

Ghestem - Two Suited Overcall

In the old days when an opponent opened a suit at the one level and we bid two of the same suit, that showed a very powerful hand. But that situation does not arise very often (and we can cope with it by doubling and then bidding on) and so another use of this direct cue bid was devised.

By the same token, an overcall of 2NT to show a very strong balanced hand is seldom used (and we can cope with it by doubling and then bidding NT) and so this 2NT jump was also allocated another meaning.

Nowadays, most players play both of these bids to show two-suited hands. The UNT is used to show the two lowest unbid suits and the Michaels Cue bid shows both majors if a minor was opened and shows the other major and an (unspecified) minor if a major suit was opened. Now I have described UNT/Michaels elsewhere and it is not totally satisfactory as all suit combinations cannot be shown and there is often ambiguity about the minor.

However, if we also allocate a conventional meaning to the jump to 3♣ we can cover everything. This complete scheme is called Ghestem: -

Direct cue bid = highest + lowest suits
2NT = 2 lowest suits
3♣ = 2 highest suits

So we have: -

Opening bid:	Overcall:	Meaning
1♣	2♣	♠'s and ♦'s (highest + lowest)
1♣	2NT	♦'s and ♥'s (two lowest)
1♣	3♣	♠'s and ♥'s (two highest)
1♦	2♦	♠'s and ♣'s (highest + lowest)
1♦	2NT	♣'s and ♥'s (two lowest)
1♦	3♣	♠'s and ♥'s (two highest)
1♥	2♥	♠'s and ♣'s (highest + lowest)
1♥	2NT	♣'s and ♦'s (two lowest)
1♥	3♣	♠'s and ♦'s (two highest)
1♠	2♠	♥'s and ♣'s (highest + lowest)
1♠	2NT	♣'s and ♦'s (two lowest)
1♠	3♣	♦'s and ♥'s (two highest)

Now this really is not too difficult to remember. 2NT is the same as the unusual NT, so always the two lowest. That leaves the cue bid and 3♣. 3♣ is always the higher bid and it means the two highest suits. That just leaves the cue bid for what's left (the highest and lowest).

There are just six of these two-suited combinations. So playing Ghestem we have: -

Hand 1	Hand 2	Hand 3	Hand 4	Hand 5	Hand 6
♠ 6	♠ 6	♠ KQ942	♠ 6	♠ KQ942	♠ KQ942
♥ 95	♥ KQ942	♥ 6	♥ K8742	♥ 6	♥ K8742
♦ KQ942	♦ 95	♦ 95	♦ KQ942	♦ K8742	♦ 6
♣ K8742	♣ K8742	♣ K8742	♣ 95	♣ 95	♣ 95

Hand 1: Over an opening bid of 1♥/♠, bid 2NT. This shows the two lowest

Hand 2: Over an opening bid of 1♦, bid 2NT. This shows the two lowest
Over an opening bid of 1♠, bid 2♠. This shows the highest and lowest

Hand 3: Over an opening bid of 1♦, bid 2♦. This shows the highest and lowest
Over an opening bid of 1♥, bid 2♥. This shows the highest and lowest

Hand 4: Over an opening bid of 1♣, bid 2NT. This shows the two lowest
Over an opening bid of 1♠, bid 3♣. This shows the two highest

Hand 5: Over an opening bid of 1♣, bid 2♣. This shows the highest and lowest
Over an opening bid of 1♥, bid 3♣. This shows the two highest

Hand 6: Over an opening bid of 1♣/♦, bid 3♣. This shows the two highest

Hand 7 Now Ghestem is basically pre-emptive. But most people play that it may also be very strong. So with this hand we bid the 2NT over a 1♦ opening and we bid 2♠ over a 1♠ opening.

♠ 6
♥ KQ942
♦ A
♣ AKQ642
But after partner's response we then make a forcing bid or bid game.

Hand 8 But hand 8 is different; it is neither weak nor very strong. So with intermediate hands like this we simply overcall.

♠ 6
♥ KQ942
♦ A5
♣ AQ642

There are a couple of drawbacks with using Ghestem: -

- 1- You lose 3♣ as a weak jump overcall or whatever it normally means in your system.
- 2- Sometimes you have to bid higher than you would have using UNT/Michaels. For example with Hand 6 we bid 3♣ but playing Michaels it would be a cuebid of two of the minor and so we are a level lower using Michaels. And most players like to cue bid over a 1♣/♦ opening when only 4-5 (or 5-4) in the majors which is unrealistic if partner is forced to the 3-level.
This really is a very big problem and the main reason why Ghestem is not that popular.

Is there any possible improvement? Yes! See Questem (inverted Ghestem).