

# How Do I Open If I Have A Really Big Hand?

## Some Guideline for Huge hands:

There are two types of Huge hands: Balanced and UnBalanced. Balanced Huge hands like the Medium Balance hand are Opened with a NT Bid, the Huge Balanced hand in the 20-21 HCP range is Opened with 2NT. The UnBalanced Huge hands are around 20+ HCP (as we noted before some suggest 22+ HCP) and are Opened with 2♣. [Partner needs to be aware if you intend to open 2♣ with unbalanced 20 or 21 HCP]

## Responses to 2NT Opener's

All the same responses one would give to the 1NT Open are available to the Responder of the 2NT Open; Transfers, Stayman, NT Response and Pass. The only differences are the level and the number of HCP required. As always the Transfer can be done with 0 HCP; Stayman (many people use Puppet Stayman over 2NT) only 4-5 HCP are required for Stayman. To Bid 3NT over a 2NT Open, like the Stayman, requires 4-5 HCP.

What if you are holding a Medium hand (15-17 HCP) and Partner Opens 1NT. Or Partner Opens 2NT and your holding Medium Response Hand? The Partnership holds 30+ HCP which suggests Slam, one or both have Balanced hands and that means fits might be hard to find and one is likely better off immediately suggesting slam. Suggesting slam is done in two ways (a) A Quantitative Bid and (b) Ace Asking. We will show the Quantitative Bid but hold off on Ace Asking.

## Quantitative Bid

A Jump to 4NT in most cases should be read as a Quantitative Bid, particularly over a previous NT Bid; e.g. 1NT – P – 4NT is a quantitative Bid; as is 2NT – P – 4NT. The quantitative Bid says "*Partner I think we have a lot of High Cards and if you are at the top of your Bid (i.e. 1NT == 17 HCP; 2NT == 21 HCP) I'm asking you to Bid 6NT else Pass*". The Quantitative Bid should stand out because there is no agreed upon suit as Trump, in fact no suit was ever mentioned before the 4NT bid.

## Strong 2♣ Opening

How would you feel if you are holding the following ♠AKT965 ♥K843 ♦A ♣AK; its not a very likely hand but you will get your share of 20-21 HCP UnBalanced hands which if you follow the guidelines of others you will open 1-of-a-suit (they give you no other choice). Your Bid is then followed by 3 Passes. You're stuck in a 1-level Bid when you were probably thinking Slam. This is the reason for my shift to 20+ HCP for the 2♣ Open. I back my reasoning up with another tool; Losing Trick Count. LTC requires a section of its own so we wont go any further on it; but will say that many say you should Open 2♣ if you have 22+ or 8.5 Tricks in your hand. We can see that our sample hand only has 7 Tricks (max) so it still can't be Opened with anything but 1♠. But using LTC this is a 3 LTC hand – LTC recommends Opening a 4LTC hand with 2♣. You don't have to understand LTC to use our guideline of Opening unBalanced 20 HCP hands with 2NT.

## Response to 2♣ Opening

When Partner has a Huge hand he really deserves two Responses from his Partner. There are several different Bidding techniques for Responder. For the moment we are going to stick with the simplest. Despite its simplicity many people use it because it is effective. Importantly remember that 2♣ is an artificial bid so you must respond; but because Partner's hand is so big you probably owe

opener two bids.

- 1) The first choice for a Response should show a Good (2 of Top 3, 3 of top 5) Major suit
- 2) In absence of a Good suit Bid 2♦; to allow Partner to show something about his hand (e.g. 2NT would show a Balanced hand with no preference for a suit; 2♠ would show a Good 5-Card suit asking if you can support it).
- 3) 2<sup>nd</sup> Response Bid is either:
  - a) 3♣ (actually the cheapest Minor), a 2<sup>nd</sup> negative showing < 3 HCP
  - b) Support Partners Suit at appropriate level 3-5 HCP is all that is needed.
  - c) Bid appropriate level of NT with no support and 3+ HCP

It would seem that Opening a Huge hand should lead to something Huge, and it often does but unless one wants to plunge headlong into danger this type of hand as well as many that don't so readily manifest themselves to a neat bidding sequence.

### How Should I Open a 25+ HCP Hand?

Many suggest such a hand be Opened with 3NT. What if it is UnBalanced? Whether it is or not there is another option: Open any hand over 20 HCP (except Balanced 20-21) with 2♣ and see what develops. If you indeed have a Balanced 25+ HCP when Partner bids 2♦, rebid 3NT. That's the same as Opening 3NT. Handling 25+ HCP hands in this manner leaves the 3NT Opening Bid available for other useful bids such as the Gambling 3NT Convention.

