

## **BENJAMINISED ACOL (reverse)**

Benjaminised Acol (named after Albert Benjamin), is a 'weak two' approach to bidding. Normally the weak two refers to a major, but it is becoming common to include a weak diamond suit. We shall adopt the traditional approach, but will consider the modified form – **Reverse Benji**

### **Why Benji**

The 'weak two' approach to bidding is popular for two main reasons. Firstly the frequency of hands is much greater than the traditional Acol strong 2 bid. Secondly, it follows the modern trend in bridge to be destructive rather than constructive – i.e. deny the opponents bidding space when they possibly hold the balance of points. However it still manages to retain the equivalent of the Acol strong 2 bids by a slightly roundabout way.

### **Why REVERSE Benji**

Quite simply, reverse Benji is easier to learn. Ordinary Benji is a more sound approach, but is slightly more confusing for players who are used to traditional Acol. My advice is to learn the general features of the system via Reverse Benji, and then play what the majority of players in your club play – it makes it easier with different partners. However established partnerships should eventually progress to Ordinary Benji.

### **Basic Bids (REVERSE Benji)**

- 2♣ - strong (23+) balanced, or strong two-suiter – same as Acol 2♣ (see Note 1)
- 2♦ - strong single suited hand, or 20–22 balanced with a five card suit (see Note 2)
- 2♥, 2♠ - weak 6 (or 7) card suit, 5-9 points non-vul, 6-10 points vul.

**Note 1** – ordinary Benjaminised Acol swaps the meanings of the 2♣ and 2♦ bids.

**Note 2** - the conventional approach is to have differing point ranges for a direct 2NT opening (21 - 22) and a 2NT through 2♦ (19 – 20). This is a better approach, since it overcomes the dreaded sequence 1♥-1♠ - 3NT with a 19/20 count (which if playing 4-card majors may miss a 5-3 heart fit – not too consequential if playing 5-card majors). However the downside is that you should now play 5-card (Puppet) Stayman over 2NT in order to locate any 5-3 fit – another convention to learn!!  
The approach given below is much simpler and causes less disruption to your current system – but make it your eventual aim to adopt the more conventional approach.

However if you currently use different point ranges for the 2NT then stay with that approach.

### **2♣ Opening Bid**

This is the same as the Acol 2♣ opening bid i.e. a strong (23+) balanced hand, or a strong two- suited hand having a high expectation of making game. Traditional Acol responses - i.e. 2♦ negative, other bids are game forcing.

### **2♦ Opening Bid**

A **strong single-suited hand** (but may have a secondary four-card suit), or **20–22 balanced with a five card suit**. The strong single-suited hand is equivalent to a hand suitable for a two-level opening playing traditional Acol (including clubs – not directly available playing traditional Acol) i.e. 4 'quick tricks', and; 8+ playing tricks for hearts or spades, 8½+ playing tricks for clubs or diamonds.

(With a long minor and a secondary major, consider opening at the one level – see example).

Partner's responses are:

2♠, 3♣, 3♦ - a good five+card suit (6 at the 3-level), and 1½ 'quick tricks'.

2NT – 8+ points balanced.

2♥ - the negative – this is the usual response. Over this bid, opener responds:

- a) if a strong single-suited hand, bid the suit. This then becomes the equivalent of opening an Acol 2♥ or 2♠, with the added bonus that you can bid a strong club suit (albeit at the three level) – not available in 'standard' Acol. The only downside is that a strong diamond suit has to be shown at the three level.

Responder then bids as if partner has opened a strong 2 – i.e. he can bid 2NT as a second negative. Note that if opener has to show his strong suit at the three level, the bid is technically non-forcing, but responder should still strain to bid.

Opener can jump the bidding to show even stronger hands (but not strong enough for a 2♣ opening) e.g. 2♦ -2♥ - stop3♠ would show a 9+ playing trick hand in spades – this would be forcing, and subsequent bids from responder are then cue bids.

- b) The simple approach (see Note 2 above) – keep the point range the same as a 2NT opener i.e. 20-22 points, but include a five card suit (conversely a 2NT opening bid denies a five card suit). A subsequent bid of 3♣ from responder requests opener to show his five-card suit (if the suit is clubs the response is 3NT). All other bids from responder are the same as for an immediate 2NT opening e.g. transfers (if played).

