

CONTEXT IN BIDDING by Maritha Pottenger

Bridge auctions depend a lot upon the context. **The same bid can mean several different things, depending on who makes it, when it is bid, and what has been bid before it.** A common example is the 2NT bid which shows 20-21 HCP & a balanced hand if it is the first bid you make as dealer.

If your partner opens a major; RHO passes and you bid 2NT, that is usually **Jacoby 2NT**—showing a forcing major raise with 4 trumps, no singletons, no voids, and an opening hand (or better). Jacoby 2NT and Splinters are reciprocal bids, so using Jacoby 2NT denies having a hand that could splinter, i.e., you do not have a singleton or a void.

If your partner opens a minor, RHO passes, and you bid 2NT, most people play that **Limit 2NT** (11-12 HCP), but some people play it 13-15 HCP. (Discuss with your partner!) Clearly this bid also denies having a 4-card major. If you have a 4-card major, bidding that suit should be your first response to partner's minor.

If your partner opens a suit and RHO doubles, 2NT by you is usually **Jordan 2NT**. It promises a limit raise (or better) in your partner's suit. (Some people play Jordan 2NT only over major openings.) Since you can use Jordan 2NT to show the Limit Raise (or better), a jump raise becomes weak. A redouble implies no fit (and desire to possibly double the opponents). Over opponent's take-out double, a new suit is forcing at the one level, but not at the two level.

If your RHO opens one of a suit and you jump to 2NT, that is usually **Unusual 2NT**, showing 5-5 in the two lowest unbid suits. So, over 1S, a jump to 2NT would show 5-5 in clubs and diamonds. Over 1C, a jump to 2NT would show 5-5 in diamonds and hearts. Some people play that the Unusual 2NT is always for the minors (even if an opponent opened a minor). Discuss with your partner!

If **your RHO opens a Weak Two, and you bid 2NT**, most people play that as **natural**—showing 15-18 HCP and guaranteeing a stopper in the suit bid by RHO. (So, you bid 1NT with 15-18 over an opening at the one level by your RHO and you bid 2NT with the same 15-18 HCP over an opening at the two level by your RHO. Your NT overcalls guarantee a stopper in the opponent's suit. If you overcall a 3-level preempt with 3NT, you could have anywhere from 17-21 HCP or a long running minor and good potential for getting 9 tricks.)

If you open a suit, partner responds at the one level, and you jump to 2NT, that is a **jump shift**, and generally promises 18-19 HCP and a balanced hand. Even if you have a 4-card major, but open a club and hear partner bid a diamond (or open a minor and hear partner bid a heart and you have 4 spades), it is better to jump to 2NT with 18-19 than to bid your 4-card major. Partner should do some sort of "check-back" system (like Stayman) if partner has a 4-card major. You want to bid NT to immediately show your strength and make sure the strong hand is Declarer.

If your **partner opens, RHO overcalls and you jump to 2NT**, most people play that as a Limited (invitational) 2NT also—promising 11-12 HCP and a sure stopper (usually 1-1/2 or two stoppers) in the suit overcalled on your right. An example would be 1C by partner, 1S on your right and 2NT by you. You should have 11-12 HCP and a sure stopper (or two) in spades. When there is an unbid major (hearts in this case), you deny having 4 cards in the unbid major. If you had 4-cards in the unbid major, you would usually make a negative double first. (The exception would be if your 4-card major is very poor and many of your points are in the opponent's suit. Then it is superior to bid NT and let partner know where your values are.)

Similarly, **you will take different actions with the same hand, depending on what your opponents do.** If, for example, you hold Q865 532 Q7 KQJ10 and your partner opens 1D, you would **bid 1S if RHO passes**. You would **bid 1S** (or could **redouble**) **if RHO doubles**. You would **bid 1NT if RHO bids 1S**. You would **double (Negative) if RHO bids 1H**. You would **pass** (& hope that partner makes a reopening double) **if RHO bids 2C**.

Another example of 2NT is when you or your partner balances after the opponents have bid one of a major and had it raised to 2. **On an auction of 1H-P-2H-P-P most people play that 2NT is asking partner pick a minor** (and denying tolerance for spades—the unbid major). With at least 3 cards in all three unbid suits, the Balancer would reopen the auction with a double as the most flexible call. Most people would also say that after a sequence of 1S-P-2S-P-P, a 2NT bid is also “Pick a minor.” HOWEVER, some people say that 2NT merely guarantees “at least two” places to play. Discuss with your partner!

Jumping to 4NT over the opponents opening is also Unusual for the Minors, but a MUCH stronger hand. So, 1S-P-4NT is a huge 2-suiter in the minors. Ditto 1S-P-2S-P-4NT is still “Pick a minor. On the convention card there is a section to note how high your doubles are takeout opposite a preempt (middle left of the convention card). Many people fill the blank in with 4H. That means that partner's double of a 4H opening bid is (ostensibly) takeout. Of course, you can pass for penalties with a stack. You can also convert to penalties with a very flat hand and a trick or two, not wanting to go to the 5 level. However, a double of 4S is strictly a PENALTY double. If you have a huge, distributional hand, and an opponent opens 4S, your bid is 4NT. That promises TWO places to play (at least 5-5 in two suits). Partner bids the lowest suit for which s/he has tolerance. If you bid the next one up, partner knows what your two suits are, and can pass or correct.

Some partners play “Good/Bad” 2NT bids in competition to distinguish between hands that are merely competing versus hands that have defensive values and are willing to double the opponents if they bid one more. There is too much detail for me to discuss that here.

One other variation to remember: **if partner has bid a minor and the opponents are competing in a major and you bid 2NT or 4NT** in a context where it canNOT be a “real” NT bid (e.g., you cannot have a stopper in their suit and a good enough hand to be looking for 3NT), **you are usually showing BOTH minors** and a willingness to sacrifice. **Generally, you will have MORE length in the unbid minor**, but still a fit in the minor that partner opened or overcalled.