

UNUSUAL NOTRUMPS

Traditionally, notrump bids are used to show balanced hands of various strengths. However, after an opponent's opening bid of one of a suit, most play that a direct jump to 2NT is the "unusual notrump overcall". This bid does not indicate the desire to play notrump, but, instead, shows a two-suited hand. Since natural 2NT hands occur less frequently than weak two suited hands, 2NT by an overcaller has become a conventional call showing a weak (or better) two-suited hand where the two suits are generally the minor suits since they are the hardest to show otherwise. Since quite often the opponents would bid too much too quickly for two suits to be shown safely, the Unusual 2NT was developed to show two suits with one single competitive bid.

The Unusual 2NT bid occurs directly after an opponent's opening bid of one of a suit; it is usually intended as a weak two-suited takeout bid. Its extended use has made it a call showing the lower two unbid suits; thus one of them will always be a minor suit. For example, over 1♣, 2NT shows at least 5 diamonds and five hearts, but over 1♦, 2NT shows at least 5 clubs and 5 hearts. Over one of a major suit opening bid, 2NT always shows the minor suits--at least five clubs and at least five diamonds.

It is recommended that two-suited hands be divided into three strength categories, weak (6-11 HCP's), intermediate (12-16 HCP's) and strong (more than 17 HCP's). Since Unusual 2NT bids are designed to hinder the opponents and/or to lead to profitable sacrifices, they are usually made on weak hands--hands with about 6-11 high card points and no more than two defensive tricks. However, the strength required for an Unusual 2NT bid does depend somewhat upon the vulnerability, the level to which you force the bidding, and whether partner has had an opportunity to bid. The more adverse the conditions, the more strength you should have. Your distribution is also a critical factor. As a general rule, the less you have in distribution, the more you should have in high card strength; thus, 6-5 hands require fewer high cards than 5-5 hands. In all cases the points should be in the long suits.

Examples. The following hands are examples of Unusual 2NT bids at any vulnerability:

♠ 7	♠ 8	♠ A3	♠ 98	♠ 96
♥ 43	♥ KJ1075	♥ 4	♥ 3	♥ QJ985
♦ QJ1086	♦ A108653	♦ AK876	♦ KQJ94	♦ 4
♣ AQJ95	♣ 3	♣ AQJ54	♣ AKJ74	♣ KQ982
Bid 2NT/1♥	Bid 2NT/1♣	Bid 2NT/1♠	Bid 2♦/1♥	Bid 2NT/1♦
Bid 2NT/1♠	Bid 1♥/1♦	Bid 2NT/1♥	Bid 2♦/1♠	Bid 2♠/1♠

Some distributional hands are unsuitable for an Unusual 2NT bid. This is particularly true when your high card points are in your short suits. A pass is appropriate for the following hands:

♠ A	♠ KQ	♠ AQ
♥ KJ	♥ J8643	♥ 2
♦ 109876	♦ A6532	♦ 75432
♣ J9743	♣ 7	♣ Q10753

It is important to remember that the length and quality of your suits must compensate for your overall lack of high card strength for the sake of safety; otherwise, you risk serious penalties when the opponents say "double."

An Unusual 2NT bid should not be used with all two-suited hands because it would be impossible for partner to be able to distinguish between your good hands and your bad hands. If, on occasion, you make an Unusual 2NT bid on a very strong two-suited hand (one in the 17+ HCP range), you must show the strength by bidding again. With a two-suited hand in the intermediate range it is usually best to overcall the higher ranking suit and then bid again if possible.

The rare powerhouse hand that was traditionally shown by a strong 2NT bid must now be handled by doubling and bidding NT at the appropriate level on the next round of bidding.

The partner of the Unusual 2NT bidder should always assume that the 2NT-bidder has a weak hand. Therefore, it is the responder's duty to select the trump suit, to inquire as to the initiator's strength if interested in game and to compete as high as seems practicable. The following responses apply:

(1) Simple preference to a suit shown by Unusual 2NT bidder – indicates a preference for that suit with no interest in game, usually shows three or more trumps but sometimes will be less.

(2) Raise to 3NT - expresses the desire to play game in NT and is not forcing.

