

BAA BAA BLACK SHEEP

In his (rightly) acclaimed *Workbook on the Two-Over-One System* (1987), Mike Lawrence devotes 52 of the book's 189 pages to "Auctions Starting with 1♦-pass-2♣":

"Meet the black sheep of the Two-Over-One System," he begins. "Anyone who plays a Two-Over-One System will wax enthusiastically on the merits of the system until the conversation turns specifically to the sequence 1♦-pass-2♣."

Mike is right. I would go further and call 1♦-pass-2♣ the "black sheep" not only of the 2/1 GF family of systems but of any bidding structure. Any other 2-over-1 response in a 5-card-major oriented structure lets opener rebid his major (presumably he has five) with nothing better to do. A 1♦ opener, however, often has only four cards in his suit (once in a while, only three) and may lack a convenient rebid.

Baa Baa Black Sheep is my way to bring the black sheep back into the fold. Essentially, *Baa Baa Black Sheep* asks opener to gather some wool. Opener must rebid a wool-gathering 2♦ with any hand that lacks significant extra values, regardless of his diamond length or lack thereof. (♠K953 ♥9762 ♦AQ9 ♣A3 qualifies for a 2♦ rebid.) With a hand that has improved because of a good fit for clubs (normally four-card support, though ♣KQ2 will do), opener may raise to 3♣, but all other rebids require substantial extra high-card strength.

Here's what other rebids mean:

2♥ or 2♠. A standard reverse showing extra values, though not necessarily as strong as the corresponding reverse after a one-level response, e.g. 1♦-1♠; 2♥.

2NT. Hold your breath: a balanced hand *too strong* for a 1NT opening. A player who opens 1♦ usually anticipates a 1♥ or 1♠ response, not a 2♣ response. If you had planned to jump to 2NT over a 1♥ response, make the same 2NT rebid without a jump over a 2♣ response. Don't let the space-consuming 2♣ response induce you to change your plan. A jump to 3NT consumes too much of the bidding space that you may need to settle on a trump suit and probe for slam. I see no merit in bidding 2NT, a bid that shuts out the 2♥ or 2♠ rebid that partner might otherwise want to make, when you have a balanced minimum.

3♦. Strong and natural.

3♥ or 3♠. A splinter raise, showing a singleton, primary club support, and extra strength.

3NT. A *balanced* club raise with primary support and substantial extra strength. Responder can use 4♣ and 4♦ rebids as Roman Key-Card asks in the named minor, if part of your system.

4♥ or 4♠. A splinter raise showing a *void*.

4♣ or 4♦. Roman Key-Card in the named minor, if part of your system.

Baa Baa Black Sheep is much simpler than other structures for rebidding over the troublesome 2♣ response to 1♦, such as the scheme that Mike favors and the scheme of Eric Kokish's that Mike includes in his book.