

The Unassuming Cue Bid

The unassuming cue-bid, or UCB, is effectively the reverse of the negative double. It is a low-level cue-bid of the opponent's suit *that shows support with your partner's suit and a hand that is strong enough for a good raise to the next level, at least*. The UCB can be used either in response to partner's opening when one of the opponents have overcalled or by the opener when partner has responded in his own suit and either opponent has overcalled. By cue-bidding you are simply asking partner to describe his hand in more detail. If partner is minimum for his previous bid, he is obliged to simply rebid his suit at the next level. If partner is better than minimum, he will show a feature in another suit or bid no-trumps to show a good guard in the opponent's suit. You will now be able to assess what the best contract is.

Example 1

♠	9 4	After partner opens with 1♥ and RHO overcalls with
♥	K J 9 3	1♠, you should make the unassuming cue-bid of 2♠.
♦	J 7 5	This bid says nothing about your holding in the enemy
♣	A Q 10 6	suit – you may or may not hold values in it.

If partner had opened with a minimum he will simply rebid 3♥, which you will pass. If partner rebids 2NT you will respond with 3♣, showing your second suit and leaving partner to judge what the best contract is. If partner rebids 3♣ over your UCB, it would be tempting to raise him to 4♥ immediately since you now know that you have a 'double fit'. A better bid is 3♦, however, since this is fourth-suit forcing but must effectively be a trial bid asking partner about the quality of his diamond holding, since he already knows that you have at least a good raise to 3♥. Alternatively, if partner rebids 3♦ over your UCB, you should raise him to 4♥ immediately, since you can provide him with good protection in the club suit.

The main advantage of the UCB is that you can describe various types of hand *where there is a fit* at a level that is low enough to explore all the options. A secondary advantage is that you can now make a pre-emptive raise in your partner's suit (7-9 HCP) simply by bidding 3 of the suit. Partner cannot confuse this as anything but a pre-emptive raise, because otherwise you would have shown the fit via the UCB.

Example 2

♠	9 4	This hand is exactly the same shape as Example 1 ,
♥	K J 9 3	but has insufficient strength to make a UCB of 2♠
♦	J 7 5	when your RHO overcalls 1♠ after partner opens 1♥.
♣	Q 10 6 4	You will pre-empt with 3♥ instead, making life as

difficult as possible for the opponents. Partner should not be confused about the value of your hand, since you have declined to show greater strength via a UCB of 2♠.

Example 3

♠	A Q 7 6 4	As dealer you open with 1♠, over which your LHO
♥	K 10 6 3	overcalls 2♣. Your partner responds 2♥. At this
♦	A K 2	juncture you should bid 3♣ as a UCB agreeing the
♣	8	heart suit and asking partner to clarify his hand. The

UCB is necessary because you need some indication from partner as to his strength in order to establish whether you should settle for game in hearts, or whether the prospects for bidding the slam should be investigated. Since partner has promised at least a five-card heart suit for his bid, he would require very little better than a minimum response to make the slam a viable proposition. Partner could well have secondary support for your spade suit or, alternatively, could have a singleton in spades and Q X X (X) in diamonds perhaps. Either possibility suggests reasonable prospects for making the slam.

The UCB can be used in a variety of situations, either by the responder as in **Example 1** or by the opener himself in the second round of the auction, in which case he is promising that he is much better than minimum for his opening bid, as in **Example 3**. The partner of the player who makes the unassuming cue-bid is required to describe his hand more fully. Remember if you are minimum for your previous bid, *you must simply rebid the agreed suit at the next available level*. Remember also that the use of the UCB **always** promises support for partner's suit, except in the rare circumstances outlined in the next example.

