

MICHAELS CUE BIDS / UNUSUAL NT

Mechanics

Originally devised by Michael Michaels of Miami. These are actually two different conventions, but they are usually bundled together to give one coherent approach. There are a few variations, but the basic mechanism involves cue-bidding the opponents' opening suit (e.g. (1♦), 2♦) or jumping to 2NT over the opening bid. The bids are unusual in that they can either be pre-emptive - and subsequently looking for a cheap sacrifice (the most common situation) - or they can be constructive looking for a game fit. These bids have no other use in the modern game.

Both these bids show at least 5-5 in one or more specific suits and are either **weak** (7 – 11 points) or **strong** (15/16+ points), but **not intermediate**. (These point ranges are subject to either side's vulnerability – I would hesitate to bid on a 7 count if vulnerable against non-vulnerable), but also might consider suitable 6 point hands non-vulnerable. Also most of the points should be in the long suits.

- **over 1♣ or 1♦, the cue-bid shows both majors (Michaels).**
- **over 1♥ or 1♠, the cue-bid shows the other major and one of the minors (Michaels).**
(if partner wishes to know your second suit, he 3♣ - pass or correct).
- **2NT shows the two lower ranked other suits (Unusual No-Trump).**
- other combinations, use a simple overcall (see later for my personal non-standard approach).
- **DO NOT USE WITH INTERMEDIATE HANDS (12-14) - use a simple overcall (usually a major).**
- Beware of using the 'weak' hand if partner has already passed (in a non-overcall position), particularly if vulnerable (I suggest you don't use if weak).

When partner responds, he should initially assume that you are in the 'weak' range (by far the most common), and bid accordingly (usually the better major at the lowest available level).

Any raise in partner's known suit is purely pre-emptive (bid to the level of the fit).

If he is interested in 'the other suit', responder bids 3♣, and the original over-caller 'passes or corrects' to 3♦ (some pairs play 2NT as the other suit enquiry, but it is generally preferred to keep this as natural).

For invitational bids by responder (usually about 12 points), responder further cue bids the opening suit (similar to an unassuming cue-bid in response to a simple overcall). If partner (the original Michaels bidder), wishes to accept the invite, he bids to game if only one major is specified, or bids the higher ranking if both majors are held (otherwise the lower). This can be used if over-caller shows both majors, or a major/minor hand. (Except where the opening bid is 1♠, when the responder must now use 3♦ as the equivalent enquiry – see examples (w) (x))

The original over-caller, with the weak variety, would usually pass your response, but if in fact the over-caller is the strong variety, he would either give a further cue-bid of the opening suit, or bid further in any agreed suit.

The above is a simplistic explanation, since the opposition often interfere, and a 'common sense' approach is usually required. This is one of the types of bid where it is important to have a good understanding of the principles, rather than trying to learn parrot-fashion (other than the basics above). It is therefore important to understand the system by reference to the examples below.

Examples

(in (a) - (d) assume West opens 1♦, and the opposition then remain silent. After the opening bid, only your and partner's bids are shown)

a)	♠ KJ876 ♥ KJ872 ♦ 10 ♣ 85	b)	♠ KJ876 ♥ KJ872 ♦ 10 ♣ 85	c)	♠ KJ876 ♥ KJ872 ♦ 10 ♣ 85	d)	♠ KJ876 ♥ KJ872 ♦ 10 ♣ 85	e)	♠ KJ876 ♥ 8 ♦ KJ984 ♣ 64
	(1♦)		(1♦)		(1♦)		(1♦)		(1♥)
	♠ 92 ♥ Q3 ♦ KJ65 ♣ K10732		♠ Q9 ♥ 6 ♦ 9653 ♣ K107632		♠ Q1094 ♥ Q3 ♦ 72 ♣ Q7643		♠ Q10932 ♥ Q3 ♦ Q5 ♣ 9763		♠ Q1093 ♥ Q3 ♦ Q52 ♣ 9753

a) (1♦) - 2♦ - 2♥ - end. The 2♦ shows both majors and in this case a weak hand. South chooses the better major – 2♥ (don't be tempted to bid 3♣).

