



How does the auction continue after a 2/1 response? How can the partnership determine if it belongs in slam? **Eric Rodwell** provides some answers.

This is part of a series of articles by Eric on 2/1 game force. Eric is a world-class player and theorist. Previous articles in the series can be found at:

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Suppose East-West are playing two-over-one game force and the auction begins this way:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♠	Pass	2♥★	

Already the partnership knows the contract will be played at either the game or slam level. The 2♥ response is a marathon bid ★, forcing to at least game. So the conversation can be relaxed and both players can concentrate on finding the best denomination — **WHERE** — without being worried about the auction stopping below game.

Focus on WHERE

In deciding **WHERE** to play, the first choice is an eight-card or longer major-suit fit. The next preference is notrump. The last choice is an eight-card or longer minor-suit fit.

After a 2/1 response, both partners have suggested a trump suit. At

Finishing the Auction

times, the partnership may be able to agree on the trump suit with the next bid, opener's rebid. Sometimes agreement will have to wait until the fourth bid, responder's rebid, or even later in the auction.

The sooner the partnership can agree, the better. Once a major suit fit has been found, all subsequent bids can focus on the appropriate level.

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

WEST	EAST
1♠	2♥★
3♥	

As with standard bidding methods, a 2♥ response over 1♠ promises a five-card or longer suit. So West can agree on a trump suit by raising responder's hearts. The decision on **WHERE** has been made. Now the partnership can move on to the second decision, **How High**.

Focus on How High

Most 2/1 auctions will end in game. However, the partnership can consider a slam if either partner has a lot of extra strength, or both partners have some extra strength.

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

WEST	EAST
1♠	2♥★
3♥	4♥

East has no extra strength for the 2/1 response, so once the fit has been found, East simply moves to 4♥. West also has no extra values, so the partnership settles in a game.

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

WEST	EAST
1♠	2♥★
3♥	4♥
4NT	5♥
6♥	Pass

Here West has a very strong hand with 18 high-card points. Notice that West still raises to only 3♥ over the 2♥ response when playing 2/1. There's no need to jump and use up extra bidding room. Responder can't pass 3♥ because it's below game.

With no extra values, East simply goes to game. However, West has enough extra strength to want to be in a slam, knowing East has at least 13 points. West bids Blackwood to check that the partnership isn't missing two aces. When East shows two aces, West bids the slam.

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

WEST	EAST
1♠	2♥★
3♥	4NT
5♥	6♥

This time it is East who has a lot of extra values. Once the fit is found, East launches right into Blackwood. West shows two aces, so East knows the partnership is missing only one and confidently bids the small slam.

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

WEST	EAST
1♠	2♥★
3♥	3♠
4♦	4NT
5♥	6♥

This time, both partners have some extra strength. Once the trump suit has been established, bids of other suits are *cuebids*, showing interest in slam and showing a *control* — ace, king, singleton or void — in the suit.

After West's raise to 3♥, East shows some interest in slam by cuebidding the ♠A. West, who also has some extra values, cooperates by showing the ♦A. That's enough to encourage East to bid Blackwood to check that the partnership isn't missing two aces and then bid the slam.

Auctions involving cuebidding can be challenging, but the real point is that the 2/1 game force has left plenty of room for the partnership to decide **HOW HIGH** — game or slam — once it knows **WHERE**.

In summary:

After a 2/1 game forcing response, focus first on **WHERE**, then **HOW HIGH**.

More Practice

There are many ways the auction can go after a 2/1 response. Let's look at some examples. In this next auction, it's not until the fifth bid that the partnership agrees **WHERE**.

WEST ♠ A J 10 5 4 2 ♥ 3 ♦ Q 4 ♣ A 7 5 3	EAST ♠ 3 ♥ A K Q 6 4 ♦ K 2 ♣ K Q 9 6 2
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WEST 1♠ 2♠ 4♣ 5♥	EAST 2♥ ★ 3♣ 4NT 6♣
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After East's 2/1 response, West chooses to conveniently show the sixth spade at the two level rather than introduce the club suit at the three level. There's plenty of time; no need to waste space.