Example 4

♠ J 8 6 With both sides vulnerable LHO (West) opened with
 ♥ 10 9 7 5 2 1♥ and partner (North) overcalled with 2♦. After a
 ♦ 2 marked hesitation, East passed and South bid 2♥!
 ♣ A Q 6 5 Ostensibly this was an unassuming cue-bid, of course,
 promising partner support in the diamond suit and
 asking him to quantify his hand. If partner had simply rebid his diamond
 suit serious trouble was in the offing, but South knew that North was
 experienced enough to place the proper interpretation on East's
 pronounced hesitation. If North had rebid either spades or clubs South
 intended to pass, secure in the knowledge that this would certainly be a
 better contract than 2♦, even if they were playing in a 4-3 spade fit. In
 the event North bid 3♣, which was passed out. The full deal:

			♠	10 4 2			
			♥	A			
			♦	A J 10 5 3			
			♣	K 10 7 3			
				N			
♠	K Q 7					♠	A 9 5 3
♥	Q J 8 6 4 3	W			E	♥	K
♦	K 4					♦	Q 9 8 7 6
♣	J 9					♣	8 4 2
				S			
			♠	J 8 6			
			♥	10 9 7 5 2			
			♦	2			
			♣	A Q 6 5			

After East led his singleton King, North was able to cash his A♦ and ruff out the K♦. He then drew two rounds of trumps, ending in his hand, and led out the 10♦. Once again East hesitated before making the mistake of

playing low. North discarded a spade from dummy and he was then able to claim nine tricks – the A♥, the A♦ and 10♦ plus two diamond ruffs and four trump tricks. The result proved to be an outright top. And the lesson of all this? Above all do not hesitate during the course of the bidding or the play! When you do, you give away reams of free information to an alert opponent.

Occasionally the UCB can be used to try and avoid a penalty double later in the auction...

Example 5

♠	10 4	After partner opened 1♣ and RHO overcalled with a weak 2♠, the responder made the UCB of 3♠. Clearly the hand is far too weak to make this bid, but the responder expected a bid of 4♠ from the opponents, unless partner held some values in the spade suit. Therefore he planned to sacrifice in 5♣ at the favourable vulnerability (hoping to avoid a penalty double) and also planned to pass 3NT if partner was able to show spade values, trusting that the club suit would garner six quick tricks and that partner could produce the additional tricks required. In the event these machinations worked exceptionally well and produced a huge double slam swing in a hotly contested Teams event. The full hand is worth reviewing:
♥	9 6	
♦	Q 10 6	
♣	K J 8 7 6 2	

		♠	----		
		♥	A J 5 4		
		♦	K J 8 4		
		♣	A Q 9 4 3		
			N		
♠	K Q 6 5 3	W		E	♠ A J 9 8 7 2
♥	10 7 2				♥ K Q 8 3
♦	A 9 7 3 2				♦ 5
♣	----				♣ 10 5
			S		
		♠	10 4		
		♥	9 6		
		♦	Q 10 6		
		♣	K J 8 7 6 2		

Dealer: North **Vul:** E/W

N	E	S	W
1♣	2♠	3♠!	4♠
5♣	P	P	5♠
P	P	6♣	P
P	P		

At table 1 East overcalled North's opening 1♣ with a weak 2♠. This was a poor bid, not only because E/W could easily have missed a fit in hearts but also because the hand is simply too strong to be described as weak. If North had not opened the auction, East surely would have considered opening 1♠ rather than 2♠ and therefore he should have made a take-out double or simply overcalled 1♠ rather than making a weak jump overcall. West was having no truck with South's sneaky UCB of 3♠ and increased the pressure by raising straight to the spade game, which was reasonable given that he thought partner's hand was much weaker than it actually was. With a spade void and fair values in both the unbid suits, North was justified in bidding 5♣. West then 'sacrificed' in 5♠ and, thinking that this contract was likely to make, South elected to sacrifice in 6♣, thanking his lucky stars when this was not penalised and not appreciating that this might have pushed the opponents into a making 6♠! When East attempted to cash the A♠, fearing that declarer might be able to discard losing spades on good diamonds otherwise, the lucky contract was home and dry.

Meanwhile at table 2, East did overcall 1♠ over 1♣. South bid a very passive 2♣, allowing West to make the UCB of 3♣. When East was then able to show his diamond shortage via a splinter, the pair had no difficulty in reaching the laydown 6♠. This could not be beaten on any lead and resulted in a double slam swing worth 20 IMPs. Phew!!