

Two-Over-One

by Eric Rodwell



Eric Rodwell is known for his highly developed skills in creating integrated bidding systems at world-class levels. In his first article on 2/1 game force, Eric reviewed the bidding messages with a focus on forcing bids, and introduced the marathon bid which is forcing to at least game.

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Two-over-one game force (2/1) is a variation of standard methods. It applies in the following situation:

- Opener bids 1♦, 1♥, or 1♠.
- The next player passes.
- Responder bids a new suit at the two level without jumping.

The new suit response at the two level is a marathon bid ★, forcing to at least game. Notice that 2/1 does not apply after a 1♣ opening. Diamonds, hearts, and spades can all be bid at the one level; bidding them at the two level would require a jump. One level responses in a suit are forcing ●, but they are not forcing to game.

In standard methods, a two level response is forcing, but not forcing to game. To see why 2/1 has become popular and how it can make some auctions easier to handle, let's look at some examples.

When 2/1 Game Force Is Used

Examples of 2/1

Consider the following partnership hands for East and West:

WEST	EAST
♠ K J 7 5 3	♠ Q 2
♥ A K 10 7 2	♥ Q 8 3
♦ 8 4	♦ A J 3
♣ 6	♣ A 10 9 5 4

Using standard methods, the auction would begin:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♠	Pass	2♣ ●	Pass
2♥	Pass	?	

West opens the bidding, showing 13 or more points. With 13 high-card points plus 1 length point for the five-card club suit, East knows **HOW HIGH**: the partnership belongs in at least game. East doesn't yet know **WHERE** the contract belongs and starts with a forcing response of 2♣. After West shows the second suit, East is still unsure about the best spot. West could have only four hearts, so East doesn't want to jump to 4♥.

This is where the standard auction becomes a little fuzzy. A rebid of 2NT by East would not be forcing; the 2♣ response did not commit the partnership to game. To make certain the partnership reaches game, East would probably jump to 3NT. Now West is faced with a dilemma. To show the fifth heart, West could bid 4♥, but East might have only one or two hearts and 3NT could be the best spot. West is unsure whether to bid again or not.

Playing 2/1 as a game force, the auction would be a lot crisper:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♠	Pass	2♣ ★	Pass
2♥	Pass	2NT	Pass
3♥	Pass	4♥	All Pass

East's 2♣ response is a marathon bid, forcing to at least game. When West rebids 2♥, East can bide time by bidding only 2NT because it is still forcing. This gives West the opportunity to rebid the heart suit comfortably at the three level. That gives East all the information needed to choose the best contract.

Let's change the West hand slightly:

WEST	EAST
♠ K J 10 7 5 3	♠ Q 2
♥ A K 7 2	♥ Q 8 3
♦ 8 4	♦ A J 3
♣ 6	♣ A 10 9 5 4

Playing standard methods, the auction would again start:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♠	Pass	2♣ ●	Pass
2♥	Pass	?	

If East were to jump to 4♥, the partnership would miss its spade fit and land in a precarious 4-3 heart fit. If East were to jump to 3NT, West would be unsure whether to bid 4♠; East could have a singleton or void in spades.

Using 2/1 game force, the auction would go very smoothly:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♠	Pass	2♣ ★	Pass
2♥	Pass	2NT	Pass
3♠	Pass	4♠	All Pass

Since East's 2NT bid is still forcing, opener can complete the description of the hand by rebidding the spades, showing six spades and four hearts. East has an easy time putting the partnership in its best spot.

So, on many auctions 2/1 game force allows the partnership to find the best contract, since both players know right away that they are headed for at least a game contract. There's no concern that the auction might suddenly stop in partscore.

Why Not Fourth Suit Forcing?

In standard methods, responder does have a forcing bid available after a new suit at the two level: a bid of the fourth suit. Many partnerships use this as an artificial game force. Could this be used instead of 2/1 game force?

Sometimes, fourth suit forcing would work just as well. Let's return to one of the earlier examples:

WEST	EAST
♠ K J 7 5 3	♠ Q 2
♥ A K 10 7 2	♥ Q 8 3
♦ 8 4	♦ A J 3
♣ 6	♣ A 10 9 5 4

As before, the standard auction would begin like this:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♠	Pass	2♣ ●	Pass
2♥	Pass	?	

