

The 2♠ and 2NT responses to 1NT

With the advent of transfers the 2♠ response to 1NT is not needed as a natural bid. There are various uses for this 2♠ bid (and also 2NT), here are a few of them: -

- 1) 2♠ (8 pts) and 2NT (9 pts) are both balanced and invitational to 3NT
 - 2) 2♠ is natural and weak
 - 3) 2♠ shows a weak hand with a long minor suit
 - 4) 2♠ is Baron, seeking a 4-4 fit or invitational to 3NT
 - 5) 2♠ and 2NT (and 3♣) are as defined in Truppet Stayman
 - 6) 2NT is a puppet to 3♣, either weak ♣'s or a 3 suiter looking for slam
 - 7) 2♠ is Minor Suit Stayman
 - 8) 2♠ is either a limit 2NT type bid or a balanced slam try.
 - 9) 2♠ is a transfer to ♣'s and 2NT is a transfer to ♦'s.
- 1) 2♠ (8 pts) and 2NT (9 pts) are both balanced and invitational to 3NT.

This scheme is use by some less experienced players in the UK (they play a weak NT so it's actually 11 pts and 12 pts). I guess that this distinction may aid declarer in a borderline case but it really is squandering two bids for just one meaning and we need all the bids we can get.

- 2) 2♠ is natural and weak

Hand A	Hand B	Before the days of transfers both of these hands would simply respond with their major suit, fine. Nowadays we transfer; nothing is lost with
♠ 7	♠ Q10972	Hand A but with Hand B if we transfer with 2♥ then there is a risk that
♥ Q10972	♥ 7	LHO will double to show ♥'s and the opponents will find a ♥ fit that
♦ Q76	♦ J76	may otherwise have been lost. A valid point, but not so important as to
♣ J652	♣ J652	squander this otherwise very useful bid.

3) 2♠ shows a weak hand with a long minor suit

This is a simple variation used by many less experienced players. 2♠ is simply a puppet to 3♣ and responder either passes or bids 3♦ which opener passes. 2NT directly over the opening 1NT is played as invitational.

4) 2♠ is Baron, asking the range and seeking a 4-4 fit

A Baron bid shows no 5 card suit and is generally looking for a 4-4 fit (usually a minor) for slam purposes. It is common in the UK to play 3♣ over an opening 2NT as Baron and this use of 2♠ over 1NT is gaining in popularity. Over 2♠ opener replies: -

2NT minimum, may have any shape. Responder will normally start bidding 4 card suits up the line until a fit is found. However, the 2♠ bid may also be used as a quantitative raise and responder will then pass the 2NT bid with an invitational hand.

3♣ → 3♠ with a maximum, 4 card suits are bid up the line.

If responder has just an invitational hand then he will pass 2NT and will convert a suit bid (showing a maximum) to 3NT. The Baron 2♠ bid denies a 4 card major if it is just invitational.

An initial 2NT bid is not needed as a natural invitation (the response to 2♠ tells responder if opener is maximum or not) and so may be used for what you wish, usually a puppet to 3♣.

Now this all works, but it is nowhere near as efficient as the SARS sequences defined in the No Trump bidding book. Let's have a look at some other options: -

5) 2♠ and 2NT (and 3♣) are as defined in Truppet Stayman

Truppet Stayman is a convention involving Transfers and Puppets. 2♠ is game forcing and is a puppet to 2NT. After the forced 2NT responder then bids 3♣/♦ with a single suited hand or any other bid to show both minors. The direct 2NT over opener's 1NT is a transfer to ♣'s and 3♣ is a transfer to ♦'s. An invitational 2NT is bid via 2♣.

I guess that this all works OK but we can do everything with simpler methods. We transfer into the minor with our single minor suited hand (weak, invitational or strong – see (9) below). With both minors and a game forcing or slam seeking hand SARS works fine. And is very convenient to have an in-between bid available when transferring to the minors. Another disadvantage of Truppet Stayman is that the direct 3♣ bid over 1NT is utilised. There are a number of useful possibilities for the direct 3♣ bid (see the No Trump bidding book) and so no Truppets for me.

