

MARVIN TWO SPADES

The popular "Gambling 3NT" opening shows a solid seven-card minor with little outside strength. Besides being rather restrictive as to suit quality, the notrump contract is played from the wrong side. Not only is the lead through dummy's strength, but the exposure of that hand lets the opponents put up a "double dummy" defense. If responder can't support a 3NT contract, the bidding ends up at the dangerous four level.

Marvin 2♠ shows the same sort of hand, or (ten times as frequent) a semi-solid (KQJ or AQJ) seven-card minor with one ace or king outside. The hand must contain at least one ace, so responder can count on seven playing tricks. Besides a solid minor, opener could have:

	♠32 ♥A7 ♦KQJ10876 ♣J2
or	♠K3 ♥9 ♦962 ♣AQJ9432
or	♠875 ♥92 ♦AQJ7652 ♣A

A third-seat bidder might cheat with an eight-card suit or regard an AKJ10 suit as solid.

Responder bids 3♣ to sign off, whereupon opener will pass with clubs, or rebid 3♦ with diamonds. If responder would raise clubs but not diamonds, she responds 3♦. If she would raise diamonds but not clubs, she bids 3♣. Opener can correct if responder bids the wrong suit.

A response of 3♥ or 3♠ is forcing. Opener bids 3NT to show Qx, xxx, or better support, so responder (perhaps fishing for a notrump contract) need not have a real suit (e.g., respond 3♥ with ♠A7532 ♥J76 ♦A87 ♣K2). Although this response must be alerted ("That is an asking bid, not a telling bid."), its ambiguous nature can make it useful as a lead inhibitor, or as a complete bluff when an opposing game is feared. (A worthless Asking Bid is not a psych because it says nothing, it only asks).

A 2NT response asks for clarification. Opener bids 3NT with a solid minor, or indicates where the outside high card is located when the minor is only semi-solid:

Opener	Responder
2♠	2NT?
	3NT - solid minor suit
	3♣ - club suit, high card in diamonds
	3♦ - diamond suit, high card in clubs
	3♥ - high card in spades, may have either minor
	3♠ - high card in hearts, may have either minor

Opener's rebid will usually give responder the information needed to place the contract. These bids are designed so that opener's LHO cannot double to direct a lead through the high card (perhaps an unguarded king).

A 4♣ response asks opener to show a short suit:

Opener	Responder
2♠	4♣?
4♦/4♥/4♠/5♣ - short suit	
4NT - no short suit	

A 4♦ response asks for a major suit preference ("Ripstra"), and 4NT is Blackwood (5♣ or 5♦ with one ace--must have one--5♥ with two).

A game response is a signoff, but a jump to 5♣ is "pass or correct" (to 5♦).

When the Opponents Intervene

If the 2♠ opening gets doubled, presumably showing a spade suit, responder may choose to make a forcing pass. She would pass, for instance, with ♠972 ♥QJ543 ♦A2 ♣A53, giving opener a chance to bid notrump if he has spades stopped:

South	West	North	East
2♠	Dbl	Pass	Pass
2NT - spade stopper			
3♣/3♦ - no spade stopper			

Suppose there is an overcall and responder cue bids:

South	West	North
2♠	3♣	4♣

South now bids 4♦ with solid diamonds, 4♥ with a high card in spades, 4♠ with a high card in hearts, 4NT with a high card in clubs, and 5♣ with a solid club suit! (Maybe 3♣ was meant as Michaels). Similarly:

South	West	North	East
2♠	3♦	4♦	Pass
4♥ - high card in spades			
4♠ - high card in hearts			
4NT - high card in diamonds, club suit			
5♣/5♦ - solid suit			

When the cue bid is in a major, opener has less room to show his hand and responder may have to guess opener's minor:

South	West	North	East
2♠	3♥	4♥	Pass
4♠ - high card in spades, unknown minor			
4NT - high card in hearts, unknown minor			
5♣/5♦ - natural			

The 5♣/5♦ bids show either a solid suit or a high card in the unbid minor.

South	West	North	East
2♠	3♠	4♠	Pass
4NT - high card in spades, unknown minor			
5♣/5♦ - natural			

The bidding here is so crowded that opener can show an outside high card in spades only.

Summarizing the advantages of Marvin 2♠ over Gambling 3NT:

- 1) It gives an accurate picture of more hard-to-describe hands.
- 2) It comes up ten times as often.
- 3) Notrump is played from the right side.
- 4) Responder can bail out at the three level.
- 5) Responder can inquire about a major at the three level.
- 6) Responder can ask for a short suit.
- 7) It frees the 3NT opening for another purpose (e.g., a nine-trick notrump hand, also hard to describe).

With a normal weak two bid in spades, you can use the Marvin 2♥ opening (section 6-3), which shows a strong two bid in hearts or a weak two bid in spades. Users of the “Multi” convention (weak two bid in an unspecified major) can incorporate Marvin Two Spades without losing the weak 2S bid.