(3) 3♥'s or 3♠'s (if new suit) - shows an independent suit, it's natural and not forcing.

(4) Jump preference to a suit shown by the Unusual 2NT bidder- shows good support, usually invitational but can be played as preemptive. (If it's a jump to game it may be either constructive or preemptive.)

(5) Cue-bid of the opponent's suit - game or slam try, forcing for one round. (With a minimum hand, the Unusual 2NT bidder should make the most economical bid of his suits; with a maximum he may make any other bid.)

(6) 4NT - Blackwood.

The Unusual NT bid can be used in other situations. When the opponents have opened the bidding, the following bids are extensions of the Unusual 2NT:

(1) Over a 1NT response - a bid of 2NT shows a weak (or better) two-suiter much as if the 1NT bid had not occurred. Example: 1♣-Pass-1NT-2NT shows ♦'s and ♥'s.

(2) Over any new-suit forcing response - a bid of 2NT shows a weak (or better) two-suiter. Example: 1♥-Pass-2♦-2NT.

(3) 2NT after an opening 1NT - Shows a weak two-suiter with the minors. Example: 1NT-P-P-2NT or 1NT 2NT directly.

(4) 2NT over any strong two-bid - shows a weak two-suiter. (If the suit bid by the enemy is artificial, then that suit is deemed to be unbid.) Example: 2♣-2NT shows the minors. But if 2NT is bid after an opponent's weak-2 bid, it's a natural NT bid showing something like 15-18.

(5) 2NT in the balancing position - shows a weak two-suiter if you have previously passed; otherwise, it's natural.

(6) 1NT in the direct position - shows a weak two-suiter by a passed hand only. 1NT in the balancing position is natural.

(7) 2NT in response to partner's balancing takeout double - shows at least 4 cards in each minor suit and asker's for a preference.

Example: N E S W
 1♥ P 2♥ P
 P Dbl P 2NT

If the opponents have opened the bidding and your side has never bid or doubled, an overcall of 4NT is not natural and it is not Blackwood; thus, it has become another extension of the Unusual Notrump overcall. The strength of the 4NT bid depends upon the bidding that has occurred. If the opponents have preempted the bidding and you have never passed, it implies intermediate or better strength; otherwise, it implies a weak hand. The following are situations where the 4NT can be used for takeout:

(1) Over 4♠'s - 4NT is takeout for the unbid suits. This may be done with a two-suiter or a three-suiter. If the two suits are ♦'s and ♥'s, 5♣'s by partner will be corrected to 5♦'s so that partner can take a choice of the red suits. Example: In 4♠-P-P-4NT, 4NT is for takeout (Double is for penalties.)

(2) Over 4♥'s - 4NT is takeout for the minors suits with at least intermediate values. Example: 4♥-4NT. Possible hand is:
♠ 64 ♥ - ♦ AQJ654 ♣ KQJ43. (Over four of a minor, 4NT is Blackwood.)

(3) Over any lower bid where the opponents have agreed upon a suit - 4NT is a takeout for the two lower unbid suits. Examples: 1♠-P-3♠-4NT suggests a weak minor two-suiter. Similarly 2♥ P 3♥ 4NT should show a very good minor suited hand.

(4) If you (but not partner) have bid or doubled and the enemy preempts to the four level - 4NT is a takeout for the unbid suits over 4♠'s or the minor suits over 4♥'s. Examples:

- | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----|---------------------------|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|--|-----|------|
| (a) | You | Opp | Part | Opp | (b) | Opp | You | Opp | Part |
| | 1♦ | 1♠ | P | 4♠ | | 1♥ | 2♣ | 4♥ | P |
| | <u>4NT</u> (3-suited t/o) | | | | | P | <u>4NT</u> (for minors
with longer ♣'s) | | |

There are many defenses to the Unusual 2NT bids, most of which revolve around the known suits shown by the 2NT bidder. The theory is that simple raises of opening bidder's suit are natural and non-forcing, new suits not promised by the 2NT bidder are also natural and non-forcing, cue-bids of known suits show specific good hands and/or suits, double is penalty of 2NT and indicates a willingness to double at least one of the suits promised by the 2NT bidder.

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