### Examples

- |    |                                      |    |                                    |    |                                   |    |                                    |    |                                   |
|----|--------------------------------------|----|------------------------------------|----|-----------------------------------|----|------------------------------------|----|-----------------------------------|
| a) | ♠ AKQ10863<br>♥ 1085<br>♦ 7<br>♣ AK7 | b) | ♠ AQ976<br>♥ KQ4<br>♦ AK7<br>♣ K6  | c) | ♠ AQ97<br>♥ KQ4<br>♦ AK7<br>♣ K62 | d) | ♠ 7<br>♥ A8<br>♦ A73<br>♣ AKQ10765 | e) | ♠ K64<br>♥ KJ1076<br>♦ AKJ<br>♣ 8 |
|    | ♠ 954<br>♥ 62<br>♦ KQ6543<br>♣ Q3    |    | ♠ KJ3<br>♥ 8765<br>♦ QJ62<br>♣ 94  |    | ♠ KJ3<br>♥ 8765<br>♦ QJ62<br>♣ 94 |    | ♠ KQ842<br>♥ Q4<br>♦ 9852<br>♣ 43  |    | ♠ AQJ732<br>♥ 4<br>♦ 73<br>♣ A753 |
| f) | ♠ AKQJ863<br>♥ 1085<br>♦ 7<br>♣ AK7  | g) | ♠ AKQJ863<br>♥ K85<br>♦ 7<br>♣ AK7 |    |                                   |    |                                    |    |                                   |
|    | ♠ 954<br>♥ A2<br>♦ 1096543<br>♣ Q3   |    | ♠ 954<br>♥ A2<br>♦ 1096543<br>♣ Q3 |    |                                   |    |                                    |    |                                   |

- a) 2♦ - 2♥ -2♠ - 4♠. With eight playing tricks in spades, North opens 2♦ and shows the spade suit after his partner's 2♥. South has sufficient support and values for game.
- b) 2♦ - 2♥ -2NT – 3♣ - 3♠ - 4♠. 21 points with a five card suit – 2♦ followed by 2NT. South is happier to play in hearts or spades given the weakness in clubs, so 3♣ (what's your suit?).

- c) 2NT - 3♣ - 3♠ - 3NT. Similar to b), but with only four spades 2NT is the correct opening bid. South is possibly interested in a 4♥ contract so bids Stayman. Over 3♠ he settles for 3NT. (I wouldn't quibble with a direct raise to 3NT given the quality of the heart suit).
- d) 2♦ - 2♥ - 3♣ - 3♠ - 3NT. 8½ tricks in clubs so North opens 2♦. South is not quite good enough for a positive, so duly bids 2♥. North shows his good club suit, South shows his useful spade suit, and North bids the obvious game.
- e) 2♦ - 2♠ - 3♠ - 4♣ - 4♦ - 4♠ - 4NT... - eventually 7♠ or 7NT. South is good enough to bid his own spade suit and North shows some support (after South's own spade suit bid you are in a game forcing situation, so take the bidding slowly). Cue bids (4♣, 4♦, 4♠) and some form of Blackwood lead to the grand slam (players unfamiliar with cue bids should still reach the small slam).
- f) 2♦ - 2♥ - 3♠ - 4♥ - 4♠. North has 9 tricks - so jump to 3♠. South having genuine spade support, cue bids ♥A. North isn't interested (remember partner has shown a negative at his first bid).
- g) 2♦ - 2♥ - 3♠ - 4♥ - 6♠. Similar to (f), but North is having a good day - so 6♠

But:...

Consider the following hand:

♠ A6	♠ Q107
♥ AQ72	♥ J1084
♦ AKQ1083	♦ 74
♣ 7	♣ K652

Playing reverse Benji, the bidding would go 2♦ - 2♥ - 3♦ - pass (East doesn't perceive any game prospects).

Whereas playing Acoll strong 2's the bidding would go 2♦ - 2NT - 2♥ - 3♥ - 4♥

This shows a disadvantage of the Benji approach (the situation is no different if playing ordinary Benji). For this reason, consider opening this type of hand (i.e. strong minor with a secondary four card major) at the one level - i.e. 1♦ - 1♥ - ..... 4♥. If partner had passed your 1♦ you would probably have been no worse off.

### 2♥, 2♠

Essentially a six card suit, 5-9 points non-vulnerable, 6-10 points vulnerable. I also like to include the option of a seven card suit which denies two of the top three honours (conversely I only open 3♥ or 3♠ with a seven card suit *and* two of the top three honours).

It is important to have a degree of strength in the major suit. As a **guideline**, I would expect either two of the top four honours, or three of the top six (yes - 9's can be useful cards), but even this can be stretched non-vulnerable.

Excellent	Possibly	Unsuitable
AK9843	KJ7432	Q87432
KQJ632	A109532	J106432
AJ10752	QJ8642	1098765
QJ10632	K107632	
KJ10863	J109743 (non-vul)	

(In practical terms most people would open the ‘possibles’ with a weak two).

### Other Considerations

Some players advocate not opening a weak two with another four-card major. There is some merit in this, in that if partner has a four-card fit with the major it will be more difficult to play at game level in the four-four fit. I don't fully subscribe to this view, preferring the advantage of the pre-empt, but I would not open a weak two with a very weak six-card suit and a strong alternative four-card major.

