

A Misuse of Two-Over-One

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Bridge bidding is all about making the bid that is most descriptive of your hand. This is true whether you play Standard American, Two-Over-One, or any other system.

If you use Two-Over-One, then you can force to game simply by bidding a new suit at the two-level after partner has opened the bidding. For example, if partner opens with One Heart, you can force to game by bidding Two Diamonds. HOWEVER: If you use Two-Over-One, and your partner opens the bidding, and you have a game-going hand, you do NOT necessarily have to bid a suit at the two-level! Instead, you should make the bid that is most descriptive of your hand. In many cases, this will mean bidding a suit at the one-level.

The following two hands were bid incorrectly by two different pairs playing Two-Over-One. Hand #1 was responder's hand after partner opened One Heart; hand #2 was responder's hand after partner opened One Diamond:

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| 1. S: KQ1075 | 2. S: AK94 |
| H: 9 | H: AJ9862 |
| D: K103 | D: 5 |
| C: AJ72 | C: 52 |

Obviously, responder knows that both of these are game-going hands once partner opens the bidding. And in both cases, responder bid Two Clubs in order to establish a game force. Clearly, the Two Club bid was wrong in both cases.

The purpose of bidding is to describe your hand to your partner. Of course, part of that description is the strength of your hand. But equally important is your distribution: Do you have a long suit? Two long suits? A balanced hand?

When responder bids Two Clubs with either of these hands, he distorts the picture of his distribution. When responder compounds the error by subsequently bidding his long major, he just further distorts the picture, making it sound like he has 5+ Clubs and a four-card major.

Clearly, you want to reach game with both of these hands after partner opens the bidding. How do you force to game as responder without making a two-level bid? You do it by bidding new suits – as many times as necessary. You start by bidding a new suit at the one-level. This bid isn't forcing to game, but it IS 100% forcing. Partner will bid again. If necessary, you then bid another new suit. Again, this is 100% forcing and partner will take another bid. After opener's third bid (if not sooner), you should know where the hand belongs and you can bid the appropriate game (or perhaps look for slam).

So with hand #1 above, over the opening bid of One Heart, responder should start by bidding One Spade. If partner raises spades, responder will just bid game in spades. On the actual deal, however, partner will bid Two Hearts. Now responder should bid Three Clubs. Partner will now know that you have 5+ spades and (probably) four clubs. In addition, the new suit by responder at the three-level is forcing to game.

With hand #2, over the opening bid of One Diamond, responder should bid One Heart. If partner raises hearts or bids spades, responder can bid game in that major. On the actual deal, partner will bid One No Trump. Now responder should bid Two Spades. Partner will now know that you have 5+ hearts and (probably) four spades. In addition to being the perfect description of your distribution, the Two Spade bid is a reverse by responder and, therefore, is forcing to game.

This doesn't mean that you will never have to "manufacture" a bid during the course of the bidding. Of course you will: There will be times when there isn't any bid that correctly describes your hand. In this situation, you just have to choose the best bid from among the imperfect options. However, this will usually NOT be the case for responder's first bid. And it will definitely not be the case for responder's first bid when you have a game-going hand and a 5+ card major! Start by just bidding your major, and worry about forcing to game later.

Now let's look at the other side of the table: What should you do if one of your opponents makes a wrong bid, such as responder's Two Club bid on these two hands, against you? Clearly, such a bid will give you an incorrect picture of your opponent's hand and may make it difficult for you to defend or play the hand correctly. Do you have any recourse?

What you should NOT do is to tell your opponent that his bid was illegal or not allowed. That is not your job! Instead, you should call the director. The director will attempt to determine if the bid in question was just a bad bid or if there was intent to deceive (i.e., a possible psych). If it's a psych, then it will be noted. If it's just a bad bid, then the director will probably explain why the bid was wrong and perhaps suggest what action should have been taken. There probably won't be any sort of penalty in either case.

However – and this is a really big "however" – if you and your partner play that, as responder, you will ALWAYS bid a suit at the two-level if you have a game-going hand, even if that suit is fewer than four cards, now it has crossed into partnership agreement territory. Don't forget that your opponents are entitled to know about ALL of your partnership agreements. With the hands in question, if opener knows that responder's Two Club bid could show less than four clubs, or that responder might bypass a 5+ card major to make a two-level bid, then opener must alert the Two Club bid. If there is a failure to Alert in this case, and if the director determines that the opponents have been injured, there will likely be a score adjustment on the board. If there are repeated violations, then there could be even more serious repercussions.