

SEMI-ARTIFICIAL RAISES

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In Bridge World Standard, responding with a fit after a one-diamond opening is overcalled with two clubs is often uncomfortable: There is little room for action, and opener's hand-type and diamond length are unclear.

When responder has game-invitational strength, he can show a five-card or longer major or double with one or two four-card majors, in each case fortified with a back-up bid in diamonds against emergencies. But when responder is weaker than that, with only "one-bid strength," major-suit investigation can be awkward.

We have found it effective to treat a competitive raise to two diamonds as "semi-artificial," suggesting two diamonds as a contract but also *promising at least four cards in at least one major*. This enables responder to guarantee at least four-four in the majors when he holds a "weak" negative double.

Semi-Artificial Raises

After one diamond — (two clubs) — ?, responder:

bids two diamonds with a hand worth a natural raise from one to two (and unsuited to a preemptive three diamonds) that includes either

- (a) three or more diamonds and at least one four-card or longer major; or
- (b) five or more diamonds (with or without major-suit length).

negative doubles with either

- (a) any of the usual hands worth at least a game-invitation; or
- (b) a weaker-than-game invitational hand with at least four cards in each major.

These techniques can be used in conjunction with either free responses of two of a major forcing (as in standard) or weak (so-called "negative free bids"). Our experience suggests that the latter treatment is better, since it further reduces the chance that a doubler has length in only one major. The standard meanings of other responses remain unchanged.

After a semi-artificial raise to two diamonds, opener can pass, bid two hearts (asking responder to pass with hearts else bid two spades with spades or three diamonds with no major and long diamonds), bid two spades (asking responder to pass with spades else move on), or invite game by bidding two no trump (natural) or three clubs (artificial; the only other low-level game-try).

A simulation revealed that when responder bids two diamonds there is at least an eight-card diamond fit approximately 90 percent of the time, and when there isn't there is an eight-card major-suit fit two-thirds of the time.

Gains and Losses

The downside of this treatment is remarkably small. Consider when responder might “get stuck” with a hand worth a raise to two diamonds that does not qualify for a semi-artificial raise. There are only two situations:

- (a) Responder has four or more clubs, three or more diamonds, and no four-card or longer major.
- (b) Responder has $3=3=4=3$.