

BARON 2NT RESPONSE

Traditionally the Acol 2NT response has been used to show a balanced hand of 11-12 points over partner's opening bid of one of a suit. eg.

S Q32
H A43 1H - 2NT
D KJ76
C Q96

The more constructive response on the above example is a bid of 2D, allowing partner room to describe their opening bid more fully. It follows that the response of 2NT used in the natural sense i.e. 11-12 points balanced is rarely used.

No bidding system likes to underuse bids, therefore an alternative meaning of the 2NT response needed to be found. One use of such a bid is the Baron 2NT response.

Basically this bid caters for all strong balanced hands of 15 points or more. This eases the strain on a force in a new suit, which can now be reserved for hands containing a good suit or strong support for partner, or both.

The bid should not be used with a hand that contains a very good suit eg.

S K76
H AJ9
D AQJ5
C Q94

Here, the diamond suit is good for slam purposes if partner has even three to an honour opposite. The Baron 2NT almost precludes the chance of finding a four-three fit, and should not be used on such hands.

So, the hand types to use the convention on, are of 4-3-3-3 or 4-4-3-2 distributions containing no really strong four card suit, and, or occasionally hands of 5-3-3-2 when the long suit is really poor eg. Jxxxx or worse.

As far as opener's rebid is concerned it is better to show shape than strength at this stage of the auction. The rule is simple: with a second suit lower ranking than your first, bid it; with a higher ranking suit, bid it only if the opening suit was a four carder, otherwise repeat the long suit first eg.

(i)	S Q96 H AJ108 D K1086 C AQ	(ii) S Q964 H AJ108 D K106 C AQ	(iii) S Q964 H AJ1086 D K10 C AQ
1H 2NT 2D	1H 2NT 2S	1H 2NT 2H	

In (iii) the second suit will still be shown if a fit exists. So a 3NT rebid by opener always shows a 4-3-3-3 hand. With a strong 4-3-3-3 hand, say 17 points plus, you can raise direct to 4NT which is of course quantitative and not Blackwood.

The responder at his second turn normally bids four card suits in ascending order, but should take time out to show three-card support for opener's first suit if he has it. If the opener does not fancy his suit with only three-card support opposite, he returns to no trumps.

A general principle to be observed is that a new suit at the three level is always natural; at the four-level, it is normally a cue-bid, agreeing one of the previous suits bid by inference. These inferences are quite unambiguous. Consider the following sequences.

(a)	1H - 2NT 3C - 3S 3NT- 4D	(b)	1H - 2NT 3C - 3H 3NT- 4D	(c)	1H - 2NT 3C - 3D 3H - 4C
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In (a), responder is agreeing clubs. He is four-four in the black suits, with a doubleton heart (as he did not bid three hearts over three clubs).

Sequence (b) is different - as this one is potentially ambiguous the four diamond bid must be agreeing hearts, of which responder presumably has four. If he wanted to agree clubs, four clubs is available.

In (c) it is clearly clubs that are agreed.

There is one case where a bid at the four-level should be regarded as natural, and this is when it is consistent with a five-five holding in opener's hand. The sequence 1H - 2NT - 3D - 3S - 4D *could* be regarded as a cue-bid on a 4-4-4-1 shape, but must be better played as showing a red five-five. Note that diamonds are already established as the trump suit - the responder has denied three hearts, so must have three diamonds.

There is one other consideration to look at - the case where the opener is one-suited. With a six-card or longer suit, he may find himself in difficulties if for example the bidding begins:

1H - 2NT - 3H - 3S. Now what is opener to do if he is strong enough to explore for slam even facing a minimum two no-trump? Four clubs and four diamonds would suggest

four-five in the majors agreeing spades, and four hearts would not convey any encouraging overtones.

This one is easily dealt with. If the hand is minimum and 6-3-2-2, opener rebids four hearts immediately over two no-trumps. With this agreement, 1H - 2NT - 3H - 3S - 4H can be taken as a strong, virtually forcing sequence, again with a 6-3-2-2 shape. And with 6-3-3-1, which virtually guarantees that a slam is worth looking for, opener can jump to the four-level in the singleton suit over two no-trumps (obviously this approach has to be used with discretion if the shape is 1-6-3-3!).

Used in this way, Baron is a valuable adjunct to Acol. Even if the convention itself were inefficient, the knowledge that one spade - three hearts can no longer be based on A K x of hearts and four-card spade support would justify the change. But the two no-trump response, properly used, is a sound and useful bid, enabling a common type of hand to be adequately investigated and described.