

## 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 be either 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 not-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 bids 2NT).
- 2NT shows the two lower ranked other suits (Unusual No-Trump).
- other combinations, use a simple overcall.
- with intermediate hands use a simple overcall (usually a major).

**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 raises in partner's known suit are purely pre-emptive (bid to the level of the fit).

If he is interested in 'the other suit', responder bids 3♣, and original overcaller 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, responder further cue bids the opening suit. If partner (the original Michaels bidder), wishes to accept the invite, he bids to game if only one major specified, or bids higher ranking if both majors are held (otherwise the lower).

Original overcaller, with the weak variety would usually pass your response, but if in fact the overcaller 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. 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 should raise pre-emptively to 3♠, or if not vulnerable maybe even 4♠.
- d) (1♦) - 2♦ - 4♠ - ?. as (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 ♥ 8 ♦ 102 ♣ K10954	g)	♠ KJ876 ♥ 8 ♦ K10954 ♣ 64	h)	♠ KJ876 ♥ 8 ♦ 102 ♣ QJ954	i)	♠ AKJ105 ♥ AKJ84 ♦ 8 ♣ 97	j)	♠ AKJ105 ♥ AKJ84 ♦ 8 ♣ 97
(1♥)		(1♥)		(1♥)		(1♦)		(1♦)	
	♠ 2 ♥ 1093 ♦ J653 ♣ A7632		♠ 2 ♥ 9742 ♦ A763 ♣ KJ32		♠ 2 ♥ A1093 ♦ AKQ873 ♣ K6		♠ 92 ♥ 93 ♦ K965 ♣ 108542		♠ 9 ♥ 1093 ♦ J653 ♣ 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♥ - 3♣ - 3♦. As (f), but North corrects to 3♦.
- 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.
- i) (1♦) - 2♦ - 2♥ - 3♥ - pass. North has the strong variety, but partner's initial 2♥ assumes the weak variety. When overcaller 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)	♠ AKQ65 ♥ 4 ♦ 92 ♣ AQ1095	m)	♠ AK854 ♥ 8 ♦ KQ984 ♣ A4	n)	♠ 4 ♥ AKJ65 ♦ 87 ♣ Q10954	o)	♠ 76 ♥ 4 ♦ AQJ97 ♣ K10975
(1♦)	♠ 92 ♥ 93 ♦ KJ65 ♣ AQ542	(1♥)	♠ 7 ♥ 9752 ♦ AJ63 ♣ KJ32	(1♥)	♠ 7 ♥ 9752 ♦ AJ63 ♣ KJ32	(1♦)	♠ 72 ♥ 9742 ♦ AJ6 ♣ KJ83	(1♥)	♠ AK5 ♥ 975 ♦ 652 ♣ QJ32

k) (1♦) - 2♦ - 2♥ - 3♥ - 4♥. 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 makes a 'pass or correct' bid of 3♣. 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). Again, South is worth a game raise.

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 ♥ KJ872 ♦ 9 ♣ 74
(1♠)	♠ J53 ♥ AJ9832 ♦ K3 ♣ 75	(1♦)	♠ 82 ♥ 9732 ♦ AJ6 ♣ KJ83	(1♦)	♠ 92 ♥ 93 ♦ K965 ♣ 108542	(1♦)	♠ Q109 ♥ Q3 ♦ A543 ♣ A853	(1♦)	♠ Q109 ♥ Q3 ♦ A543 ♣ A853

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 nor 2NT**. 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)

(hands (u) – (y)). West opens with the bracketed bid, and any further opposition bid is also shown bracketed.)

u)	♠ KJ854 ♥ 8 ♦ KJ984 ♣ 64	v)	♠ KQ1094 ♥ KJ1092 ♦ 94 ♣ 3	w)	♠ KJ765 ♥ 4 ♦ Q10954 ♣ 92	x)	♠ 7 ♥ 4 ♦ AQJ1074 ♣ AQ984	y)	♠ J7432 ♥ 86432 ♦ K7 ♣ A
(1♥)	(3♥) (1♣)	(3♣) (1♥)	(4♥) (1♥)	(4♥) (1♥)	(4♥) (1♥)	(4♥) (1♥)	(4♥) (1♥)	(4♥) (1♥)	
♠ Q1093 ♥ Q3 ♦ Q52 ♣ 9753	♠ J8762 ♥ Q763 ♦ 107 ♣ K7	♠ 2 ♥ 97 ♦ KJ832 ♣ AJ653	♠ 98542 ♥ 873 ♦ K53 ♣ K7						

- u) (1♥) – 2♥ - (3♥) - 3♠. North bids 2♥ showing spades and a minor. After East’s 3♥ bid, South’s bid is pre-emptive – the opponents may not bid 4♥. (I wouldn’t argue with 4♠ at suitable vulnerability).
- v) (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.
- w) (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.
- x) (1♥) – 2NT – (3♥) – pass – (4♥) – 5♣ - 5♦. North with the strong hand, can compete constructively over 4♥, which South converts to 5♦, knowing North has both minors.
- y) (1♦) – pass. Don’t even think of a two-suited overcall – all the points in the short suits.

### 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.
- **some 5-5 hands cannot be bid** – so overcall in the major if suitable.
- the Michaels overcaller can also invite game with a very strong hand (20+) by a further cue-bid of the opposition’s suit.

- **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 (o) 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:
  - (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 – (1♥) – 2♦ (the other two suits (so 2NT is natural and strong 18+).
  - (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).