Unsure of the best contract, East could make an artificial fourth suit bid of 3♦. This is a marathon bid, forcing to game. The auction would continue:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♠	Pass	2♣ ●	Pass
2♥	Pass	3♦ ★	Pass
3♥	Pass	4♥	All Pass

West can now rebid the five-card heart suit and East can place the partnership in the best contract. It appears that 2/1 is unnecessary.

However, suppose we make a slight change to West's hand:

WEST	EAST
♠ K J 7 5 3	♠ Q 2
♥ A K 7 2	♥ Q 8 3
♦ 10 4	♦ A J 3
♣ K 6	♣ A 10 9 5 4

The auction now begins:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♠	Pass	2♣ ●	Pass
2♥	Pass	3♦ ★	Pass
?			

What is West to do at this point? West doesn't want to bid 3NT with nothing in diamonds. If West gives a preference to 4♣, the partnership has missed its best spot of 3NT.

Using 2/1, East rebids a natural 2NT and West simply raises to 3NT. **2/1 allows the partnership to save valuable bidding space and make the most natural bid on the hand.**

When 2/1 Is Off

Even if the partnership has agreed to play 2/1 as game forcing, there are two situations when it doesn't apply:

WHEN 2/1 DOESN'T APPLY

- If responder is a passed hand.
- If responder's right-hand opponent overcalls or doubles.

Responder Is a Passed Hand

To commit the partnership to game, responder needs about 13 or more points. If responder passed initially, responder presumably has fewer than 13 points. It doesn't make sense for responder's 2/1 bid to be game forcing.

In addition, it's common practice to sometimes open 'light'—with fewer than 13 points—in third or fourth position. So, whether the partnership uses 2/1 or standard methods, **a new suit response is only invitational when responder is a passed hand.**

WEST	EAST
♠ 2	♠ A K J 8 3
♥ A Q 10 5 4	♥ J 3
♦ K J 9 4	♦ Q 8 3
♣ 8 4 3	♣ 9 7 6

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
Pass	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♥ ●	Pass	Pass	Pass

West doesn't have enough to open in first position. After West passes, East opens light in third chair with 11 high-card points plus 1 length point.

As a passed hand, West is limited to fewer than 13 points and can afford to make a 2/1 response knowing partner won't treat it as a marathon bid. In fact, East chooses to pass 2♥, knowing the partnership doesn't have enough combined strength for game and not wanting to get too high on the Bidding Ladder. 2♥ is a good spot for the partnership.

Right-Hand Opponent Overcalls

When an opponent overcalls, the auction has become competitive. Responder can't necessarily afford to wait for 13 or more points to bid a new suit at the two level. If responder doesn't show a good suit with about 11 or more points, the opportunity might be lost.

The overall gives responder new options: the double and the cuebid of the opponent's suit. This gives responder enough flexibility that it's unnecessary to use a 2/1 response as a marathon bid. Instead, responder uses the standard approach: **a new suit response is forcing, but not game forcing, after an overcall.**

WEST	EAST
♠ 8 5 4	♠ 9 3 2
♥ A K 9 5 4	♥ 8 3
♦ Q 4	♦ K 10 3
♣ Q J 2	♣ A K 10 9 4

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♥	1♠	2♣ ●	Pass
3♣	Pass	Pass	Pass

East doesn't have enough to commit to game after West opens 1♥. When North overcalls 1♠, however, East shows the club suit. East doesn't want to be shut out of the auction if the opponents compete further. The 2♣ response is forcing, but not to game. When all West can do is raise to 3♣, East passes and the partnership rests in its best contract.

Right-Hand Opponent Doubles

If partner's opening bid is doubled, a slam, or even game, become less likely, and 2/1 as a marathon bid is less useful. Besides, responder has a new bid to show about 10 or more high-card points, the redouble.

It makes more practical sense to fall back on standard methods, where **a new suit at the two level is not forcing after a takeout double.**

WEST	EAST
♠ 8 5 4	♠ 9 3 2
♥ A K 9 5 4	♥ 8 3
♦ Q 4	♦ K J 10 9 7 3
♣ Q J 2	♣ K 9

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♥	Double	2♦ ●	Pass
Pass	Pass		

East doesn't have enough strength for a 2/1 response even using standard methods. But when 1♥ is doubled, East can make a non-forcing response of 2♦, getting the suit mentioned in a competitive situation. West knows East doesn't have a strong hand. With 10 or more points, East would have started with a redouble. ♦