



Advanced Series #1

Competing with a two suited hand

Sometimes when the opposition open the bidding, you'll hold a decent balanced hand, with shortage in the opposition suit, and you can make a take-out double. Sometimes you'll have a shapely hand, and want to compete in the bidding in a suit of your own. This is usually quite straightforward if you have one good suit: you will overcall in that suit.

But what to do if you have two good suits, say two 5-card suits? With two 5-card suits you'd overcall with the higher ranking first ("high fives").

But the problems here are

- A suit overcall won't show partner your powerful shape – at least 10 cards in two suits.
- You might never get a chance to show your other suit, and a fit with partner might be missed.

The good news is we have two very handy tools to cope with that situation: the Michael's Cue bid, and the Unusual 2NT. I say "two" handy tools, but they are closely linked, and you should play both. As we will see, it makes little sense to play one without the other. Together they provide a very useful means of bidding shapely two-suited hands.

What are they?

Both Michaels' Cue Bid and the Unusual 2NT are **OVERCALLS** of an opposition bid, and show a 2-suited hand:

- You hold 5-5 (or better) in two suits (**shouldn't be 5-4!!**), so you hold a max of 3 cards in the other two suits
- You have at least 8 HCP
- Both your suits should be decent ones, ie at least 2 honours in each

Lets' start with the **Michael's Cue Bid**

It's an overcall of the **opposition's** opening suit bid, at the lowest level available in **THEIR SUIT**.

For example, your RH opponent is dealer and opens 1♣. You bid 2♣. What does this mean?

If you overcall the opposition's opening bid of 1 of a minor with 2 of their minor:

ie 1♣ - overcall 2♣ or 1♦ - overcall 2♦

You have both majors, at least 5-5, at least 2 honours in both, and at least 8HCP.

What if they open a major, and you overcall in their suit?

ie 1♥ - overcall 2♥ or 1♠ - overcall 2♠

You have the other major, and an unspecified minor, at least 5-5, at least 2 honours in both, and at least 8HCP.

The Michael's Cue bid can also apply **over an opposition weak two opener**, and has the same meaning, ie

2♦ (weak two) - 3♦ = I have 5-5 in the majors

2♥ (weak two) - 3♥ = I have 5-5 in spades and an unspecified minor

2♠ (weak two) - 3♠ = I have 5-5 in hearts and an unspecified minor

However, there is another possibility when holding a strong two suited hand, when the opposition open a weak two (or a 3-level pre-empt). It's called "Leaping Michael's", and I'll come on to that at the end of this lesson, as an additional option you might be interested in picking up. But note that it's perfectly fine, and quite common, to play Michael's and the Unusual 2NT without getting into the complexities of Leaping Michael's.

We'll see how to respond the Michael's Cue Bid in a moment, but let's now look at the

UNUSUAL 2NT

What is it?

It is an overcall of 2NT over an opposition opening 1-level bid. It shows the same sort of hand where you'd bid a Michael's Cue Bid, ie

- two suits of at least 5 cards
- at least 8 points
- at least two honours in each suit

But this time it shows the two **lowest** unbid suits.

So, the UNUSUAL 2NT bid means

Opposition open	You overcall	Meaning
1♣	2NT	I have 5-5 in ♦ and ♥
1♦	2NT	I have 5-5 in ♣ and ♥
1♥	2NT	I have 5-5 in ♣ and ♦
1♠	2NT	I have 5-5 in ♣ and ♦
1NT	2NT*	I have 5-5 in ♣ and ♦

*Note that this bid is consistent with the Cappelletti defence to 1NT

What if the opposition open a weak two, can I bid Michael's Cue bid or the unusual NT?

Michael's – as we've seen, YES, but we've got another tool in our toolbox to deal with that- Leaping Michaels' – which we will come on to shortly.

Unusual NT – **NO!!** Bid the UNUSUAL 2NT only after an opposition 1 level opening bid

An overcall of 2NT over an opposition weak two opener is reserved for a different meaning, as it crops up more often, and is a more useful use of the 2NT bid in that situation. It says "I have 16+ points and a stop in the opposition suit".

