

Those “not quite game forcing” hands

Living on the edge with a flexible 2C

by RAKESH KUMAR



Rakesh Kumar describes himself as an enthusiastic non-expert who makes enough errors to have plenty of material for bridge columns.

Hands of intermediate high card strength (say 16-20 hcp) with two good 5+/5+ suits have considerable trick-taking power if either suit fits with partner’s hand. Especially when one of the suits is a major, there’s the real possibility of missing game using standard bidding methods, which might open such hands 1-of-a-major and get passed out. It is also difficult to assess slam potential after a sequence such as 1M-1NT-3m.

There are various solutions to this problem; mine, developed several years ago, was to add them into a more flexible strong 2♣ opening. After a forced 2♦ response, opener then rebids to show both shape and strength, the latter via assessing the loser count. So after 2♣-2♦, opener rebids 2M with either a 4-loser single-suited hand or any 5+/5+ hand, or 3-of-a-suit with any 3-loser-or-better single-suited hand. After a 2M rebid, responder can sign off by jumping to 4M with a fit and a weak hand, otherwise a second response of 2NT asks for clarification. Then opener rebids 3M with a single-suited hand and 4 losers, 3-of-the-second-suit with 4 losers, or 4-of-the-second-suit with 3 losers or better.

At the Double Bay Swiss Pairs in January, which was won quite comfortably by Catherine Zhang and Cevat Emul, there were a couple of hands which would have benefited from this approach. Here’s one:

Board 3

Dealer S | Vul E-W

♠ 52 ♥ T4 ♦ AT8432 ♣ K54	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 60px; height: 60px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W — E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W — E	S	♠ K43 ♥ Q ♦ KJ765 ♣ 8762 ♠ JT8 ♥ J983 ♦ Q9 ♣ JT93 ♠ AQ976 ♥ AK7652 ♦ ♣ AQ
N					
W — E					
S					

9
7 □ 5
19

W	N	E	S
			2C
P	2D	P	2S
P	2NT	P	4H
P	4NT	P	5S
P	6S		

Showing 3 aces

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	3	—	5	6	3
S	3	—	5	6	5
E	—	—	—	—	—
W	—	—	—	—	—

Only 5 of 16 pairs reached 6♠, possibly because South splintered with 4♦ after 1♠-2♠, which would have mightily discouraged North. Using the 2♣ opening suggested above, the auction begins 2♣-2♦ (forced)-2♠-2NT (please clarify)-4♥ (5+/5+ suits, 3 losers). North, with 8 losers and a spade fit, should now apply loser-count arithmetic (24-[3+8]=13 tricks possible if all is well) to infer that slam must be a very good prospect. Checking for aces won’t resolve the ambiguity about whether the diamonds are any use, but fortune favours the brave ...

Fortune favours the brave.



With even more shapely hands, one can consider opening 2♣ with even fewer high card points! Partner thought a 2♣ opening was a good idea on this West hand:

Board 27

Dealer S | Vul None

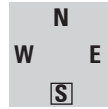
5
15 10
10

♠ 7
♥ AKQJT7
♦ AJ7652
♣

♠ QT983
♥ 6
♦ QT83
♣ J92

♠ AJ62
♥ 832
♦ K
♣ QT874

♠ K54
♥ 954
♦ 94
♣ AK653



W	N	E	S
			P
2C	P	2D	P
2H	P	2NT	P
4D	P	4NT	P
5H	P	6H	

Showing 2 aces

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	1	-	-	-	-
S	1	-	-	1	-
E	-	5	6	-	3
W	-	5	6	-	3

After the sequence 2♣-2♦-2♥-2NT (please clarify)-4♦ (again 5+/5+ suits, 3 losers) East has all the information necessary to move in the direction of 6♥. However, in the Double Bay Swiss Pairs, only 8 of 16 pairs were in slam.

Using this sort of 2♣ opening, it's still easy enough for responder to sign off in 3M opposite a 4-loser hand, even though it might be a shaky contract. However, the risk of missing games when responder has only 3-card support and relatively few high card points is greatly reduced. Naturally, if opener shows a 4-loser hand then responder needs additional values to consider moving towards slam.

If you wish, you can easily try out this adaptation of a 2♣ opening – your notrump rebids will be unaffected. However, as is true for all conventional methods, there are no guarantees of success. At the Summer Festival of Bridge, this nasty hand turned up in the Seniors, offering the prospects of slam but then causing much heartache:

Board 3

Dealer S | Vul E-W

4
18 10
8

♠ AQT84
♥ AKJ86
♦ 53
♣ A

♠ J5
♥ 9543
♦ T
♣ QJT752

♠ 973
♥ T2
♦ AQJ842
♣ K4

♠ K62
♥ Q7
♦ K976
♣ 9863



W	N	E	S
			P
2C	P	2D	P
2S	P	2NT	P
3H	P	4NT	P
5S	P	6S	

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	-	-	-	-	-
S	-	-	-	-	-
E	1	5	5	6	4
W	1	5	5	5	4

Using the flexible 2♣, the auction would be 2♣-2♦-2♠-2NT-3♥ (5+/5+ suits, 4 losers) and East, with 7 losers and a spade fit, would certainly want to head towards 6♠. In Canberra, 11 out of 34 reached this slam, but the usual lead of the 10 destroyed what little communication there was between the two hands, and set up a ruff if declarer finessed. As a result, 6♠ was made only 3 times ... 🍀