

# Michaels Cue Bids and the Unusual No Trump Overcall

## Introduction

If the opponents open the bidding, it can be difficult to compete effectively when you hold length in two suits. And yet these hands have tremendous potential if partner holds a fit for one (or both) of your suits.

What we shall look at here is a way of putting to use two bids which are rarely needed in a natural sense, and utilising them to describe at once a hand with two long suits where you would like to compete.

When the opponents have opened the bidding, an overcall of 2NT traditionally used to show a balanced hand of 20-22 points, just like an opening bid of 2NT. Unfortunately, when one of the opponents holds opening strength, the chances of you having a strong hand like this are slim. In fact, the opportunity to make this 2NT overcall (showing a balanced 20-22 points) comes up so infrequently that it makes sense to use the bid in a conventional way.

Similarly, an overcall in the opponent's suit (e.g. 1♠ - 2♠) was used to show a hand with enough strength to insist on game. Such hands are extremely rare, and can usually be well bid by starting with a takeout double.

So we are going to use these two, almost redundant, bids of a cue-bid of the opener's suit and a 2NT overcall as our conventional bids to show a two-suited hand.

The overcall of 2NT is called the **Unusual No Trump (UNT)**

The overcall in opponent's suit is called a **Michaels cue bid**.

Both of these bids are useful as obstructive weapons, as they take away bidding space from the opponents. It is often easy for partner to compete, as he only needs a fit in one of the suits for his hand to be useful.

The bids usually show about 8-15 points (the same sort of strength as a normal overcall) and two decent suits.

Since both of these bids are forcing (partner will not pass either the 2NT overcall or the cue-bid) they can be used on strong two-suited hands. If the overcaller holds reserves of strength over the normal level, he may show it by bidding on after his partner has responded.

This is how I recommend the two bids (the 2NT overcall and the cue-bid in opener's suit) may best be combined:

When the opponent has opened 1 of a minor suit:

A cue-bid in his suit = both major suits

A 2NT overcall = the other minor suit and a major suit

Over a major suit opening bid:

A cue-bid = the other major plus a minor suit

A 2NT overcall = both minor suits

As we shall see later, there is a simple way to find out which second suit is held where necessary.

### **Responding to a Michaels cue bid**

Responder to the cue bid should bid on the assumption that partner is minimum.

- ❖ Without a good fit for either of partner's suits, give simple preference for the one you like best (or dislike least)
- ❖ With a good fit, make a single or double jump in the suit
- ❖ With an even better hand, responder may force to game by bidding the opener's suit.
- ❖ With a strong hand, and good stoppers in opener's suit and the "other" suit, responder may bid 3NT
- ❖ After 1♠ - 2♠ or 1♥ - 2♥ overcaller's second suit is not known. A reply of 2NT is forcing and asks which minor is held.
- ❖ A bid in a suit not promised by the overcaller is natural and non-forcing, based on a very long suit. Overcaller will not bid again unless he is extra strong.
- ❖ If opener's partner bids, you do not have to respond to the overcall unless you like one of partner's suits and wish to compete.

## Examples of the Michaels cue bid in action

West opens 1♦ and North overcalls 2♦ (Michaels) showing both major suits. After a pass from East, what should South bid?

♠ J 9  
♥ J 8  
♦ K 6 5 3  
♣ K 7 5 4 3

South bids 2♥, the cheaper of the two suits. If East had doubled the 2♦ overcall, South should pass, implying no strong preference for either suit, in case the overcaller is 6-5 in the majors.

♠ K 5  
♥ J 8 7 2  
♦ A 8 7 4  
♣ 8 7 2

With a good fit for hearts, a useful card in spades and an ace (always a good card) South bids 3♥ as a game try. Even a bid of 4♥ would be quite reasonable, and certainly better than a feeble 2♥.

♠ 9 8  
♥ J 8 4 3  
♦ K J 3  
♣ K Q 4 3

South has more points than in the previous example, but they are the wrong sort of points! Kings and queens in the opponents suits are useful in defence, but are likely to be wasted in hearts. South should bid 2♥.

This time, the bidding starts

West	North	East	South
	1♥		2♥

Note that South knows that his partner holds a spade suit, but does not know which minor suit is held.

♠ 9  
♥ 6 5 4 3 2  
♦ K J 8  
♣ A J 8 5

South bids 2NT, asking his partner to show which minor suit he holds. South will pass either 3♣ or 3♦. If North jumps to 4 of his minor to show considerable extra strength, South can bid game in the suit.

♠ J 10  
♥ K J 10 8  
♦ A Q 10  
♣ A J 10 5

Bid 3NT. South has a strong stopper in hearts, great help in whichever minor partner holds (to develop tricks in that suit) and a strong holding for no trumps in the other minor suit.

## The unusual no trump

When partner has overcalled an opening bid of 1♣ or 1♦ with 2NT (unusual no trump) and you wish to find out which major suit he holds, you bid the enemy suit as a request for partner to specify his major suit.

Here is an example of this method in action:

West	North	East	South
1♦	2NT		

Over an opening bid of 1 of a major suit by the opponent, an overcall of 2NT (the unusual no trump) shows both minor suits – at least 5-5 distribution). The strength is usually in the range 8-15 points, and both suits should be of reasonable quality.

When the opening bid is in a minor suit, it is quite common to play that an overcall of 2NT shows the two lowest suits – hearts and whichever minor suit has not been opened.

However, I recommend instead that, over a minor suit opening bid, the 2NT overcall shows the unbid minor and an unspecified major suit. As we saw when considering the Michaels cue bid, it will be quite easy to discover which other suit (here, which major) is held if necessary.

♠ J 10 3 2  
♥ K J 10 8  
♦ 5 3 2  
♣ 4 2

North's bid shows clubs and a major suit. You want to play in the major, so bid the enemy suit, 3♦, which asks partner which major he holds. He will bid either 3♥ or 3♠ and you can pass either of these bids.

## Summary

The Michaels cue bid and the unusual no trump are useful weapons in a competitive auction. Do not use them unless the hand is quite suitable.

It is more important to have two good suits containing honours than assorted high card points.

When the overcall shows only one specific suit and one other suit, remember it like this:

- a bid of NT (either as the overcall or in response to a Michaels cue bid) looks for a minor suit fit
- a cue bid (either as the overcall or after partner has bid 2NT over a minor suit opening) is seeking a major fit