Bidding 2-Suited & 3-Suited Hands

Statistically, there are many more two-suited hands (holding a minimum shape of five cards, or more, in one suit and four cards, or more, in a second suit) than there are balanced or single-suited hands. Two-suited hands include five-fours, five-fives, six-fours, six-fives, six-sixes, seven-fours, seven-fives, and, most infrequently, even seven-sixes.

1. The Minimum Point Count for Opening Two-Suited Hands: Many two-suited hands, even with fewer than 12 HCP’s, have strong trick-taking potential (“playing strength”) as a result of their distributions, if a “Golden Fit” is uncovered, and should, therefore, be opened. Add the high-card points to the number of cards in the two longest suits (“The Rule of 20”). If the numerical result is 20 or more, open the bidding.

   a. With: A65 K843 A8762 3: (Open 1D)
   b. With: AJ7532 KJ10753 6: (Open 1S)

   “The Rule of 20” should not be applied to hands containing a singleton or doubleton losing honor such as K, Q, J, QX, or JX. Honor cards in short suits must be devalued when applying “The Rule of 20.”

   With: Q6 K7642 Q9653 K: (“Pass”)

   Very strong two-suited hands should open at the 1-level, not “2C.” If the bidding is begun at the 2-level, the auction often escalates too high, too quickly, and, as a result, the two-suited shape remains un-disclosed, and a “Golden Fit” might be missed.

   WITH: 6 AKQ5 AKJ643 K5: (Open 1D – If you open “2C,” you might have to bid to the 4-level in order to show your length in your two suits.)

2. Re-bidding Two-Suited Hands: On many occasions, it takes more than two bids to describe a two-suited hand. The more extreme the distribution, the more bids it may take to describe the hand’s shape. In general, however, after opening with a 1-level suit bid, and a re-bid at the 2-level or higher in a new suit, one has shown a two-suited, unbalanced hand.

   a. Five-fours (Bid 5-4): When holding one suit with 5-cards and one with 4-cards, Opener first bids his/her 5-card suit and then re-bids his/her 4-card suit. If the second suit bid is of lower rank than the first-bid suit, Opener’s HCP range is 11-18 HCP’s (Examples 1 & 2), and is not forcing. If the second suit is higher ranking than the first then Opener is said to have “Reversed,” and this shows 17 or more HCP’s and is forcing for 1-round (Example 3).

   When Opener re-bids a new suit at the 2-level or higher, he/she has shown a minimum of 4-cards in the second suit, and no fewer than 5-cards in the first bid suit.

   (1) With: AK876 KQ84 A9 J4: (Open 1S and re-bid 2H)
   (2) With: A76 8 KQ654 A642: (Open 1D and re-bid 2C)
   (3) With: AQ87 AKQ76 K65 3: (Open 1H and re-bid 2S)
b. **Six-fours (Bid 6-4-6):** In order to show a 6-4 distribution, Opener must first open the 6-card suit, then re-bid his/her 4-card suit, assuming the second suit is lower-ranking than the first, and lastly, with his/her third bid, re-bid the 6-card suit (Example 1). Because Opener requires three bids to show a 6-4 shape, it frequently takes the bidding to the 3-level to accomplish this.

   1. **With:** AK7532 Q964 A7 9: (Open 1S. If Responder were to bid 2C, Opener should re-bid 2H. If given the opportunity to bid yet again, Opener should re-bid Spades, now evidencing the 6-4 shape.)

   c. **Five-fives (Bid 5(Higher-Ranking)-5(Lower-Ranking-5(Lower-Ranking)):** With two suits of 5-cards each, it also may take three bids to describe this distribution as in the 6-4 hand described above. Opener first bids his/her higher-ranking (HR) suit, and then re-bids the lower-ranking (LR) suit on his/her first re-bid. With Opener’s third bid the lower-ranking (LR) suit is then bid once again (Example 1). **Bidding a second suit twice shows a minimum of 5-cards in that suit.**