- b) (1♦) - 2♦ - 2♠ - end. Even with 2-1 in the majors, South chooses the better major – 2♠ (again - don't be tempted to bid 3♣).
- c) (1♦) - 2♦ - 3♠ - end. South raises pre-emptively to 3♠ (or possibly 4♠ if non-vul).
- d) (1♦) - 2♦ - 4♠ - ? similar to (c), but the pre-empt can be extended to the 4-level, making it more difficult for the opponents to find the probable diamond slam.
- e) (1♥) - 2♥ - 3♠/4♠ - ? The 2♥ shows spades and a minor and weak. South still bids pre-emptively (3♠ or 4♠) – no point in trying to find the minor fit.

f)	♠ KJ876	g)	♠ KJ876	h)	♠ KJ876	i)	♠ AKJ105	j)	♠ AKJ105
	♥ 8		♥ 8		♥ 8		♥ AKJ84		♥ AKJ84
	♦ 102		♦ K10954		♦ 102		♦ 8		♦ 8
	♣ K10954		♣ 64		♣ QJ954		♣ 97		♣ 97

(1♥) (1♥) (1♥) (1♦) (1♦)

♠ 2	♠ 2	♠ 2	♠ 92	♠ 9
♥ 10932	♥ 9742	♥ A1093	♥ 93	♥ 1093
♦ J65	♦ A763	♦ AKQ873	♦ K965	♦ J653
♣ A7632	♣ KJ32	♣ K6	♣ 108542	♣ A6542

- f) (1♥) - 2♥ - 3♣ - pass. South makes a pass or correct bid, he is happy to play in either clubs or diamonds. North with the weak hand and with clubs just passes.
- g) (1♥) - 2♥ - 4♣ - 4♦. South is happy to raise pre-emptively with support for either minor (since the hand will probably need to be played on a cross-ruff, it is best to have at least a 5-4 fit). North corrects to 4♦.
- h) (1♥) - 2♥ - 2NT/3NT. Pessimist/optimist - with the solid diamonds and good heart intermediaries, South is just worth 3NT even opposite a minimum in partner's hand. (If South had only ♥A107, 2NT would probably be the limit).
- i) (1♦) - 2♦ - 2♥ - 3♥ - pass. North has the strong variety, but partner's initial 2♥ assumes the weak variety. When the over-caller raises to 3♥, South knows he is strong, but with a 3-count, is content to leave in 3♥.
- j) (1♦) - 2♦ - 2♥ - 3♥ - 4♥ - end. As (i), but South even with a 5-count, is just worth the game.

k) ♠ AKJ105 ♥ AKJ84 ♦ 8 ♣ 97	l) ♠ AKQ6 ♥ 4 ♦ 92 ♣ AQ1095	m) ♠ AK854 ♥ 8 ♦ KQ984 ♣ A4	n) ♠ 4 ♥ AKJ65 ♦ 87 ♣ Q10954	o) ♠ 76 ♥ 4 ♦ AQ1097 ♣ K10975
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(1♦)	(1♥)	(1♥)	(1♦)	(1♥)
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♠ 92 ♥ 93 ♦ KJ65 ♣ AQ542	♠ 7 ♥ 9752 ♦ AJ63 ♣ KJ32	♠ 7 ♥ 9752 ♦ AJ63 ♣ KJ32	♠ 72 ♥ 9742 ♦ AJ6 ♣ KJ83	♠ AK5 ♥ 975 ♦ 652 ♣ QJ32
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k) (1♦) - 2♦ - 2♥ - 3♥ - 3NT. Initially South assumes partner has the weak hand, so just gives suit preference. When North now shows a strong hand (he would have passed 2♥ with the weak variety), South bids the obvious 3NT.

l) (1♥) - 2♥ - 3♣ - 4♣ - 5♣. South initially assumes partner is weak, and bids 3♣ ('pass or correct'). North now shows a strong hand with clubs, which South can readily raise to game.

m) (1♥) - 2♥ - 3♣ - 4♦ - 5♦. Similar to (l), but North gives preference to diamonds by bidding at the 4-level (he would have bid 3♦ with a weak hand).

n) (1♦) - 2NT - 3♥ - end. 2NT shows the two lower ranking remaining suits (clubs and hearts). South assumes partner to be weak.

o) (1♥) - 2NT - 3♣ - end. South is interested in North's 5-card minor, so bids 3♣ as a 'pass or correct'. North with clubs is happy to pass.

p) ♠ 42 ♥ 6 ♦ AQ1074 ♣ K8643	q) ♠ AKJ76 ♥ 4 ♦ 87 ♣ Q10954	r) ♠ KJ1075 ♥ AKJ84 ♦ 8 ♣ 97	s) ♠ KJ876 ♥ K9872 ♦ 9 ♣ 74	t) ♠ AJ876 ♥ KJ8 ♦ 9 ♣ 74
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(1♠)	(1♦)	(1♦)	(1♦)	(1♦)
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♠ J53 ♥ AJ9832 ♦ K3 ♣ 75	♠ 82 ♥ 9732 ♦ AJ6 ♣ KJ83	♠ 92 ♥ 93 ♦ K965 ♣ 108542	♠ Q109 ♥ Q3 ♦ A543 ♣ A853	♠ Q109 ♥ Q3 ♦ A543 ♣ A853
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p) (1♠) – 2NT - 3♦ - end. The 2NT shows the lower two suits, so do not bid 3♥. Settle for the known 5-2 fit with your better minor. (3♥ (unlikely) would show a good seven-card suit and would be passed).

