2 ♣ has been opened, both players have to be in tune that the partnership is almost certainly headed to game and slam is often a result after this start. Since opener has advertised a powerful hand, it is incumbent upon responder to indicate the relative strength of their hand so the proper level can be reached.

The previous lesson covered the initial responses, the most common being the "waiting 2 ♦" response to leave opener the maximum space to share their hand type. Responder's hand type generally falls into three ranges: extremely weak, just enough for game and interested in slam. An initial 2 ♦ waiting response can fall into any of those three categories. Still this is often the best course of action without a distinguishing feature to introduce.

## **Non-2D Waiting Responses - Planning Ahead**

On occasion responder will have a hand where they wish to convey both a positive response and a critical feature of their hand that might be difficult to do. It often pays to think ahead and determine the best way to describe our hand. Any non-2 ♦ response is 100% natural and forcing to at least game. While we want to avoid crowding the auction for opener, sometimes it pays to get a head start describing our hand. This typically involves at least a five card suit and typically shows two of the top three honors.

A good habit for responder after a 2 ♣ opening is to determine how high the partnership belongs giving opener a typical 2 ♣ opener (though they can have more). The average 2 ♣ opener when unbalanced has 9-10 tricks. When balanced the typical range is 22-24 HCP. Looking at our hand, we can develop a baseline expectation. Responding hands tend to fall into one of three buckets.

- **Flat Broke** -- At times, responder will have a terrible hand with no help for opener. In the last lesson, the "2nd negative" rebid was introduced. That is one technique to warn opener. Another is known as "fast arrival." Jumps in forcing auctions should be reserved for narrowly defined hands, taking up our own bidding space is too problematic otherwise.
- **Game Time** -- When responder has enough for game, natural / economical bidding is best to allow the partnership to determine the best strain (suit or NT).
- **The Slam Zone** -- When might the partnership have the values for slam? (1) A balanced hand that opens 2 ♣ and rebids in NT has at least 22 HCP. If responder is balanced, around 32 HCP is needed for slam. If responder has a long suit of their own, potentially fewer. (2) Unbalanced 2 ♣ openers deliver at least nine tricks and can easily have more. Whenever responder has a fit with two or more tricks, slam should be at least explored if not reached. Large trump fits and long/strong side suits allow for slam to be made with less than traditional strength expectations.

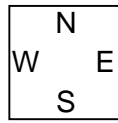
There are several constructive ways to investigate slam, some are more advanced than others. It is not necessary to employ all of these. In the majority of cases, establishing a trump suit early makes life much easier and gives us more options to choose from. If you're going for a slam in a suit contract, you can use some form of Blackwood, or Roman Keycard. Some hands call for bidding controls instead -- especially hands with voids. When a fit has been established and slam is being investigated, a new suit above 3 NT is advertising a control. There are others, too, involving splintering and other toys. The most important thing is that you and partner have AGREEMENTS on which tools you will use to find the info you need.

**Board 5**

North Deals  
N-S Vul

♠ A K Q 10 7 6  
♥ Q J 9  
♦ —  
♣ A K Q 7

♠ 2  
♥ A 6 3 2  
♦ Q 10 8 4 3  
♣ 9 3 2



♠ J 3  
♥ K 10 5 4  
♦ J 9 7 2  
♣ J 10 4

♠ 9 8 5 4  
♥ 8 7  
♦ A K 6 5  
♣ 8 6 5

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	2 ♣	Pass	2 ♦
Pass	2 ♠	Pass	3 ♠
Pass	4 ♣	Pass	4 ♦
Pass	4 ♠	All pass	

**Auction Commentary:** Opener has a 3 loser hand and almost 5 defensive tricks with enough for game in the hand. Responder requires at least a 5-card suit with two of the top 3 honors and 8 or more HCP to give a positive bid and waits with 2♦. Responder is stronger, goes slowly and raises to 3♠ to show goodies. Opener bids controls and is interested in a slam if responder has the A♥. Hearing a ♦ control is of no use and settles in 4♠ knowing they are losing ♥ tricks.

*Remember: We do not Blackwood with voids or two losers in an unbid suit. We show controls. Cue-bid Aces and if we have no Aces we cuebid kings.*

**Opening Lead:** 4♥ (Unbid suit showing that the opener lacks controls in this suit.)

**Planning the Play:** North sighs when they see dummy. The AK♦ are wasted. The defense gets the first two tricks and declarer easily takes the rest. Draw trump, leaving one in dummy to take care of the fourth ♣.

**Defenders' Plan:** East has already listened to the auction and found the best lead. West wins the A♥ (third hand high) and should return the suit. Any ♣ trick the defense is entitled to does not rate to disappear, but the same cannot be said for the K♥.

**Takeaways:**

(1) Control Bidding -- A slam investigation technique that can be used when a Blackwood response will still leave us guessing. Would East have led a ♥ against a 6♠ contract with a different auction? No way to know.

(2) Listen/Remember -- The opposing auction often provides us clues on opening lead and defense. It not only tells us what they HAVE, but it gives clues to what they do NOT have!

