

TALK ON 2/1 GAME FORCE MONDAY 15/5/17

2/1 was developed in the USA in the 1970s by various players, notably Dick Walsh. Max Hardy was the first to publish the full system.

I first heard about 2/1 in the 1990s and I thought it was bizarre that players would want to unilaterally force to game when they knew so little about the hand. I always thought you bid firstly to decide the strain and secondly to decide how high to go. Over the years I have observed 2/1 GF has many weaknesses and one big strength. First the weaknesses:

OPENING LIGHT

I noticed over a period of time how hopeless were some of the contracts 2/1 reached and after being bitten a number of times I realised that you need to stiffen your opening bids.

One day I asked Peter Buchen, a big 2/1 fan, what you did when you're halfway through the bidding in a 2/1 GF situation and you know you're going to go 2 or 3 down in the final contract. He said "You go 2 or 3 down like everyone else". Nowadays it is taken for granted any partnership with ambition will play 2/1.

Would you open these hands at the one level, I would love to but would be cautious playing 2/1 GF:

K86432	----	A1095
KJ10975	105	KQ10965
6	KQ10765	1098
---	K9653	----

THE FORCING 1NT RESPONSE

Many years ago one of our most successful players was forming a partnership and had been convinced to play the Forcing NT (FNT) and had stuck with it despite a number of undignified results. This time his partner opened 1S and he had the worst possible hand – 1-4-5-3. He responded a forcing 1NT and his partner bid 2C which could be a 3 card suit. At which point he threw up his hands and said "That's it, no more forcing 1NT!"

An equally bad hand for the F1NT is a 1-4-4-4 hand in response to a 1S opening. On every hand you have either one 8-card fit or two 7-card fits and here it looks like you have two 4-3 fits. Your best spot is probably 1NT but you can't play there.

Another hand that is a shocker for the FNT is when opener holds 4 spades and 5 hearts, especially 4-5-2-2 where opener must rebid 2C over the F1NT with a 2-card suit.

However you need the FNT in 2/1 because you can't respond at the two-level with 10 or 11 HCP. Let's say partner opens 1S and you hold: A10, 87, 873, AKT952. Experience tells me not to bid 2C, what if partner has shaded their opening and you have a misfitting 11 opposite 11? The responding hand looks good but it is surprising how often it all comes unstuck.

In my preferred system I am able to just bid 2C and if partner bids 2S showing a minimum with 5+ spades I can pass. You are judging whether to carry on based on the measure of your secondary fit. And in 2/1 what do you do after 1S-1NT, 2D on this hand? If you are thinking 3C you would also rebid 3C with 3, K54, 87, QJ98764 (it would be nice to have a 7-card suit)

THREE CARD LIMIT RAISE

Let's say you hold 65, K96, Q96, AQ643 and partner opens 1H. Doesn't the club fit come into this equation? Playing FNT you bid 1NT and when partner bids (say) 2D you bid 3H but the partnership has little idea how the two hands fit. I like to bid 2C over 1H and if opener rebids 2H I pass. It doesn't change much if you play Bergen raises here, 1H-2S. You know even less about how the hands fit.

It could be even worse, say you hold J106, 85, 753, AKQ65 and partner opens 1S. How good is your hand? To be honest you have no idea, so you bid a F1NT or jump to 3H (Beregn) depending on your methods. I like to be able to bid 2C and if opener rebids 2S I pass. What if opener has A8753, AQ65, A642, ---, how else do you avoid the hopeless game?

THE BIG STRENGTH OF 2/1 GF

The big, big plus with 2/1 is the sequence: 1S – 2D, 2S which is game forcing as 2D is 2/1 GF. This powerhouse sequence gives the partnership a great deal of space to explore for the right contract. Equally impressive is something like: 1S – 2D, 2H – 2S. The opener can now bid out the shape of the hand and 3NT can be used as serious slam try or non-serious slam try, followed by cue bidding of 1st and 2nd round controls up the line. Slam bidding in this area is particularly accurate.