When East shows the second suit, West raises and the fit is found. East has enough extra values to use Blackwood and put the partnership in the small slam.

WEST ♠ K J 8 5 2 ♥ A 8 4 3 ♦ A 6 3 ♣ 3	EAST ♠ Q 3 ♥ K Q 9 2 ♦ 5 4 2 ♣ A Q 10 2
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WEST 1♠ 2♥ 4♥	EAST 2♣ ★ 3♥ Pass
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This time the fit is found after responder's rebid. Notice responder initially bids clubs, not hearts. **A 2/1 response of 2♣ or 2♦ doesn't promise a five-card suit, but a response of 2♥ shows at least a five-card suit.** There's no danger of missing a heart fit. Opener will always show a four-card heart suit over a 2♣ or 2♦ response. **Opener doesn't need five cards when showing a second suit.**

After the heart fit is found, West simply goes to game with nothing extra. East is also comfortable to stop in game holding no extra strength.

WEST ♠ A J 8 5 2 ♥ A 10 9 3 ♦ 3 ♣ K 7 3	EAST ♠ 6 3 ♥ J 5 2 ♦ K Q J 10 2 ♣ A Q 4
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WEST 1♠ 2♥ 3NT	EAST 2♦ ★ 2NT Pass
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When the partnership can't find an eight-card or longer major suit fit, it will usually settle for notrump. Here West shows both major suits, and East suggests a notrump with values in diamonds and clubs. West is happy to agree.

Notice that East doesn't need to jump to 3NT on the rebid. East can suggest notrump by bidding only 2NT, since that is still forcing. This leaves room for West to further describe the hand. If West held a fifth heart, for example, West could now bid 3♥, and the partnership would find its eight-card fit.

In standard methods, East couldn't afford to bid only 2NT, since it would not be forcing. East would have to jump to 3NT, leaving West with a difficult decision when holding five spades and five hearts.

WEST ♠ K J 8 5 2 ♥ A 8 4 3 ♦ 3 ♣ A Q 3	EAST ♠ 6 3 ♥ K 5 2 ♦ A K Q J 2 ♣ 7 5 2
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WEST 1♠ 2♥ 3NT	EAST 2♦ ★ 3♣ Pass
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Similar to standard methods, **the partnership can make use of 'fourth suit forcing'** — a totally artificial bid of the fourth suit — when nothing else is convenient. Here both players show their suits on the first three bids. East then has a dilemma. No eight-card fit has been found, but East doesn't want to suggest notrump with no high cards in the club suit.

A bid of the fourth suit, clubs, is merely forcing, saying nothing about East's club holding. First, it's unlikely the partnership has a club fit once West has bid spades and hearts. Second, with strength in clubs, East would probably bid notrump, as in the prior example. So West assumes East simply wants West to make a further descriptive bid. With some strength in clubs, it is easy for West to suggest 3NT. The partnership has finally found **WHERE** it belongs.

With the help of fourth suit, the partnership can sometimes discover it has no stopper in a suit and scramble into a 5-2 major-suit fit.

WEST ♠ A Q J 5 2 ♥ 10 6 ♦ K Q 6 3 ♣ Q 3	EAST ♠ K 3 ♥ J 2 ♦ 7 5 2 ♣ A K J 7 5 2
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WEST 1♠ 2♦ 3♥ 4♠	EAST 2♣ ★ 3♣ 3♠ Pass
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After West bids spades and diamonds and East rebids clubs, this time it is West, opener, who makes use of the fourth suit, hearts. East can't bid notrump and gives 'preference' to spades. Also holding nothing in hearts, West decides to bid 4♠. The defenders can take at least the first five heart tricks against 3NT. ♦