

If you could add one thing . . .

Lebensohl against Weak Two Openings

by Neil Rosen



People have always battled when defending against weak two bids. I always advise:

- a) Not to panic
- b) To defend as if they had opened at the one-level and make your bid accordingly – ie double, bid a suit or bid no trumps in exactly the same manner.

A clear area for improvement however is to incorporate Lebensohl-type ideas into **responding** to partner's take-out double of a weak two bid.

Consider the following:

♠ A J 7 3
♥ 7 4
♦ A K 9 7
♣ A Q 4

If your opponent opens 2♥ (weak) you have an easy double. What would you do if partner then bid 3♣? 3NT might be easy (*Hand A below*) whereas even 3♣ might be a struggle facing some weak hands (*Hand B below*). In other words it all depends on partner's hand – yet you can't see it when making your next decision!

Hand A
♠ 8 6 2
♥ A 5 3
♦ 10 4
♣ K J 8 7 6

Hand B
♠ 8 6 2
♥ 8 5 3
♦ 10 4
♣ K 8 7 6 5

HOW ON EARTH DO YOU KNOW?

Use Lebensohl responses to partner's double of a weak two bid

After your partner doubles a weak two bid use the following:

- a) A response at the 2-level is natural and non-forcing and non-invitational (0 - 7/8 approx)

- b) A bid of 2NT forces 3♣ from the doubler (unless they are **very strong**, about 19+ approx). After the 3♣ relay you can either pass with clubs or correct to your actual suit. Again about 0-7/8 HCP.
- c) A bid at the 3-level is **constructive** but non-forcing – approx 8-11 HCP (with only eight points I would want a 5-card suit).
- d) Bidding 2NT followed by three of a new suit **above** their suit is **invitational**.
- e) Jumping in a new suit is forcing to game.

Here are some examples after 2♥-Dble-Pass-?

Hand C
♠ Q 8 6 2
♥ 7 5 3
♦ A 9 7 4
♣ 7 6

Bid 2♠ – natural and non-forcing.

Hand D
♠ Q J 8 6 2
♥ 7 5
♦ A 9 7 4
♣ K 6

Bid 2NT, then 3♠ over partner's likely 3♣ conversion. This is natural and invitational.

Hand E
♠ 8 6 2
♥ Q 5
♦ Q 9 7
♣ Q 8 5 3 2

Bid 2NT, intending to pass the 3♣ conversion. This shows between 0 and 7/8 points.

Hand F
♠ 8 6 2
♥ K 5
♦ A J 9 7 4
♣ Q 8 5

Bid 3♦. This shows real values, about 8-11 points, so partner can judge whether to bid or not. Should partner bid on it could be a new suit

which would now be game forcing. For instance a 3♠ bid would suggest a hand too strong to overcall 2♠ on the first round – perhaps five spades and 17+ points. A new bid of 3♥ (the enemy suit) would be forcing and asking for a heart stopper.

Hand G
 ♠ Q J 6
 ♥ K 5
 ♦ A Q J 7 4
 ♣ 9 8 5

Bid 3NT. You are too strong to merely bid a constructive/invitational 3♦.

There is of course an enormous amount of work that individual partnerships can put into this area to really tighten up their agreements. The use of jump bids and cue-bids allow for a tremendous number of possibilities – I don't intend to go through them all here – I'm just trying to provide you with food for thought!

LEBENSORHL RESPONSES WHEN DEFENDING THE MULTI 2♦

Again I'm not going to go into a major review of defence vs the dreaded Multi. Suffice to say they *usually* have a weak two in hearts or spades. Here are some thoughts:

Hand H
 ♠ Q J 6 2
 ♥ 5
 ♦ K J 7 4
 ♣ A 9 8 5

A. When holding a shortage in one major I would suggest passing over the 2♦ opener with a view to doubling their major when they unwind if it is the suit you hold shortage in – hearts

in the given example – for takeout at the next opportunity (I would double at both the 2- and 3-level quite happily). If it turns out they have a weak two in spades or a stronger variation of the Multi it will probably be prudent to remain silent throughout the auction. If you do double on the next round at the 2-level then Lebensohl responses can apply in exactly the same way I detailed over their direct weak two opening earlier. So:

West	North	East	South
2♦	Pass	2♥	Pass
Pass	Dble	Pass	?

Now you can use the Lebensohl arrangements detailed earlier with 3♣/♦ being constructive and using 2NT for weaker hands.

B. When holding a balanced hand the most common treatment is to double the 2♦ opener (showing 12-15 balanced, or a big hand, 19+ or thereabouts). Again we can use Lebensohl type responses to this:

West	North	East	South
2♦	Dble	2♥/♠	?

a) 2NT (asking partner to bid 3♣) would show a competing only hand – a 5- or 6-card suit and about 5-7 HCPs as a general guideline.

♠ 5 4
 ♥ K 7 3
 ♦ 8 4
 ♣ Q J 8 4 3 2

With this hand you could bid 2NT – safe in the knowledge that partner would dutifully bid 3♣ (unless 19+). There would be no danger now of mis-representing the strength

of this hand – whereas with standard methods you would still bid 3♣ but partner would have to work out with, say, a 15 count whether you had this 6-point hand or perhaps 10 points or more. I know this – I've been there!

b) Bidding a new suit at the 3-level is natural and constructive but non-forcing (8-11)

West	North	East	South
2♦	Dble	2♥/♠	?

♠ A 4
 ♥ 8 7 3
 ♦ A Q 7 6 4
 ♣ 8 4 3

With 10 points you can bid a constructive (invitational) 3♦. Partner can pass or, if upper-range, can bid on to a game contract (3NT is often the favourite here).

I firmly believe that incorporating Lebensohl-style responses into your defence to weak twos and the Multi 2♦ is one of the most significant areas of development to arrive on the scene for decades. □

Check out Neil's quiz online, page 67

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