

 	Benji Acol. Eight playing tricks in Hearts. A 2♣ opening bid?
	♠ 10 8 ♥ A Q J 9 8 7 6 5 ♦ A J 10 ♣ -
	Um ... No.

It's all to do with the new Orange Book regulations, which have clarified the meaning of 'Strong'. A Strong Two-Level Opening Bid must now comply with the **Extended Rule of 25**: that is, the Rule of 25, with an absolute minimum of 14 HCP.

So a hand is 'Strong' if it meets two conditions:

- (1) the point-count plus the number of cards in the longest two suits comes to 25+, or equivalent playing strength (in this case, 8 playing tricks).
- (2) the hand has at least 14 points.

Most traditional Acol Strong Two hands, either single-suited or two-suited, will qualify – but the hand above does not. It's OK on the first criterion – although it only adds up to 23, it does have the required 8-trick playing strength – but it fails on the second: it only has 12 HCP. So if you're playing Benji, you'd have to open it at the one level. If you made an unnatural Strong opening bid such as 2♣, it would have to be treated as a psyche or a misbid – and to do so regularly is against the laws of the game.

Unnatural vs Natural

Note that this restriction is aimed mainly at *unnatural* Benji and Multi-style Strong opening bids (including the Strong Club opener, which must have at least 16 HCP or comply with the Extended Rule of 25).

There is no restriction on the strength of a *natural* opening bid – that is, an opening bid that shows the suit bid. So if you're playing Standard English, you can go ahead and open 2♥. But if you do, make sure that your convention card says '8 playing tricks' and not 'Strong twos' – 'Strong' now has a precise technical meaning, and this hand doesn't qualify!

Warning!

If you have all 13 spades and play Benji, you cannot open 2♦ as a game force. Less subtle players will probably try 7♠.