**Board 7**

South Deals  
Both Vul

♠ K Q 4 3	♠ J 10 7 6	♠ A 9 5 2			
♥ 5 4 3	♥ 10 8 7 6	♥ J 2			
♦ K 5	♦ Q 9 8 6	♦ 4 3 2			
♣ 8 6 3 2	♣ 7	♣ J 9 5 4			
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N					
W   E					
S					
	♠ 8				
	♥ A K Q 9				
	♦ A J 10 7				
	♣ A K Q 10				

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			2 ♣
Pass	2 ♦	Pass	2 N
Pass	3 ♣	Pass	3 ♥
Pass	4 ♥	All pass	

**Auction Commentary:** South has a very strong hand, but three-suiters are very difficult to bid after opening 2 ♣. (South might open 1 ♦, but fears missing game.) South does not have an obvious rebid, lacking a five card or longer suit. The strength is there for a 2 NT rebid, and the singleton spade argues against that, but South chooses that over bidding a 4-card suit (because partner will think it's five cards!).

**Opening Lead:** K♠ (promising the Q♠)

**Planning the Play:** Declarer counts their tricks: 4 trumps in hand, 3 ♣ and 1 ♦ to start. Dummy's trump holding can be worth one or possibly two tricks as well. Both ♣s and ♦s provide the chance for additional tricks. The ♦ finesse is an attractive option for developing tricks at first glance. However we can't conveniently reach dummy. Ruffing a ♣ is possible but we want to avoid shortening the trumps in both hands. Remember that we are only in 4 ♥, we can afford to lose another trick or two. If the opposing trumps are divided 3-2, there is a 100% path to success. If they are 4-1, we will likely need the ♦ finesse to work.

After ruffing the second ♠, cash the AK♥. Both opponents follow and the rest is easy. Draw the last trump with the Q♥. Cash the AKQ♣, throwing dummy's remaining two ♠s away. Then simply play on ♦s conceding the K♦ when it doesn't drop. We cannot risk taking the finesse by using dummy's last trump lest the defense cash black suit winners. This way the defense gets only 1 ♠ and 1 ♦. Dummy remains with a trump to prevent the defense from taking any further tricks.

**Defenders' Plan:** East should signal high for ♠ encouragement. The 9♠ is clear. When the K♠ holds, West should continue with a low spade to protect partner's spade holding. Leading the Q♠ will allow declarer to ruff away the A♠ regardless of how many ♠ East has.

**Takeaways:** (1) Plan rebids in advance, that often helps us with early bidding decisions. (2) Be wary of ruffing in both hands unless playing on a crossruff. (3) Remember the strength we each have in the auction and bid to the level accordingly. As an example, here opener has shown 9-10 tricks at least by opening 2 ♣. Even though opener bid only 4 ♥ in the auction, if responder has two or more likely tricks they must continue bidding.

**Board 10**  
 East Deals  
 Both Vul

♠ A Q 6 4	♠ J 7 5	♠ K 9 8
♥ 10	♥ 8 5 4	♥ A K Q J 9 7 6
♦ K J 6 4	♦ 7 5 3	♦ A 8 2
♣ 10 9 7 3	♣ Q J 8 6	♣ —

N
W     E
S

♠ 10 3 2
♥ 3 2
♦ Q 10 9
♣ A K 5 4 2

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		2 ♣	Pass
2 ♦	Pass	4 ♥	Pass
4 ♠	Pass	5 ♣	Pass
5 ♦	Pass	6 ♥	All pass

**Auction Commentary:** Opener has a 4 loser hand and a "self sufficient " suit. This hand is too strong to open at the one level. We open 2 ♣ and go straight to game in a major - shows 4 losers usually 8 or 9 tricks in your own hand and a very strong hand. The bigger we are, the SLOWER we go! *Remember: We cannot Blackwood with a void.*

**Opening Lead:** A♠ At the 6-level we do not promise the K♣

**Planning the Play:** Dummy is just what the doctor ordered. Declarer can see 7 ♥s, 3 ♠s and 2 ♦ to start. No harm in trying for all 13 though. Ruff the opening lead and draw trumps, no reason to risk a ruff. The ♥s are strong enough to start with the A♥, even if they divide 5-0 declarer can draw them all.

The ♦ finesse is the first chance that comes to mind but look at the ♠ suit closely. If the opposing ♠s divide 3-3, dummy's fourth ♠ will be good. No need for the ♦ finesse. If the ♠s don't split, declarer can always take the ♦ finesse later. If declarer relies on the ♦ finesse, there is no second chance. Both options work on this layout.

**Takeaways:**

- (1) Understand your rebids! Having East/West understand what the 4 ♥ jump rebid shows and how to continue from there makes bidding this hand much easier.
- (2) The Control Bidding technique comes up often in slam bidding. It takes practice but improves slam bidding accuracy.
- (3) Declarer frequently has to choose amongst several potential paths. Look for ways to combine multiple chances rather than relying on a specific one.