In other words, it's like overcalling an opposition 1-of-a-suit opening bid with 1NT.

(some people like to call it the Tom Jones 2NT overcall– "It's Not Unusual" – fine, if it helps you remember)

Alerting

Do you have to alert a Michael's Cue Bid or an Unusual 2NT?

YES, they are alertable under EBU regulations.

However, if you play on-line against opponents in USA, for example, you'll find players not alerting them. They are not alertable under other jurisdictions, so beware.

Here are some examples of Michaels' Cue Bid and Unusual 2NT in action:

Example 1

All vulnerable. Opposition open 1♦

You hold ♠A Q 7 4 3 ♥K J 10 7 2 ♦8 ♣6 3

You bid 2♦ (the opposition's suit), saying "I have 5-5 in the majors, at least 2 honours in both, and 8+ points".

Example 2

All vulnerable. Opposition open 1♥

You hold ♠K Q 8 5 4 ♥4 ♦6 5 ♣Q 8 6 5 3

Your bid?

It's best to bid 1♠ here. You are a little too weak for a Michael's Cue Bid – only 7 HCP, and only one honour in one of your 5 card suits.

Example 3

Neither side vulnerable. Opposition open 1♠

You hold ♠6 ♥5 2 ♦K Q 9 8 3 ♣Q J 10 6 4

Here you bid 2NT, saying "I have 5-5 in the minors, at least 2 honours in both, and 8+ points"

Note that you'd still have bid 2NT if the opposition had opened 1♥ or 1NT.

Example 4

Neither side vulnerable. Opposition open 1♦

You hold ♠8 ♥Q J 10 4 3 ♦J 8 ♣A Q 9 4 2

You bid 2NT,

saying I have 5-5 in the two **lower unbid suits** (♥ and ♣), at least 2 honours in both, and 8+ points.

Note that if the opposition opening bid had been 1♠, you'd have bid 2♠, showing hearts and an unspecified minor.

How to respond to a Michaels's Cue Bid or unusual 2NT

Responses are generally natural, and intuitive.

You know a great deal about partner's hand.

In the case of

- Michael's Cue Bid when opposition have opened a minor, you know partner has at least 5-5 in the majors
- Unusual 2NT, you know partner has at least 5-5 in two specific suits, the two lowest unbid ones

In the case of Michael's Cue Bid when opposition have opened a major, you know partner has at least 5-5 in 2 suits: the other major, but the other could be ♣ or ♦

The situation:

Opposition have opened

Your partner has made a Michael's Cue bid

And your RHO passes

You are forced to bid, and to show preference for one of partner's suits.

If you have a **weak hand**, bid at the lowest level.

If partner's Michael's Cue Bid shows the unbid major and an **unspecified** minor, and you really hate the major, you'll likely hold some length in both minors. Bid ♣, and partner will either pass, or correct it to ♦ if that is their minor.

If you have a **strong hand**, jump bid with a fit.

Remember you only need a 3-card suit for a fit, as partner has 5 (or more).

You should be thinking at least game, with partner's lovely shape, and a fit located.

The situation:

Opposition have opened

Your partner has made a Michael's Cue bid

And your RHO overcalls (ie bids something other than **X**)

You are not forced to bid.

If you have a **weak hand**, pass.

If you have a **strong hand**, jump bid with a fit.

Remember you only need a 3-card suit for a fit, as partner has 5 (or more).

You should be thinking at least game, with partner's lovely shape, and a fit located.

The situation:

Opposition have opened

Your partner has made a Michael's Cue bid

And your RHO doubles (rare- and you might want to ask opposition what it means, and take that into account)

If you're **strong**, ignore the double, and bid as you would have, ie jump bid with a fit.

If you're **weak**, even though partner has another bid after the opposition **X**, try to help partner by showing a preference, at the lowest level.

