

Michaels Cuebids and Unusual Notrump Overcalls

The **Michaels Cuebid** and **Unusual Notrump** are conventions that let you show two suits with one bid. The convention you use depends on which suit the opponent opens and which suits you have. They are generally played together, as the concepts behind them are similar.

Cuebids

A cuebid is a term that applies to two types of bid:

- A bid of a suit that has already been bid by the opponents.
- A slam-investigating bid made during an auction's later rounds that shows control of a suit.

A cuebid of a suit bid by the opponents is normally intended as a forcing bid. It shows interest in contesting the contract and asks partner to describe his hand.

Michaels Cuebid

This is a direct cuebid of the opponent's opened suit (e.g., 1C by RHO, 2C by you) to show a two-suited hand with **at least 5 cards in the two suits**. One of your suits is always a major, but the exact two you promise depend on the opening bid:

- Over a **minor-suit opening**, a Michaels Cuebid (1C-2C or 1D-2D) shows **both majors**.
- Over a **major-suit opening**, a Michaels Cuebid (1H-2H or 1S-2S) shows **the OTHER major and an unspecified minor**.

For example, with ♠KQ964 ♥KQ872 ♦52 ♣7, if RHO opens 1C (or 1D), you can bid 2C (or 2D).

Unusual 2NT

This convention is a direct jump to 2NT over an opponent's opening bid (e.g., 1H by RHO, 2NT by you) to show the **two lower-ranking unbid suits**, with **at least 5 cards in each suit**. One of your suits is always a minor, but the exact two you promise depend on the opening bid:

- Over a **1C** opening, 2NT shows **diamonds and hearts**.
- Over a **1D** opening, 2NT shows **clubs and hearts**.
- Over a **1H** or **1S** opening, 2NT shows **both minors**.

For example, with ♠765 ♥Void ♦KT765 ♣QJT93, if RHO opens 1H or 1S, you can bid 2NT.

Strength Requirements

For both Michaels and Unusual 2NT, you should have at least 5 cards in both suits, and either:

- A relatively weak distributional hand (less than the high-card strength for an opening bid), or
- A very strong distributional hand that intends to bid again after hearing partner's response.

For example, over a 1D opening bid by RHO, with ♠AKQ98 ♥KQJ92 ♦K5 ♣7, bid 2D (Michaels) and then jump to game in the major partner bids.

With an intermediate hand, you would typically make a simple overcall of the higher-ranking suit, planning to show the second suit later if possible.

Be careful if your high-card strength is outside your suits. With a hand like ♠K ♥A6 ♦J9853 ♣Q7632, your suits are too weak for a 2NT overcall.

Vulnerability should also affect your decision. Since partner is often forced to bid at the 3-level (sometimes with only 2-card support), a vulnerable Michaels or Unusual 2NT should promise more playing strength.

Examples

The auction has gone (1D)-?, and you hold:

- ♠QJ965 ♥KJT83 ♦8 ♣72. Bid 2D, showing both majors.
- ♠AQJ76 ♥AQT863 ♦4 ♣A. Bid 2D, planning to jump to game in whichever major partner bids.
- ♠AQ873 ♥AKJ3 ♦73 ♣64. Bid 1S. You only have 4 hearts, so you cannot bid Michaels.

The auction has gone (1H)-?, and you hold:

- ♠KJT74 ♥83 ♦7 ♣KQT75. Bid 2H, showing spades and a minor.
- ♠KQT84 ♥K4 ♦AQ873 ♣5. Bid 1S. You have an intermediate hand – too strong to bid Michaels and then pass partner's response, but not strong enough to bid Michaels and then force to game.

The auction has gone (1H)-?, and you hold:

- ♠7 ♥5 ♦KJ8765 ♣AJT85. Bid 2NT, showing the minors.
- ♠84 ♥73 ♦AKJ87 ♣AKT2. Bid 2D. Unusual 2NT shows at least 5-5 in the two lower unbid suits, and tends to show a weak hand (or sometimes a very strong hand), so a bid of 2NT would not be a good description of your hand.

Advancing After a Michaels or Unusual 2NT bid

When partner makes a Michaels cuebid or an unusual 2NT bid, you can:

- Give preference to one of partner's suits, with no interest in game.
- Jump to game. This could be preemptive, or it could be bid with the intention of making the contract.
- When partner makes a Michaels cuebid over a major suit, showing the other major and unspecified minor, a bid of 2NT by you is conventional (artificial), asking partner to bid his minor suit.

Examples

The auction has gone (1H)-2H-(p)-?, and you hold ♠Void ♥K7532 ♦AJ32 ♣9875.
Bid 2NT, asking for partner's minor.

The auction has gone (1H)-2H-(p)-?, and you hold ♠K7532 ♥Void ♦AJ32 ♣9875.
Jump to 4S. It's probably a good sacrifice against the opponents' game – and you might even make it sometimes, depending on what partner has.

The auction has gone (1C)-2NT-(p)-?, and you hold ♠K753 ♥6 ♦J84 ♣AJT54.
Bid 3D, supporting partner's diamonds.

The auction has gone (1H)-2NT-(p)-?, and you hold ♠K753 ♥6 ♦J84 ♣AJT54.
Bid 4C or 5C, depending on vulnerability. You have an excellent fit in clubs and a good fit in diamonds, and you know the opponents have a big heart fit, so you should make a preemptive jump to put the maximum pressure on the opponents.

Playing the Hand

After Michaels or Unusual 2NT auctions, the contract will often be played from the hand with short trumps. Declarer should plan the play from dummy's perspective, establishing dummy's suits, instead of trying to eliminate all of the losers from declarer's hand.

Sources:

1. Karen Walker. "Michaels Cuebids and Unusual Notrump Overcalls."
<http://home.comcast.net/~kwbridge/michaels.htm>
2. ACBL Bridge Series: More Commonly Used Conventions in the 21st Century. Lesson 4: Two Suited Overcalls.
<http://www.acbl.org/assets/documents/teachers/Teacher-Manuals/More-Commonly-Used-Conventions-Lesson-4.pdf>