q) (1♦) - 1♠ - pass. North can't show spades and clubs so settles for the simple overcall. He may get chance to show the clubs later on.

r) (1♦) – 1♠ - (pass) – pass – [dbl - 2♥ - 3♥ - 4♥] North has an ‘**intermediate**’ strength hand, so **cannot bid Michaels**. He must first overcall in the higher ranking suit, and then if given the chance, bid the other suit (unless partner supports). If in fact North were to make a Michaels 2♦ bid, South would still be ok, but should South hold say:

♠ A96; ♥ Q973; ♦ K96; ♣ 1085, he would merely bid 2♥ and a possible game may be missed.

s) (1♦) - 2♦ - 3♦ - 3♥ - 3♠. South would like to be in game if partner has the upper end of a weak bid. He makes the invitational bid of 3♦. Partner with only 7 points bids the lower of his majors.

t) (1♦) - 2♦ - 3♦ - 3♠ - 4♠....whereas with the upper end he bids the higher of his majors, whereby South will convert to the appropriate game (spades).

u) ♠ AJ876
♥ 9
♦ J8762
♣ Q4

v) ♠ AJ876
♥ 9
♦ KJ872
♣ 74

w) ♠ 9
♥ AJ876
♦ J8762
♣ Q4

x) ♠ 9
♥ AJ876
♦ KJ872
♣ 74

(1♥)

(1♥)

(1♠)

(1♠)

♠ Q109
♥ Q3
♦ A543
♣ A853

♠ Q109
♥ Q3
♦ A543
♣ A853

♠ Q3
♥ Q109
♦ A543
♣ A853

♠ Q3
♥ Q109
♦ A543
♣ A853

u) (1♥) – 2♥ – 3♥ – 3♠. The 2♥ shows spades and a minor. South is interested in a spade game if partner is weak/strong. North with his poor 8 points, settles for 3♠. (If South had been interested in partner's minor, he would have bid 3♣ and not 3♦.

v) (1♥) – 2♥ – 3♥ – 4♠..whereas with the extra points (still weak range), North bids the spade game.

w) (1♠) - 2♠ - 3♦ - 3♥. With a spade opening, South cannot cue-bid spades, since this would push partner to the 4-level, so he bid 3♦ (**In this situation it is not a 7-card suit**). Partner can then conveniently settle in 3♥.

x) (1♠) - 2♠ - 3♦ - 3♥.whereas with the extra points, North bids 4♥.

y)	♠ KJ854	z)	♠ KQ1094	aa)	♠ KJ765	bb)	♠ 7	cc)	♠ J7432
	♥ 8		♥ KJ1092		♥ 4		♥ 4		♥ 86432
	♦ KJ984		♦ 94		♦ Q10954		♦ AQJ1074		♦ K7
	♣ 64		♣ 3		♣ 92		♣ AQ984		♣ A

(1♥) (3♥) (1♣) (3♣) (1♥) (4♥) (1♥) (4♥) (1♥)

♠ Q1093	♠ J8762	♠ 2	♠ 98542
♥ Q3	♥ Q763	♥ 97	♥ 873
♦ Q52	♦ 107	♦ KJ832	♦ K53
♣ 9753	♣ K7	♣ AJ653	♣ K7

y) (1♥) – 2♥ - (3♥) - 3♠. North bids 2♥ showing spades and a minor. After East’s 3♥, South’s bid is pre-emptive – the opponents may not bid 4♥. (I wouldn’t argue with 4♠ at suitable vulnerability).

z) (1♣) – 2♣ - East (3♣) – 4♠/5♠. South can afford to pre-empt to a high level due to the known fit in both majors, so East/West will have a good game or slam fit in the minors. If non-vulnerable bid 5♠, whereas if vulnerable bid 4♠. Bidding to probably go three off.

aa) (1♥) – 2♥ - (4♥) – 5♣ - 5♦... After East’s 4♥, South makes a ‘pass or correct’ bid of 5♣. He is happy to sacrifice in either clubs or diamonds. Even if East bids 4NT instead of 4♥, South would still bid the same.

bb) (1♥) – 2NT – (3♥) – pass – (4♥) – 5♣ - 5♦. North with the strong hand (a six-card suit is worth an extra 3 points), can compete constructively over 4♥, which South converts to 5♦, knowing North has both minors.

cc) (1♦) – pass. Don’t even think of a two-suited overcall – all the points in the short suits.