6) 2NT is a puppet to 3♣, either weak ♣'s or a 3 suiter looking for slam

You respond 2NT with either type of hand. With a ♣ bust you pass opener's 3♣ bid; with a three suiter you bid your singleton/void (or the suit below if you prefer that). This works fine but we can also do both of these; we transfer with the weak ♣ hand and we also have splinters which are defined in section 5.4 of the No trump bidding book. With this scheme there is no obvious mechanism for showing the weak ♦ hand.

7) 2♠ is Minor Suit Stayman

This is quite popular for those who do not use 4-way transfers, and there are different variations within Minor Suit Stayman. I'll cover two common variants: -

7a) 'Garbage' Minor Suit Stayman

With this variation, popular in the States, the 2♠ bid does not promise anything in the way of values and so opener cannot bid above 3♦. The responses to 2♠ are: -

2NT no 4 card minor

3♣ 4 (or 5) ♣'s

3♦ 4 (or 5) ♦'s

With two 4 card minors, opener bids the better one.

What can I say? 'Primitive' is apt, but this is popular, even with some experts.

Responder will bid 2♠ with any of three hand types: -

- 1- A weak hand with a long ♦ suit.
- 2- A weak hand with both minor suits.
- 3- A hand interested in slam, containing one or both minors.

Now this works (otherwise it would not be played by so many people) but it really is rather limited. Let's consider the three hand types: -

- 1- OK with ♦'s, but there is no provision for a weak hand with ♣'s.
- 2- How often do you come across a weak hand that can play in either minor at the 3 level but not in 1NT? And since opener may have no 4 card minor, it may well have to play at the 3 level opposite 3 card support.
- 3- This is acceptable, but our SARS sequences are far superior as you can find out opener's exact minor suit holding rather than just establishing that he has a 4 card minor. And, with this scheme, when opener shows a 4 card minor responder does not know if it is a 4 or 5 carder or if opener also has 4 cards in the other minor.

So, not really very satisfactory. Let's look at another variant of Minor Suit Stayman: -

7b) Game Forcing Minor Suit Stayman

With this variant responder must have at least game going values and is usually looking for a minor suit slam. Responder may have just one or both minors. The responses to 2♠ are:

- 2NT no 4 card minor but slam interest
- 3♣ 4 (or 5) ♣'s
- 3♦ 4 (or 5) ♦'s
- 3♥ two 4 card minors with a ♥ control
- 3♠ two 4 card minors with a ♠ control
- 3NT no 4 card minor and no slam interest

I guess that this variation works but there are a few drawbacks: -

- 1- We have no bid to show our weak hand with a long minor suit.
- 2- The responses do not tell responder if opener has a 4 or 5 card minor.
- 3- What does responder do with a hand two 4 card minors but no ♥/♠ control?

And, of course, we can get all of this information and more with the SARS sequences.

Whichever variation of Minor Suit Stayman you use, 2NT is free for the conventional limit raise.

8) 2♠ is either a limit 2NT type bid or a balanced slam try

This system is popular in the UK, they use 2♠ to ask opener's strength and the direct 2NT is generally used to sign off with a weak hand and a long minor suit (a puppet to 3♣ which responder either passes or corrects to 3♦).

The responses to 2♠ are: -

- 2NT minimum
- 3♣ maximum.

There are then various different subsequent bids to show all sorts of hand types. I shan't bother to list them as they can all be shown by other means and Baron 2♠ (4) seems simpler/better.

9) 2♠ is a transfer to ♣'s and 2NT is a transfer to ♦'s

Finally we come on to Transfers to the Minors, easily the best use of these bids. In combination with transfers to the majors (the combination is called 4-way transfers) and SARS this is undoubtedly the best use for these 2♠/2NT bids. 4-way transfers are used by many advanced pairs but SARS has yet to become well established.