My preference is for non-serious 3NT since if partner also has little interest the partnership can sign off without cue bidding at the 4 level and giving away more information. Try this hand after you open 1S and partner replies 2H:

AQJ9874	K10
---	KJ875
Q107643	AKJ2
---	K6

HOW TO EXPLOIT THE WEAKNESSES OF 2/1


There are tell-tale sequences that indicate the 2/1 GF opponents are in a misfitting auction and if you have a likely looking hand where you know their suits aren't breaking you should venture a penalty double of their final contract, for example:

1S – 2C	1S – 2H
2D – 2NT	2S - 3D
3D - 3NT	3S – 3NT

You might quite rightly say that it's not easy to judge when to double. That's true and you can sit on the sidelines for a lifetime. To start getting it right you've got to get out there and try a few experimental penalty doubles.

This deal is from the 2017 Australian Open Teams Playoffs:

Board 22 ♠AK32
Dealer E ♥76
Vul E-W ♦92
 ♣KT863

♠76		♠J54
♥A98		♥KQJ2
♦Q84		♦K7653
♣AQ954		♣7

♠QT98
 ♥T543
 ♦AJT
 ♣J2

10	<p style="text-align: center; margin: 0;">Makeable contracts</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="border: none;"></td> <td style="border: none; text-align: center;">♣</td> <td style="border: none; text-align: center;">♦</td> <td style="border: none; text-align: center;">♥</td> <td style="border: none; text-align: center;">♠</td> <td style="border: none; text-align: center;">NT</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: none;">N</td> <td style="border: none; text-align: center;">1</td> <td style="border: none; text-align: center;">-</td> <td style="border: none; text-align: center;">-</td> <td style="border: none; text-align: center;">2</td> <td style="border: none; text-align: center;">1</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: none;">S</td> <td style="border: none; text-align: center;">1</td> <td style="border: none; text-align: center;">-</td> <td style="border: none; text-align: center;">-</td> <td style="border: none; text-align: center;">2</td> <td style="border: none; text-align: center;">1</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: none;">E</td> <td style="border: none; text-align: center;">-</td> <td style="border: none; text-align: center;">2</td> <td style="border: none; text-align: center;">1</td> <td style="border: none; text-align: center;">-</td> <td style="border: none; text-align: center;">-</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: none;">W</td> <td style="border: none; text-align: center;">-</td> <td style="border: none; text-align: center;">2</td> <td style="border: none; text-align: center;">1</td> <td style="border: none; text-align: center;">-</td> <td style="border: none; text-align: center;">-</td> </tr> </table>		♣	♦	♥	♠	NT	N	1	-	-	2	1	S	1	-	-	2	1	E	-	2	1	-	-	W	-	2	1	-	-
	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT																										
N	1	-	-	2	1																										
S	1	-	-	2	1																										
E	-	2	1	-	-																										
W	-	2	1	-	-																										
12	10																														
8																															

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
<i>Gill</i>	<i>Milne</i>	<i>Peake</i>	<i>Griffiths</i>
		1D	Pass
2C	Pass	2D	Pass
2H	Pass	3H	Pass
3S	Pass	4H	Pass
Pass	Dble	All pass	

1D was Precision (2+) and 2C was GF clubs or balanced, or NF if next bid 3C (can be weak e.g. AJxxxx and out). 2D showed five. 2H was "usually natural, occasionally three cards and stopper-showing looking for 3NT". 3H showed four card support and 3S confirmed the "three-card heart suit, looking for 3NT, lacking spade stopper" option.

To quote Liam, "In the context of the bidding double is clear, once you think about it. We can be fairly sure two spades are cashing (partner didn't overcall 1S at favourable), both of our opponents can be somewhat light e.g. 10 opposite 12, they have only a 4-3 fit, trumps aren't breaking, clubs are sitting over the long club hand, and any diamond honours are also offside."

Aside from declarer having four top losers the play went well for N-S. At a late stage North got in and led a spade for a ruff and discard which promoted a trump trick for the defence for +800. In the other room their teammates played 1H for +110 and a 14 imp pick-up.

The first step in exploiting a problem is to know it exists so now you are on your way. IMO Gazzilli is a better method than the F1NT and the three card limit raise can be handled well by using 1M-2C as a four-way bid which allows you to stop in 2M when opener is minimum opposite the 3-card LR.

And don't forget to double when opponents bid too much.

Paul Lavings