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This Week in Bridge

(191) Bidding Over Strong 2♣ (and 1♣) Opening Bids -- Mathe

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Level: 3

Robert S. Todd

robert@advinbridge.com

General

When the opponents open the bidding with a Strong Artificial Forcing (SAF) bid, showing nothing about their distribution but just a strong hand, then it is often effective to preempt the opponents auction by eating up some (even just a bit) of the valuable bidding space.

Vs. Strong Artificial Forcing 2♣ Opening Bids -- Mathe

When an opponent opens the bidding with 2♣ (SAF), they have already taken away more than one full level of bidding without communicating to their partner any information about the shape of their hand. Anything we can do to take away even more bidding space will be particularly destructive.

After a 2♣ opening bid by RHO, a suit bid is natural (even a 3♣ bid), showing a long suit, and is generally destructive. The values needed to enter the auction vary based on the quality and length of our suit and the vulnerability (of course!) These overcalls at any level (2-, 3-, or even 4-level) could be as weak as a preemptive bid (but could be stronger) and are designed to interfere with the opponents who have already stated (by opening 2♣) that they have a very powerful hand.

Example

♠ 8

♥ KQJT64

♦ 975

♣ 974

2♣ ___?

With this hand, overcall 2♥ to get in the opponents' way and make it even more difficult for them to communicate at a low level. Do so at any vulnerability.

Note: ♠ is the suit that eats up the most bidding space and is the most destructive to the opponents. It pays to be aggressive in bidding with a long ♠ suit.



Mathe 2-Suited Bids

It is also useful to be able to interfere in the opponents' auction with some 2-suited hands (showing both suits with one bid). If we adopt an artificial system (like we do after a 1NT opening bid) then we give up some natural, direct, and destructive bids. Instead, let's look at how we can use other bids (unused ones) to show 2-suited hands.

The two low-level bids that are not used are double and 2NT. Playing a system called Mathe, one of the first and simplest interference systems, we use these bids as follows:

- Double* Both Majors (at least 5/4 shape – either suit could be longer)
- 2NT* Both minors (usually at least 5-5 shape since we are forcing to the 3-level)

Both of these bids are usually destructive – showing 2-suited preemptively-oriented hands.

Example

♠ 8

♥ 53

♦ QJ965

♣ KJT32

2♣ ___?

With this hand, non-vulnerable, 2NT (showing both minors) is a good destructive bid.

These 2-suited bids can be used in another situation - after an opponent opens the bidding 2♣ and their partner responds 2♦. In this situation, we can play Mathe 2-suited bids as well.

2♣ P 2♦ ___?

- Double* Both Majors (at least 5/4 shape – either suit could be longer)
- 2NT* Both minors (usually at least 5-5 shape since we are forcing to the 3-Level)

These bids mean the same here as directly after a 2♣ opening bid by RHO.

Note: Some partnerships choose to play other systems (like Transfers, Suction, etc.) over a 2♣ opening bid in an attempt to create even more chaos for the opponents. This approach has some advantages and some disadvantages - it is a partnership choice.



Mathe vs. Precision (“Big Club”) 1♣ Opening Bids

If the opponents play a precision-style system where 1♣ is a Strong Artificial Forcing bid (usually promising 16+ points), then it is important to create problems for the opponents in any way possible. One simple approach is to play Mathe.

Playing Mathe vs. 1♣* (SAF) then suit bids are natural (including 2♣) and destructive. Again, other calls are used to show 2-suited hands:

- Double* Both Majors (at least 4/4 shape – either suit could be longer)
- 1NT* Both minors (usually at least 5/4 shape – either suit could be longer)
- 2NT Both minors (usually at least 5-5 shape since we are forcing to the 3-level)

Mathe can also be used to show 2-suited hands when the auction starts with a strong 1♣ opening on your LHO and RHO bids 1♦* (showing a weak hand):

1♣* P 1♦* __?

- Double* Both Majors (at least 4/4 shape – either suit could be longer)
- 1NT* Both minors (usually at least 5/4 shape – either suit could be longer)
- 2NT Both minors (usually at least 5-5 shape since we are forcing to the 3-level)

Conclusion

When an opponent shows a strong hand by opening with a SAF bid (2♣ or a strong 1♣) then they have neglected to describe their distribution to partner with the first round of the bidding (only showing strength instead). In this case, if you can safely take away even more bidding space from your opponents, you will make it difficult for the opponents to land in the right contract. This can be done with single-suited hands that simply preempt as high as they safely can or with 2-suited hands (both Majors or both minors) which can be described with a double or NT bids – using Mathe. Try to find ways to make the opponents’ lives difficult when you suspect the hand belongs to them – get into their auction!