Responding to an UNUSUAL 2NT

This is essentially the same as responding to a Michael's cue bid, except

- You always know partner's two suits- there is never an unspecified suit
- You have an option to pass, and play in 2NT, with a suitable hand

The situation:

Opposition have opened at the 1 level (1 of a suit, or 1NT)

Your partner has overcalled 2NT

And your RHO passes

If you're **weak**, show preference at the lowest level for one of partner's suits.

If you're **strong**, jump bid with a fit (you only need 3 cards – partner has at least 5), or with good stops in the other two suits, you can pass, or even bid 3NT.

The situation:

Opposition have opened at the 1 level (1 of a suit, or 1NT)

Your partner has overcalled 2NT

And your RHO overcalls (something other than X)

If you're **weak**, pass.

If you're **strong** with a fit (ie 3+ cards) in one of partner's suits, jump bid that suit. This will usually mean bidding game (though obviously don't bid beyond game just to jump).

For example

You hold ♠A 9 7 2 ♥K J 10 7 ♦8 ♣A 8 3 2

West	North (partner)	East	South (you)
1♦	2NT (♥and ♣)	3♦	4♥

West has an opening hand, and you have 12 HCP. Partner might well have only 8, but has 5 hearts and 5 clubs, and a max of 3 cards in ♦ and ♠.

You have a 9-card heart fit, so you jump bid to game in hearts.

The situation:

Opposition have opened at the 1 level (1 of a suit, or 1NT)

Your partner has overcalled 2NT

And your RHO X

If you're **weak**, even though partner has another bid, show preference for one of her suits by bidding it at the lowest level.

If you're **strong** with a fit (ie 3+ cards) in one of partner's suits, jump bid that suit. This will usually mean bidding game (though obviously don't bid beyond game just to jump).

If you're **strong** with good stops in the other two suits, you can even consider passing, with a view to playing in 2NT X (rare)- you will probably ask what the X means so you can judge what to do.

Leaping Michael's

Now we've covered the Michael's Cue Bid and the Unusual 2NT: when to bid them, and how to respond to them. Before we finish, I want to describe another handy convention: Leaping Michael's.

This is a **jump overcall in a minor suit, over an opposition weak two opening bid**.

This can get a bit more complicated. By partnership agreement, if you're playing Leaping Michael's, it can modify the meaning of a standard Michael's Cue bid (eg 2♥ – 3♥) over an opposition weak two opener.

What does it mean?

Opposition open	You bid	Meaning
1 Weak 2♥ or 2♠	4♣	I have a strong 2-suiter in ♣ and the other major
2 Weak 2♥ or 2♠	4♦	I have a strong 2-suiter in ♦ and the other major
3 Weak 2♦	4♣	I have a strong 2-suiter in ♣ and an unspecified major

In cases 1 and 2, partner knows your two suits, and can show preference accordingly.

In case 3, if partner doesn't like your Clubs, and wants you to bid your major, he simply bids 4♦ (what's your major?)

You can also use Leaping Michael's over an opposition 3♣ pre-empt.

Opposition open	You bid	Meaning
3♣	4♦	I have a strong 2-suiter in ♦ and an unspecified major

Playing this means that overcalling an opposition opening 3♣ with 4♣ means standard Michael's, rather than any strong two suiter, ie .

Opposition open	You bid	Meaning
3♣	4♣	I have a strong 2-suiter in the majors

If you and partner want to agree to use Leaping Michael's, it makes eminent sense to also use non-leaping Michael's over opposition 3 level pre-empts:

Over 3♣: 4♣ = both majors; 4♦ = diamonds + a major

Over 3♦: 4♣ = clubs + major; 4♦ = both majors

Over 3♥: 4♣ = clubs + spades; 4♦ = diamonds + spades

Over 3♠: 4♣ = clubs + hearts; 4♦ = diamonds + hearts.

I strongly recommend you play standard Michael's Cue Bid and the Unusual 2NT – they crop up fairly often, and are not complicated (with a little bit of practice).

If you do want to go on to also use Leaping and non-leaping Michael's, you might want to do a bit more reading up and exploring.

Jim Steele
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