

Unusual Cuebids

When an opponent makes an overcall that shows two suits you are often at a disadvantage. It has suddenly become more difficult to make a response to your partner's opening bid that accurately describes your hand. The following are some rather simple ways of using two-suited overcalls such as Unusual NoTrump and Michaels Cuebids to your advantage.

Before I enumerate specific methods, there are some actions that are common after almost all two-suited overcalls:

- (1) Double = indicates the willingness to defend one or both of the opponents' suits
- (2) A raise of partner's suit is just a raise.....less than a limit raise
- (3) 3NT bids always indicate the willingness to play 3NT.
- (4) Pass = I have nothing.... or I have nothing to say for the time being

Unusual Versus Unusual

When an opponent makes an Unusual 2NT bid, both of the overcaller's suits are known. This makes available to responder some cuebids of yet unbid suits that can be used to his side's advantage. (Some call these invisible cuebids.) Perhaps the easiest method after one of a Major followed by a 2NT overcall (we'll call it METHOD 1) is to use the cuebid of the lower suit (clubs) to show a good hand in support of hearts and the cuebid of the higher suit (diamonds) to show a good hand for spades. Thus after partner's 1♠ opening followed by an unusual 2NT overcall:

- 3♣ shows hearts, at least 11+ HCP's, thus it is FORCING
- 3♦ shows spades, at least 9+ HCP's (limit raise+), thus it is FORCING
- 3♥ shows hearts, but it's NOT FORCING (like a Negative Free Bid*)
- 3♠ shows a decent spade raise (less than limit), but it's NOT FORCING

Using METHOD 1 clubs and hearts are linked together and diamonds and spades are linked together, making it easier to remember which suit is being supported.

Now if the auction has gone 1♥ by partner and 2NT by opponent, then:

- 3♣ shows hearts, at least 9+ HCP's (limit raise+), thus it is FORCING
- 3♦ shows spades, at least 11+ HCP's, thus it is FORCING
- 3♥ show a decent heart raise (less than limit), but it's NOT FORCING
- 3♠ shows spades, but it's NOT FORCING (like a NFB*)

A second method (METHOD 2) starts with using the cuebid of the lower of the opponents' suits to show support for opener's suit and the cuebid of the higher suit to show a good hand with the fourth suit. For example, after partner's 1♠ opening followed by an unusual 2NT overcall, these meanings apply:

- 3♣ (lower of their suits) shows a limit raise or better in spades, thus it is FORCING
- 3♦ (higher of their suits) shows a 11+ HCP's with hearts, thus it is FORCING
- 3♥ shows hearts, but it's NOT FORCING (like a NFB*)
- 3♠ shows a spade raise that is less than limit, thus it's NOT FORCING

Or you can change the 3♦ bid to show the unbid major but NOT game FORCING (sort like a transfer to the unbid major) and then 3♥'s remains a natural FORCING bid (METHOD 3). Notice that using METHODS 2 and 3 the cheapest suit bid shows support for the suit opened.

Try METHODS 2 and 3 after partner opens 1♥ and the next opponent bids 2NT.

After a minor suit opening, e.g. 1♣, 2NT (showing diamonds and hearts) the following overcalls are recommended: (METHOD 4)

- 3♣ shows a club raise that is less than a limit raise, thus it is NOT FORCING
- 3♦ (lower of their suits) shows a good limit raise+ in clubs, thus it is FORCING
- 3♥ (higher of their suits) shows a good hand with spades and it is FORCING
- 3♠ shows a decent spade suit but it's NOT FORCING (similar to a NFB*)

Unusual versus Michaels

Regardless of the Michaels cuebid used, the four basic bids presented at the beginning of the article still apply.

Perhaps the most common form of Michaels is that of a cuebid of opening bidder's minor suit to show the major suits (1♣-2♣ or 1♦-2♦). Again it is quite possible to use cuebids of yet unbid suits to show the strength and direction of responder's hand. Thus METHOD 5 is:

- 3 of the opening minor is just a raise
- cheapest bid in the other minor shows that suit but it's NOT FORCING
- 2♥ shows either (a) a limit raise or better in clubs if clubs were opened or (b) a club suit if diamonds were opened starting a FORCING auction in either case
- 2♠ shows either (a) a limit raise or better in diamonds if diamonds were opened or (b) a diamond suit if clubs were opened starting a FORCING auction in either case.

Bidding over Michaels bids over the majors (1♥-2♥ or 1♠-2♠) is not quite as exacting. Since the only suit known positively is the other major only one cuebid is available. Therefore, the following responses apply in addition to those listed at the beginning (METHOD 6):

- 2♠ (over 1♥-2♥) shows a limit raise + in opener's heart suit and it is FORCING
- 3♥ (over 1♠-2♠) shows a limit raise + in opener's spade suit and it is FORCING
- Both 3♣ and 3♦ are natural and NOT FORCING (but you could agree to play them as FORCING)
- 2NT is natural, but limited and invitational only.

There are other methods out there but they are even more confusing. Good luck!

*NFB or Negative Free Bid is usually made at the two or three level and shows a good five or six card suit but with insufficient values to force to game; it is NOT FORCING.

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