   1. **With:** QJ752 KQ954 7 K5: (Open 1S, prepared to re-bid 2H. On Opener’s third bid, Opener must re-bid the Heart suit (3H).)

d. **Six-fives (Bid 6-5-5-6):** Most 6-5’s are shown as 5-5’s, and then, if needed, a fourth bid is made to show the 6-card suit (Example 1). **With a 6-5 distribution, one usually opens the higher-ranking suit first, even if this means bidding your 5-card suit before your 6-card suit (Example 2).**

   1. **With:** AQJ752 9 AK763 8: (Open 1S. After Partner responds 2C, Opener’s second bid is 2D. When Partner then re-bids 2-NT, Opener follows with a 3D bid. At this point, Opener has shown a 5-5. If Partner’s next bid is 3-NT, Opener’s fourth bid should be 4S to complete the showing of this 6-5 shape.)

   2. **With:** 9 AQJ75 AK7632 8: (Opener’s bids should still be H – D – D – H, as (1) above.)

3. **Re-bidding with Minimum Two-Suited Hands:**

   a. When Opener holds minimum HCP values, he/she must be careful not to push the auction up too high without sufficient HCP strength to play in a No-Trump contract at that level if No-Trump ends up being the best contract.

   **With:** A KQ843 85 Q9865: (After you open 1H and Partner responds 1S, you re-bid 2C. When Partner then responds 2S you must “Pass.” You do not have sufficient strength to re-bid 3C, which you would normally do with a 5-5 distribution, but here, it might result in Responder bidding 3-NT, likely to be an un-makeable contract.

   b. When you have opened with a 5-4 distribution, and Partner responds to your opening bid with a suit which is higher ranking than your second suit, you should **not** bid your second suit at the 2-level with minimum values as this would constitute a “**Reverse**.” Alternatively, Opener must choose either to re-bid his/her 5-card suit (Example 1), as if it held 6-pieces; or re-bid 1-NT (Example 2), even if holding an unbalanced hand.
5. opener’s re-rebid: HCP count from 11 bid by opener is 4. re-bid.

the partnership will have a three corresponding to two

“reverse,” showing 17 or more HCP’s.

One of the most common errors inexperienced Players make is to re-bid a new suit at the 2-level with minimum HCP values when they should re-bid in the opened suit or in No-Trump instead. To “reverse” with too few HCP’s is an inexcusable bidding error.

c. When you open with minimum HCP values, and Partner responds in a new suit at the 2-level, your second bid is allowed to be 2-NT.

With: 8 AK64 J8765 Q3: (You open 1D and Partner responds 2C. Your second bid should be 2-NT. Do not re-bid 2H as Partner has, most likely, denied a 4-card Heart suit having bypassed the Heart suit with his/her 2C first response. (Note: If the Partnership is using the “Two-Over-One” bidding system, 2H would be an acceptable bid here as in this system of bidding, since the Partnership is already in a game-forcing auction, anyhow, bidding 2H, here, would not be considered a “reverse.”)

4. responding to two-suited hands bid by opener: A non-jump, non-reverse, new suit, bid by opener is not forcing on his/her responding Partner (Example 1). Opener has limited his/her HCP count from 11-18 HCP’s and if Responder holds a mere 5-7 HCP’s, he/she need not make a re-bid. Only if Opener had made a “jump-shift” (Example 2) or a “reverse” (Example 3) call, would Opener’s re-bid have been forcing.

(1) 1H - 1S - 2D (A non-jump, non-reverse re-bid by Opener = Not forcing)
(2) 1H - 1S - 3D (A jump-shift by Opener = Forcing to Game)
(3) 1D - 1S - 2H (A “reverse” by Opener = Forcing for 1-round)

5. three-suited hands: When Opener holds a (4-4-4-1) or a (5-4-4-0) shape, he/she is said to have a three-suited hand. Although these hands are rare on most deals, when holding such shapes the Partnership will, most likely, have an 8-card, or better, suit fit. (See “Mini-Roman”)

A 4-4-4-1 Shape: With opening strength, one must open at the 1-level with one’s lowest-ranking suit, prepared to bid “Up-the-Ladder,” until a fit is found, if possible.

