

Big Balanced Hands

Anybody who reads the news-sheet fairly regularly will know of one my pet hates – the need to open 3NT (or rebid 3NT having opened 2♣ or 2♦) with a 25+ balanced hand.

My favourite solution is to play Benjamin twos, but apparently the original Benjamin has: - 2NT opening = 19-20; 2♣ - 2♦ - 2NT = 21-22; and 2♦ - 2♥ - 2NT = 23 -24; (or some variation) and with 25 + you still have to make the silly leap to 3NT.

So what's the solution? It's very nice to have precise two step intervals. But opening 2NT (directly or indirectly) with 19 points certainly is not my cup of tea; and I most certainly do not want to play a system where you have to bid 3NT with 25+ (partner does not know whether to pass or try Stayman/transfers when he is virtually bust – often the case).

My recommended solution is: -

<u>Playing Benjamin twos</u>		<u>Playing Multi 2♦</u>	
18-19	1x - 1y - 2NT (a)	18-19	1x - 1y - 2NT (a)
20-21	2NT	20-21	2NT
22-24	2♣ - 2♦ - 2NT	22-24	2♦ - 2♥ - 2NT
25+	2♦ - 2♥ - 2NT	25+	2♣ - 2♦ - 2NT

So you never need the silly leap to 3NT when playing my treatment of either of these systems. Thus with these two conventions we have: -

Playing **Benjamin twos** a 2♦ opening is **absolutely game forcing** and 2♣ is a strong hand, either 8-9 playing tricks in an unspecified suit or a balanced 22-24.

Playing **Multi 2♦** then the 2♣ opening is **absolutely game forcing** and 2♦ is whatever selection of meanings you choose including the 22-24 balanced hand.

With either system the 3NT opening is best played as the gambling 3NT promising a long (7+) solid minor with absolutely no ace or king outside.

Note that Benjamin (and Multi 2♦) **both** work perfectly well with Standard American or with Two-Over-One (2/1). It's a shame that most Americans have not realised this yet.

The above structures work whether you play a strong NT or a weak NT (except that weak No Trump players may play 1x - 1y - 2NT as 17-19 if 1x - 1y - 1NT is 15-16 as in basic Acoll).

When the bidding starts with an effective 2NT opening (directly or 2♣ - 2♦ - 2NT or 2♦ - 2♥ - 2NT in either system) then responder can use both Stayman and transfers below the level of 3NT. **This is the whole point.**

When the bidding starts with a 1x - 1y - 2NT (18-19) then I play that any bid by responder is game forcing and more established pairs might also like to play New Minor Forcing or Checkback Stayman.

The sequence 1♣/♦ - 1something - 3NT (b) is best used to show a strong hand with a good long suit in the minor opened.

The sequence 1x- 2y (y lower ranking than x) - 3NT may be either hand type (a) or (b).

If, having read this, you still do not like to use 2♦ in one of these ways and prefer to struggle along with just 2♣ as your only strong bid, then have a look at the Kokish Relay; but Benjamin or the Multi 2♦ really is the best solution. You Americans should come out of your shell and realise that occasionally the Europeans have got it right.

The American invented the fantastic 2/1 system but are still in the middle of the last century as regards strong balanced hand openings.