### A Better Response to Strong 2♣ Open

When Partner Opens a Strong hand there is a very good likelihood that he has stoppers in a number of suits. With any support at all from you game is very likely and SLAM is a possibility, so Controls are an important issue to get information on. Where better for that information to be shared than the first bid? This is the reasoning behind replacing the "waiting bid" of 2♦ with a Controls showing bid. There is sufficient bidding space to also include point range when we consider that to hold < 6 HCP a hand can't have more than 1 A or 1 K. Here is the method suggested by Edgar Kaplan, a long time Bridge Expert and Author. An A is considered 2 Controls and a K is 1 Control.

- 2♦ → 0 or 1 Control and < 6 HCP. This implies no A since an A ≡ 2 Controls
- 2♥ → 0 or 1 Control and ≥ 6 HCP. Again No A! But assuredly at least 1 K
- 2♠ → 2 Controls, 1 A or 2 K's
- 2NT → 3 Controls very specifically 3 K's
- 3♣ → 3 Controls 1 A and 1 K. As always knowledge of an A (vs 3 K's) can be important.
- 3♦ → 4+ Controls

The premise behind this is, as mentioned, to convey controls, and still have bidding space to find a fit. Remember that the opening hand has around 8 tricks (controls) and so a responder with 2 controls pretty much guarantees a 4-level contract. The point is that with a strong hand the Opener, with this type of information, should be able to determine *Slam or Game* and continue appropriately. It should be clear that nothing is lost from the switch from the standard 2♦ *waiting* response; the second negative (cheapest Minor) is still available. Instead of just 2♦ *waiting* these bids are all effectively *waiting* while giving some information. With the other bids there are sufficient controls combined with the Openers such that the bidding space is expanded for suit-fit exploration (meaning that with knowledge of 2,3 or 4 Controls we can continue into the 5-level space with little trepidation and stop short of slam, if necessary). An example might be in order: You're holding ♠Q973 ♥852 ♦832 ♣863

when Partner opens 2♣. Under either method you respond 2♦ and Partner bids 2♠ showing his 5♠'s. Do you bid 3♠ (encouraging) or Pass or bid 3♣, second negative? If you bid 3♠ will Partner feel confident that you have sufficient points to proceed to game? Change your holding by changing all the 8's into Q's. Under the standard system you still respond with 2♦ and likely jump to 4♠ after Partner's 2♠ rebid (you have no other information (stoppers) to convey but you do know you have game points). What does Partner do? Consider slam? With the Kaplan system you can show the lack of Aces (first round Controls) but the greater points with the 2♥ bid. Partner doesn't have to do Ace-Asking you've already told him. Now here's the real impact. If he does make an Ace-Asking bid it (after you told him you didn't have any) *can only* be interpreted as King-Asking and know it is being done because he holds all the Aces. But there is still some ambiguity.

## The 2♥ Negative Response

Another popular response system to the Strong Opening is the 2♥ Negative. In this system the waiting bid implies 4+ HCP while the immediate Negative reply of 2♥ says "No A or K" which might equate to less than 3 HCP.

- 2♦ → Promises 3+ HCP & at least 1 K
- 2♥ → 0 Controls < 3HCP No A or K
- 2♠ → Promises 5+ (good) ♠'s 8+ HCP i.e. at least 1 Kaplan like control
- 2NT → Promises 5+ (good) ♥'s 8+ HCP i.e. at least 1 Kaplan like control
- 3♣ → Promises 6+ (good) ♣'s 8+ HCP i.e. at least 1 Kaplan like control
- 3♦ → Promises 6+ (good) ♦'s 8+ HCP i.e. at least 1 Kaplan like control

The 8 HCP is the published values for this convention but why not make it 6+? In reducing the point count Partner can (a) bid safely bid 3NT if there is no fit, (b) advance to Game with a fit and a lower point count (allowing you to show Slam interest with an Ace-Asking) or (c) with a higher point count suggest slam by invoking Ace-Asking himself.

**Note the value of the Negative response – it doesn't say you have no HCP, you could have as much as 12 (4 Q's and 4 J's). What it says is you have no 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> round controls (No A or K) thus if the strong opener is considering slam they must have at least 2<sup>nd</sup> round control of all suits.**