

Overcalls with Two Suited (5+ cards) Hands

After an opponent opens in a suit, it is often difficult to describe a hand with two long suits. The auction may get too high (or end too soon) for you to show both, or you may not have the strength to safely bid either suit.

Consider your responses on these hands:

A		B		C	
East	North	East	North	East	North
♠ K Q 9 6 4	opens	♠ 7 6 5	opens	♠ 4	opens
♥ K Q 8 7 2	1♣ or 1♦	♥ -	1♥ or 1♠	♥ K J 8 7 2	1♣ or 1♠
♦ 5 2		♦ K 10 7 6 5		♦ A J 10 7 5 4	
♣ 7		♣ Q J 10 9 3		♣ 3	

With (A), you would overcall 1♠ and hope to bid hearts later. With (B) and (C), it may be dangerous to bid at all, especially at the 2-level. Both hands have good playing strength (SQT = 6+), but neither can be described with a standard overcall, which tends to show a one-suited hand with more high-card points.

The Michaels Cue-bid and Unusual No Trump (UNT) are conventions that let you show two suits with one bid, greatly enhancing your chances of finding fit while disrupting the opponents' bidding. They are, in a sense, the counterparts to the Landy two suited overcall of the opponent's opening 1NT. The convention you use depends on which suit the opponent opens and which suits you have. They are generally played together, as the concepts behind them are similar.

This handout describes the Michaels Cue Bid. When an opponent opens in a suit at the 1 level, a bid by overcaller of opener's suit: (1♥) – 2♥ is Michaels. It is an artificial bid which promises at least five cards in two of the unbid suits.

The requirements for binning a Michaels are:

- The two long suits must be at least 5-5, never 5-4 or 6-4.
- Only use with weak (6-10 HCP) or strong (16+ HCP) hands. With 11-15 HCP bid one of the 5 card suits and hope to show the other later. This gives partner a better picture of the strength of the overcaller's hand if he bids again. He will know whether overcaller's rebid is being obstructive (no hope of game but getting in the opponents' way, partner must pass), or constructive (game a real possibility, partner must find a bid).
- Required HCP count:
 - - Weak (6-10 HCP): If vulnerable only use Michaels with two very good suits and/or freakish distribution – partner must respond at the 3 level!! .
 - Strong: 16+ HCP, any vulnerability.
- Most of overcaller's HCP should be located fairly evenly in the two best suits.

The emphasis of the Michaels Cue Bid is on the majors.

- If opener's suit is a MINOR then Michaels shows BOTH majors.
- If opener's suit is a MAJOR the Michaels shows the OTHER major and an unspecified minor (there is a way of finding out which minor is held – more later).

North	East	Shows
1♣	1♣	5+ hearts and 5+ spades.
1♦	2♦	5+ hearts and 5+ spades.
1♥	2♥	5+ spades and an unspecified minor (5+ clubs OR diamonds)
1♠	2♠	5+ hearts and an unspecified minor (5+ clubs OR diamonds)

Examples:

E	S	W	N	South 1	South 2	
1♣	?			♠ K 7 6 5 3 ♥ 10 8 6 4 3 ♦ Q ♣ Q 5	♠ Q J 6 3 2 ♥ A J 6 5 2 ♦ 9 6 ♣ 4	Both hands have 7 points but South 1 should pass. The suit quality is too poor (and 8 losers). The points should be mainly in the overcall suit. South 2 is suitable for a 2♣ overcall (7 losers).

E	S	W	N	South 3	South 4	
1♥	?			♠ A J 6 3 2 ♥ Q 9 ♦ 8 ♣ K 8 6 5 2	♠ A 10 6 3 2 ♥ - ♦ K 10 ♣ Q 8 7 6 5 2	N/S may end up at the 3 level if North has a minor so South 1 should bid 1♠. The club suit quality is too poor for 2♥ (and 7 losers – needs 6 losers to play safely at the 3 level). South 2 is suitable for 2♥ as the minor suit has 6 cards and 5 ½ losers)

E	S	W	N	South 5	
1♦	?			♠ A J 9 6 2 ♥ K J 10 8 6 ♦ 8 ♣ A 8	With an intermediate hand (11-15 HCP) South should not use Michaels because North will assume that it is the weak type. South has defensive value so 'pre-empting' is not appropriate. Instead South should open 1♠ hoping to have the chance to bid both suits.

S	W	N	E	West	East	
1♦	2♦	P	2♥	♠ A Q 9 8 7 ♥ A K J 7 5 ♦ 6 ♣ A 5	♠ 3 2 ♥ Q 4 2 ♦ A 7 5 4 ♣ Q 8 7 4	West has 16+ so starts Michaels. It is more descriptive than a simple overcall and a takeout double may let the opponents in cheaply. When West bids again after East's 2♥, East knows it is the strong type of hand.

S	W	N	E	West	East	
1♣	2♣	P	2♥	♠ K J 10 8 6 ♥ A J 9 7 2 ♦ 8 5 ♣ 3	♠ 9 2 ♥ 9 6 3 ♦ K 10 6 4 2 ♣ A J 6	East bids her longer major

S	W	N	E	West	East	
1♣	2♣	3♣	4♥	♠ K J 10 8 6 ♥ Q J 9 7 2 ♦ 8 5 ♣ 3	♠ 7 ♥ A K 10 6 3 ♦ 9 7 3 ♣ 6 5 4 2	On the normal assumption that West's hand is the weak type, East raises preemptively to 4♥ (bidding to the level of the fit) making life as difficult as possible for the opponents.

S	W	N	E	West	East	
1♣	2♣	P	2♠	♠ K Q J 8 7 ♥ A Q 9 7 2 ♦ A 5 ♣ 3	♠ A 3 2 ♥ 5 ♦ 6 4 2 ♣ Q 9 8 6 5 2	East gives preference to his longer major. When West raises spades (he would pass with a weak hand), East knows he has the strong 16+ type hand. Realising his ♠A and shortage in hearts will be useful, East bids game.

Ask 'Which Minor' – the 2NT Enquiry

The 2NT enquiry response can be used after a major suit cue bid (which shows the other major and an unspecified minor) to find out which minor the overcaller holds. Use this when you cannot support partner's major but have at least 3+ in both minors. Partner bids his preferred minor and you then pass or raise his suit.

The 2NT enquiry doesn't promise any points, it might be needed when overcaller's partner is very short in the known major. The 2NT bid is artificial and must be alerted.

S	W	N	E	West	East	
1♥	2♥	P	2NT	♠ K Q J 8 7 ♥ 8 ♦ 7 5 ♣ A J 9 7 2	♠ 2 ♥ 10 6 5 3 ♦ A Q 9 6 ♣ K 5 4 3	West's Michaels is showing spades and a minor. With only one card in partner's major East uses the 2NT enquiry to find out partner's second suit. Since West is weak he bids 3♣, which East passes.

S	W	N	E	West	East	
1♥	2♥	P	2NT	♠ K Q J 8 7 ♥ 8 ♦ K 5 ♣ K Q J 9 7	♠ 3 ♥ 10 6 5 3 ♦ A 9 6 3 ♣ A 5 4 3	With only one card in partner's major East uses the 2NT enquiry to find out partner's second suit. Since West must bid 3♣ with the weak type hand, he needs to jump to 4♣ to show the strong (16+ HCP) type hand. Now East knows that with shortage in spades and partner's long suits and length in clubs, 5♣ is a realistic proposition.