

Symmetric Asking-Bids after a Weak 2-Bid

by

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Revised: September 16, 2012

References

1. **The Useful-Space Principle, I.** Jeff Rubens. *The Bridge World* Vol. 52 No. 2, November 1980.
2. **The Useful-Space Principle, II.** Jeff Rubens. *The Bridge World* Vol. 52 No. 3, December 1980.
3. **The Useful-Space Principle, III.** Jeff Rubens. *The Bridge World* Vol. 52 No. 4, January 1981.

Introduction

Many partnerships employ the following agreements following a weak 2-bid:

- RONF – Only a raise of opener's suit is non-forcing,
- 2N as a feature-ask, or as the Ogust convention,
- 4♣ as a modified key-card ask.

A consequence of using the same bid, 2N, as a feature-ask following any weak 2-bid is asymmetry. There is ample space for a full set of responses below 3 of the agreed suit only when the suit is ♠. When opener's suit is ♥, responder may show ♣ or ♦ features below 3♥; but 3♠ to show a ♠-feature takes the bidding beyond the safety level of 3♥. The situation worsens following a weak 2♦ bid.

After a 4♣ key-card ask for ♠, there are three responses available without surpassing the safety level of 4♠. When the trump suit is ♥ or ♦, only two and one safe responses respectively are available below the safety level of 4♥ or 4♦.

In the following discussion, we propose symmetric feature-asks and key-card asks that permit a full range of safe responses for all three suits. The common strategy is based on Jeff Reuben's *Useful Space Principle*, described in a series of Bridge World articles in 1980-1981. Unsurprisingly, the strategy resembles Kickback. Instead of always using the identically named bid, 2N or 4♣, regardless of the trump suit, the asking bid is always in the next higher suit after the trump suit. Thus, No-trump asks for ♠, ♠ asks for ♥, and ♥ asks for ♦. It is easy to see that there are now always 4 responses available up to the next bid of the trump suit. We annotate these generically as the 1st step, the 2nd step, the 3rd step, and the 4th step which is always the next level of the trump suit. Because the response structures convey the maximum information without surpassing the next level of the trump suit, the structure is *safe*: a conventional response never forces the bidding beyond the safety level. The structure is *symmetric* because identical information is available in the same way independently of the trump suit.

The key to facility with any symmetric structure is to *think in steps*, not in terms of the denomination.

The Feature-Ask

A feature ask is initiated by the next available bid after the weak 2-bid. Opener cue-bids his cheapest feature, Ace or King, or returns to 3 of the trump suit when holding no outside feature. When the trump suit is ♥, 2♠ asks, and there is then no natural ♠-bid to show a feature in that suit below the level of 3♥. Instead, 2N is employed as a *surrogate* response to show a ♠ feature. Similarly, following a weak 2♦ opening, 2♥ is the feature-ask and a surrogate response of 2N shows a ♥ feature. This agreement is typical of all symmetric response structures and is well known to users of Kickback, for example.

<u>Spades</u>	<u>Hearts</u>	<u>Diamonds</u>
2♠ 2N	2♥ 2♠	2♦ 2♥
3♣ ♣ Feature	2N ♠ Feature	2♠ ♠ Feature
3♦ ♦ Feature	3♣ ♣ Feature	2N ♥ Feature
3♥ ♥ Feature	3♦ ♦ Feature	3♣ ♣ Feature
3♠ No Feature	3♥ No Feature	3♦ No Feature

Table 1: Responses to the Modified Feature-Ask

Since what would otherwise be natural bids are utilized as asking-bids, the *surrogate principle* is extended to allow natural and forcing bids in the asking suit. After a 2♥ weak-2 bid, responder must bid 2N instead of a natural 2♠ forcing. Under the RONF agreement, opener may now bid 3♠ as a natural raise just as if responder had bid 2♠, or return to 3♥. Similarly, after a 2♦-opening bid, responder must bid 2N to show ♥'s, and opener may now bid 3♥ to raise or return to 3♦. The RONF agreement is prerequisite to this system. Without it, the surrogate 2N bid to show the asking suit is impractical. For example, many partnerships play suit responses to a weak 2♦ as non-forcing; then, a response of 2♥ will need to be retained as a natural bid, unless the partnership is prepared to play at the 3 level.

<u>Spades</u>	<u>Hearts</u>	<u>Diamonds</u>
2♠ 2N Feature-ask	2♥ 2♠ Feature-ask	2♦ 2♥ Feature-ask
3♣ natural forcing	2N surrogate forcing	2♠ natural forcing
3♦ natural forcing	3♣ natural forcing	2N surrogate forcing
3♥ natural forcing	3♦ natural forcing	3♣ natural forcing
3♠ further preempt	3♥ further preempt	3♦ further preempt

Table 2: Non-jump responses to a weak 2-bid

Mini-Kickback

This agreement is employed as a key-card ask following an opening weak 2-bid. The asking bid is a single jump in the next higher denomination: 3N after a 2♠ opening, 3♠ after a 2♥ opening, or 3♥ after a 2♦ opening. The asking suit is identical with Kickback, but “mini” because the asking bid is one level lower.

In principle, the structure allows a full set of responses to show key-cards below 4 of the agreed trump suit: 1st Step – 0 or 3, 2nd Step – 1 or 4, 3rd Step – 2 without the Queen, 4th Step – 2 with the Queen. Following a weak 2-bid however, opener will not have 3 or 4 keycards. Thus, an abridged set of responses is possible:

<u>Spades</u>	<u>Hearts</u>	<u>Diamonds</u>	<u>Mini-Kickback agreement</u>
2♠ 3N	2♥ 3♠	2♦ 3♥	1 st Step: 0 Key-cards, or 1 without the Queen 2 nd Step: 1 Key-card plus the trump Queen 3 rd Step: 2 Key-cards without the trump Queen 4 th Step: 2 Key-cards plus the trump Queen <i>Following an ambiguous 1st Step response, responder may relay to ask for clarification:</i> 0 Key-cards 1 Key-card without the trump Queen
4♣	3N	3♠	
4♦	4♣	3N	
4♥	4♦	4♣	
4♠	4♥	4♦	
2♠ 3N	2♥ 3♠	2♦ 3♥	
4♣ 4♦	3N 4♣	3♠ 3N	
4♥	4♦	4♣	
4♠	4♥	4♦	

Table 3: Mini-Kickback after a weak 2-bid

Some adjustments may be necessary:

1. Since a direct bid of 3N is Mini-Kickback, responder, wishing to play in 3N willy-nilly, must still first go through the feature ask.
2. If a partnership employs splinter bids in response to a weak 2-bid, then 3N may be used as a surrogate ♠-splinter after a 2♥ opening bid, and as a surrogate ♥-splinter after a 2♦ opening. In both cases, adjustment-1 applies since the natural meaning of a direct 3N response is unavailable.