

The Unusual NT (UNT) and Michaels cue bids.

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. The complete scheme is: -

Opening bid:	Overcall:	Meaning	Notes
1♣	2♣	♥'s and ♠'s	1
1♣	2NT	♦'s and ♥'s	
1♦	2♦	♥'s and ♠'s	1
1♦	2NT	♣'s and ♥'s	
1♥	2♥	♠'s and a minor	2
1♥	2NT	♣'s and ♦'s	
1♠	2♠	♥'s and a minor	2,3
1♠	2NT	♣'s and ♦'s	

These bids are usually weak and pre-emptive, although they can be very strong. The bids show 5-5 in the suits shown and partner is expected to choose one of them. However, the bid can also be very strong, in which case the bidder will bid on after partner's choice.

Notes

- 1) In the case of a major suit two-suiter most people play that 5-4 or 4-5 in the major suits is sufficient as responder is not forced to bid above the two level.
- 2) In these two situations the minor suit is unknown, if responder does not wish to play in the major then he bids 2NT to get partner to bid his minor.
- 3) In this case some people play that a 4 card ♠ suit is permissible as partner has only to bid at the two level in support of ♠'s.

There are just six of these two-suited combinations. Playing UNT/Michaels 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. Over an opening bid of 1♠, bid 2NT.	This shows the two lowest This shows the two lowest
Hand 2:	Over an opening bid of 1♦ bid 2NT Over an opening bid of 1♠, bid 2♠.	This shows the two lowest This shows ♥'s and a minor
Hand 3:	Over an opening bid of 1♦ we have no conventional bid, so overcall 1♠. Over an opening bid of 1♥, bid 2♥.	This shows ♠'s and a minor
Hand 4:	Over an opening bid of 1♣, bid 2NT. Over an opening bid of 1♠, bid 2♠.	This shows the two lowest This shows ♥'s and a minor
Hand 5:	Over an opening bid of 1♣ we have no conventional bid, so overcall 1♠. Over an opening bid of 1♥, bid 2♥.	This shows ♠'s and a minor
Hand 6:	Over an opening bid of 1♣, bid 2♣. Over an opening bid of 1♦, bid 2♦.	This shows both majors This shows both majors

Hand 2 Let's look at Hand 2 a little deeper. RHO opens 1♠ and we bid 2♠, showing ♥'s and a minor. If partner likes ♥'s then he will bid them; but if he prefers to play in your minor suit he bids 2NT, this asks you to bid your minor suit.

♠ 6
♥ KQ942
♦ 95
♣ K8742

Hand 7 Now Michaels and the UNT are basically pre-emptive. But most people play that they may also be very strong. So with this hand we bid the UNT over a 1♦ opening and we bid 2♠ over a 1♠ opening. But after partner's response we then make a forcing bid or bid game: - I play any subsequent bid as a very strong hand and game forcing.

♠ 6
♥ KQ942
♦ A
♣ AKQ642

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

Hand A Consider this hand A. The definition of Michaels cue bids states that one need be only 5-4 (or 4-5) in the majors to cue bid an opening 1♣/♦, and many (most?) people play Michaels that way. So playing Michaels cue we bids bid 2♣ over a 1♣ opening and 2♦ over a 1♦ opening.

♠ KJ84
♥ K8742
♦ 96
♣ 95

Now Michaels and the UNT are very useful, but there are a couple of problems: -

- 1- When we show a specific major and an unspecified minor partner may have a problem if he has mediocre support for the major and just one reasonable minor. Should he play it safe and bid the major or take a chance of finding an excellent minor suit fit? Since this minor suit ambiguity occurs in 4 out of the 12 possible combinations, this is a significant disadvantage.
- 2- As we saw with Hands 3 and 5 we cannot show all hand types. Specifically, we cannot show a hand with ♠'s and a minor if the other minor is opened.

These problems have been overcome with the Ghestem convention where all two-suited combinations can be specifically shown, but it requires the jump to 3♣ to be used conventionally. But Ghestem also has its drawbacks; by all means have a look at it, but the best solution is undoubtedly Questem (which is actually inverted Ghestem).