### Responses To Weak-Twos

Since weak-twos are pre-emptive the usual response is to pass (in the 11 – 14 point range), but there are three other types of response to an opening weak-two:

- With some support (doubleton honour or three cards) and weak (i.e. up to about 10 points), the suit can be raised. This merely **extends the pre-empt**, making it even more difficult for the opposition. You should raise to the level of the fit (i.e. with three-card or a flattish four-card support bid 3♥ or 3♠. With four-card fit and a singleton bid 4♥ or 4♠).
- With no support, a change of suit response is highly unusual, and is made with a probable other six-card suit and possible strength for game (about 16+ points). It is forcing for one round.
- With some support and 15+ points there is a possibility of game. Bid 2NT, over which the opener further describes his hand. We shall assume the popular ‘Ogust’ or ‘Blue Club’ responses, which asks opener to define his hand in terms of quality and more concise strength as follows:  
(Alternatively some players use the Standard American approach whereby 2NT requests opener to show features).

3♣ - lower range (5,6 non-vul; 6,7 vul); poor quality suit  
 3♦ - lower range (5,6 non-vul; 6,7 vul); good quality suit  
 3♥ - upper range (8,9 non-vul; 9,10 vul); poor quality suit  
 3♠ - upper range (8,9 non-vul; 9,10 vul); good quality suit  
 3NT – shows specifically AKQ of the suit

(with the ‘middle’ of the range make a judgment. For example if the point count contains an unsupported Jack, devalue the hand).

The criteria for a good quality suit is one containing two of the top three honours (or one of the top two honours with a seven-card suit).

With a ‘lower range; good quality’ response (3♦), the opposite hand should be aware that there may be entry problems to the weak-two hand, should he decide to play in no-trumps. It's often preferable to support the weak-two trump suit on even sub-minimum support.

I actually prefer to reverse the 3♦ and 3♥ bids, since it gives responder an extra cue-bid in the rare situations where a slam is contemplated (but this is not standard).

### Examples (North to open):

a) ♠ 854	b) ♠ Q1098652	c) ♠ 84	d) ♠ KQJ753	e) ♠ AK8532	f) ♠ AJ10752
♥ KQ10943	♥ J7	♥ KQJ1076	♥ 954	♥ 86	♥ J84
♦ 52	♦ 53	♦ 753	♦ 7	♦ 753	♦ 98
♣ 63	♣ K4	♣ 82	♣ Q74	♣ 85	♣ 54
♠ A63	♠ J7	♠ AK6	♠ 6	♠ 964	♠ 6
♥ A5	♥ AQ6	♥ 5	♥ AK8	♥ KQ7532	♥ AK9753
♦ A7643	♦ Q742	♦ A1064	♦ KQ654	♦ 6	♦ K72
♣ A84	♣ AQJ6	♣ AK1065	♣ J853	♣ J76	♣ AK6

- a) 2♥ - 2NT – 3♦ – 3NT. The 3♦ shows lower range, good quality (i.e. two of top three honours).
- b) 2♠ - 2NT – 3♣ – 3♠. The quality of the seven card spade suit is unsuitable for a three level pre-empt, so bid 2♠. South is interested in game, so enquires with 2NT. However after the 3♣ response (lower range, poor quality) settles for 3♠, probably losing two spades and two diamonds.
- c) 2♥ -2NT – 3♦ – 4♥. South knows he is going to game, but after the 3♦ response (lower range, good quality), he deems 4♥ preferable to 3NT despite only having a singleton. Partner's points are in the heart suit (3♦ response – good hearts), and so he would be lacking entries to the heart suit if played in no-trumps.
- d) 2♠ - pass. Despite 15 points, there is no fit with partner. Game would be highly unlikely.
- e) 2♠ - 3♠. Support for spades, weak, but good shape, so pre-empt further (opposition could be making a slam in a minor). The opposition could double 3♠ for take-out, but this takes the opposition beyond 3NT (which they may 'punt', and this will probably be a disaster), They may even make a minor slam.
- f) 2♠ - 3♥ - 4♥. The 3♥ bid is forcing and partner is happy to show support.

### **Advantages Of Benji v Reverse Benji**

Above we have described the workings of Reverse Benji as opposed to Ordinary Benji, simply to ease the transition from Standard AcOL – the 2♣ bid remains the same.

However Ordinary Benji does have some slight advantages, mainly involving the heart suit:

- a) – in Reverse Benji, with the usual 2♥ negative response, this potentially 'wrong-sides' the eventual contract if opener has the strong heart suit option. This is of less consequence if the negative was 2♦ - as is the case with Ordinary Benji.
- b) – in Reverse Benji, with the usual 2♥ negative, opener is forced to the three level to show his strong heart suit (which is then non-forcing). This does not apply if using Ordinary Benji.
- c) – you can readily show extra tricks in either hearts or spades playing ordinary Benji – 2♣ - 2♦ - 3♥/♠. This is only available for the spade suit if playing reverse Benji.

**So – convert to ordinary Benji when you feel comfortable with the overall approach**