(Spades and a Minor)

A personal, but **non-standard** approach to show the ‘impossible’ spades and a minor (over opener’s other minor opening), is to jump-cue in opener’s minor. E.g. (1♣) – 3♣ shows spades and diamonds, and (1♦) – 3♦ shows spades and clubs. With the diamond cue bid, you may be forced to the 4-level in clubs, so I recommend that the ‘weak’ range should be 10-12 points, and a reasonable minor (club) suit. With weaker hands, and with suitable spades and vulnerability, make a simple overcall.

dd) ♠ AK976 ee) ♠ AQ976
♥ 4 ♥ 4
♦ K4 ♦ K7
♣ Q10974 ♣ Q10954

(1♦) 1♦)

♠ 852 ♠ 82
♥ 9732 ♥ 9732
♦ A96 ♦ A96
♣ KJ8 ♣ KJ83

dd) (1♦) - 3♦ - 3♣. 3♦ shows spades and the other minor (clubs). South settles for the spade 5-3 fit. Note: North has 12 points – (10-12 necessary for the diamond cue).

ee) (1♦) - 3♦ - 4♣. ...but now with no spade support, prefers the 5-4 club fit.

(4th. Position After Opponents Two Suits) – (not standard)

e.g. (1♥) – pass – (2♣) - ?

To show the other two suits – 5-5, three bids are available, 2♥, 3♣, 2NT. My personal approach is to use each of these to show 5-5, weak, intermediate, strong. – in the sequence of occurrence.

(Therefore with any suitable non-5/5/ hand you should double)

After 1♥ – pass – 2♣ - ?

ff) ♠ KQ843 gg) ♠ KQ843 hh) ♠ KQJ84 ii) ♠ KJ108
♥ 9 ♥ 9 ♥ 9 ♥ K64
♦ A7652 ♦ A7532 ♦ AQ652 ♦ AQ65
♣ 97 ♣ A7 ♣ A7 ♣ A7

- ff) 2♥ (weak)
- gg) 2NT (intermediate)
- hh) 3♣ (strong)
- ii) Double – not 5/5

Summary/Other Considerations

- initially, assess if the suit combinations are suitable for a Michaels/UNT bid. Then assess the suitability of the points (**only weak or strong two-suited hands are suitable**).
- in response, **always assume partner has the weak hand**. So bid at the lowest level, or alternatively further cue-bid thereby inviting partner with a maximum weak hand (9-11 points) to bid on to game. The hand can also pre-emptively raise any known suit.
- with ‘standard Michaels’, **some 5-5 hands cannot be bid** – so overcall in the major if suitable. Consider using the modification
- the Michaels over-caller can also invite game with a very strong hand (20+) by a further cue-bid of the opposition’s suit (if available).
- **with 12–15 points, just use a simple overcall** of the higher ranking suit, hoping to also bid the lower suit if necessary (see example (r) above).
- a 6-5 distribution hand is worth about another 2-3 points.
- remember that if you make a two-suited bid and subsequently the opposition declare the contract, all you have achieved is to give them better information as to the distribution of the cards (this is why you don’t make the bid on intermediate values – you are unlikely to want to sacrifice). So having made the bid (weak variety) you should try to get into the sacrificing situation. Hence the bids are of far more value at favourable vulnerability.
- in fourth position, after two suits bid by the opposition, to show a two suited hand, three bids are available (lho’s suit, rho’s suit, 2NT). I would suggest the following (not standard):
 - the first available bid in sequence of the three, – weak hand
 - the second available in sequence bid of the three – intermediate hand

- the third available bid in sequence of the three – strong hand
- initially (until more experienced), the only other sequences suitable for Michaels/UNT are:

(in the following bidding sequences, the hands should be **intermediate or strong**).

- (1♦) - pass – (pass) – 2♦ (showing 5-5 in the majors), or 2NT (clubs and hearts)
- (1♥) – pass – (pass) – 2♥ (showing spades and a minor)
- (1♦) – pass – (1NT) – 2♦ (showing 5-5 in the majors), or 2NT (clubs and hearts).
- (1♥) – pass – (1NT) – 2♥ (showing spades and a minor), or 2NT (showing both minors).

AFH