



Unassuming Cue-bids

IN THE coming issues I will be introducing some of the more difficult but nonetheless extremely useful bidding conventions that aspiring regular partnerships may wish to add to their armoury. At the very least it may make them conversant with these ideas so that if they happen to be used by the opponents at the table, then they will be in a position to grasp exactly what is going on.

Consider the following hand:

♠ A 3
♥ A Q 7 5
♦ K J 9 8
♣ J 6 4

You open 1♥, there is a 2♣ overcall and partner jumps to 3♥. Do you raise to 4♥ or pass?

If you pass, partner invariably puts down

Hand A below and you have missed an easy game. Whereas if you decide to raise to 4♥, partner may well put down Hand B, where you are doomed to failure . . .

Hand A	Hand B
♠ K 7 5 4	♠ Q 7
♥ K J 8 2	♥ K J 8 6 2
♦ A 6 3	♦ Q 7 6 3
♣ 3 2	♣ 3 2

. . . with the usual comment: I was bidding on shape, partner! We have all been there!

How nice it would be to be able to describe both of responder's hand types so opener does not face such a nasty guess.

Thus the Unassuming Cue-bid (UCB) becomes so important. In essence if there is an opening bid followed by an opponent's overcall, then a cue-bid of the opponent's suit shows a good raise, i.e. Hand A type, whereas jumping to three of opener's suit shows a stretched distributional raise, i.e. Hand B type, as in the auctions below:

West	North	East	South
1♥	2♣	3♠ ¹	

¹ UCB, four-card support, 10+ HCP (or a good 9)

West	North	East	South
1♥	2♣	3♥ ¹	

¹ Distributional type raise, 6-9 points with four-card support and some shape.

You will notice that I recommend the use of UCBs after an opening bid followed by an overcall. It works in exactly the same way as if the opponents had doubled where most people play that 2NT is a good raise in partner's suit and jumping to three of the suit instead is weaker but shapely.

Please note that when showing a good raise, it is a good raise to three *or more*, i.e. 10+ high-card points rather than just specifically 10-12 HCP, as is often misunderstood.

The following hand is no longer a nightmare if playing UCBs:

♠ A 5
♥ K 6 2
♦ A Q J 7 3
♣ 8 5 2

If your partner opens 1♦ and the opponent overcalls with 1♠, what would you bid? Most club players would either guess to bid 3NT or 5♦, with a few under-

bidding dramatically with 3♦ or 4♦!

No problem any more with the UCB, just bid 2♠! This shows a good raise to *at least* 3♦, remember. You can continue with 3NT next to show both the diamond raise and the no-trump suitability, thus accurately being able to explore the best contract.

When you hear your partner make a UCB, remember that he is showing at least a 10-count or so, so you must bid accordingly.

The confusion that arises when adopting UCBs as part of your structure is that previously everyone always assumed that a bid of the opponents suit was asking for a stopper for no-trump purposes. That may still be a valid assumption in some auctions but simply not as a direct response to an opening bid or, by agreement, as a response to partner's overcall, which is something I also recommend. For example, in the

following auction:

West	North	East	South
1♦	1♥	Pass	2♦

The last bid is a UCB showing at least three-card support and 10+ points. Some people like to think of it as saying: 'How good is your overcall?' Clearly, with a minimum overcall they just return to the suit, otherwise they describe their hand.

So having heard partner make a UCB, the duty of the opening bidder / overcaller is to best describe his hand as follows:

- Return to the agreed trump suit at the lowest available level with a minimum hand for his actions so far.
- Bid a second suit with a non-minimum hand (note the distinction here where *non-minimum* rather than *maximum* is required).
- On occasion, jump in the agreed trump suit either to the three-level or game, as appropriate.

If you have made an overcall and partner makes a UCB, then your understanding as to whether your overcall is minimum really depends on whether you have overcalled at the one or two level. The accepted standards for a two-level overcall are greater than for a one-level overcall, with 8-16 points at the one level and 10-16 at the two level being an approximate guideline. I would like to add here that two-level overcalls should be treated with respect and nearly always contain a six-card suit, most particularly if the suit is a minor. Having overcalled at the two level, a minimum would usually be up to about a 12-count, whereas after a one-level overcall we usually treat up to about 11 as a minimum. Full judgement will also depend on hand shape, good or poor holdings in the opponent's suit and of course experience!

In the modern age of wide-ranging overcalls, it is essential to use UCBs to

avoid getting too high all the time!

To Summarise

1. A UCB applies after an opening bid, followed by an opponent's overcall; it shows four-card support and 10+ (a good quality 9-count will also suffice).
2. It also applies if we make an overcall. Clearly three-card support is all that is necessary since partner's overcall *always* guarantees a minimum of five cards.
3. UCBs also apply after we open and the opponents make a jump overcall. Hence 1♣ - (2♠) - 3♠ is a UCB etc.
4. By describing your 'real values' with a UCB, then if the auction becomes competitive at higher levels, partner has a much greater chance of deciding whether to bid on as a sacrifice, double or just defend.
5. Good partnerships actually welcome the opponents making an overcall, because it allows for greater clarity of description than can happen in uncontested auctions.
6. Finally, whilst most people when adopting UCBs recognise when and how to use the UCB itself, it is in fact the very useful shapely jump bid that are often missed. Thus, holding:

♠	7 6 5 2
♥	K 6 2
♦	3
♣	Q J 8 7 4

If the auction starts 1♣ from partner followed by an overcall at the one level, don't be afraid to jump to 3♣. It will put maximum pressure on the opponents but will be recognised by partner as showing *fewer values* than using a UCB.

UCBs are in no way as complex as some people misguidedly think. They allow for much greater accuracy in competitive auctions and are in my opinion a 'must'.

What if Your Hand is Not Suitable for a UCB When Partner Has Overcalled?

One more subject that lends itself to discussion is how to respond to partner's overcall when you do *not* have a fit for his suit, so making a UCB inappropriate.

The standard approach is to bid as follows:

- a) A new suit is 'constructive' but not forcing, denying a primary fit for partner's suit otherwise you would have used a UCB. A normal guideline is to need at least 10 HCPs and a five-card suit to do this, though some leeway is allowed at the one level to do it on less. Please do not bid because 'you do not like partner's suit' without real values as all you are doing is making matters potentially worse not better! By partnership choice some play a change of suit as a one-round force, though I myself do not play it that way. After:

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
1♦	1♠	Pass	?

I would bid 2♣ with the hand below:

♠	7 6
♥	A 5 2
♦	3 2
♣	K Q J 8 7 4

. . . knowing that partner will bid again if he has extra values (or even a sixth spade) but also knowing that by my failure to use a UCB he will know that I will *not* hold three-card support for the overcalled suit.

- b) Bidding no-trumps shows a stopper in the opponent's suit and reasonable values:

1NT = 8-11 HCPs approx.
2NT = 12-14 HCPs approx.
3NT = 15+ HCPs.

These can clearly vary by partnership arrangement.

- c) Jumping in a new suit is natural and forcing; at least a good five-card suit and 15-16+ HCPs is normal for this action.