(1) If Responder shows a suit in which you, with minimum opening values, hold a Trump fit, add another 3 points and make a jump-raise.
With: 9753 KQ64 5 AKJ3: (Open 1C. If Partner responds 1H or 1S, jump to 3H or 3S, respectively.)

(2) When opening with minimum values (11-14 HCP’s), and Partner has responded in your singleton, do not bid one of your other 4-card suits if Partner has “passed” over your other two suits. Alternatively, re-bid 1-NT even though your hand is unbalanced. With: 6 KQ74 J763 AQ32: (Open 1C. If Partner responds 1S, your correct re-bid is to bid 1-NT. Responder has “passed” over your Diamonds and Hearts and your Partnership will, most likely, not have a fit of 8-cards in either of these two suits.)

(3) Do not re-bid No-Trump if you have an unbalanced 3-suited hand and there is still some chance of finding a Trump fit in one of your suits.
With: A874 4 AQ32 K653: (Open 1D. If Partner responds 1H, re-bid 1S,)
“Up-the-Ladder”
b. **A 5-4-4-0 Shape:** With opening values, one must open at the 1-level in his/her 5-card suit.

   (1) If Partner shows a suit in which you have a Trump fit, you should bid aggressively with your second bid. Your void is worth an additional 5-points, and so, you should usually bid directly to a game-level contract with your second bid.  *With: 8654 QK75  --  AKJ86:* (Open 1C. After Partner responds 1S, you should re-bid 4S.)

   (2) If Partner responds with a bid in your void suit, you should re-bid at the lowest level in one of your other 4-card suits, but only if Partner has not "Passed over" showing that suit.
   *With: 5653  --  AK743 AJ83:* (Open 1D. After Partner responds 1H, re-bid 1S)
   *With: 8743 AQ764 AJ76  --:* (Open 1H. After Partner responds 2C, re-bid 2D)

   (3) When you hold minimum opening values (11-14 HCP’s), and Partner has bid your void, do not re-bid one of your other 4-card suits if Responder has “Passed over” these suits. Prefer instead to re-bid your 5-card suit and do not make a second bid in No-Trump with your void.
   *With:  --  9853 AK74 AJ753:* (Open 1C. After Partner responds 1S your re-bid should be 2C. Partner has "Passed over" both Diamonds and Hearts and your Partnership will, most likely, not have an 8-card fit in either of these suits.)

   (4) With a 5-4-4-0 or a 5-4-3-1 shape; i.e., holding either a singleton or a void, your hand is more often suited to a Trump contract. This is reinforced if Partner has not bid the suit in which you have shortage.

   (a) With a 5-4-4-0 shape you may, on occasion, in order for Partner to judge your Partnership’s best contract, choose to bid your third suit of 4-cards with a third bid. You have already shown a 5-4 hand with your first two bids, and this third bid shows the three suits held with a void in the fourth, un-bid suit.  *With: AK643 KQ65  --  AJ63:* (Open 1S. After Partner responds 1-NT, your first re-bid should be 2C in order to show a 5-4 or 5-5 in Spades and Clubs. If Partner re-bids 2-NT you should now make a third bid of 3H to show your 5-4-4-0 shape.)

   (b) With a 5-4-3-1 shape, and your 3-card suit is in support of a suit Partner has shown with his/her first response, you should delay raising Partner’s suit immediately as Partner may hold only 4-cards in that suit. Instead you may choose to show your 5-4 shape first, and then, raise Partner’s suit with your third bid, now showing 3-card support.
   *With: 854 AKQ64 4 AJ82:* (Open 1H. After Partner responds 1S, you should re-bid 2C in order to first show your 5-4 Hearts and Clubs. If Partner now re-bids 2-NT, you should now bid 3S to show your 3-5-1-4 shape.)