

The Foundation System

Showing Two Suits

INTRODUCTION

Two-suited hands are the stepchildren of modern bidding systems. When our side opens the bidding, Opener can show a second suit easily by bidding it on the next round, but if Responder has bid a suit on the first round and Opener has shown a second suit, Responder often has difficulty showing a second suit because his bid of the fourth suit is usually considered an artificial forcing bid rather than a natural bid, since Responder would normally have bid some number of notrump to show a useful holding in the fourth suit. Similar problems arise when the opponents have opened the bidding. An overcall can be used to show any one specific suit, but unless Overcaller's partner is strong enough to bid something, Overcaller may not get a chance to show a second suit. Similarly, a takeout double after an opponent's opening suit bid is available to show a hand with potential for play in all three of the unbid suits, but is unsuitable for two-suited hands unless strong enough to double and then bid again if Doubler's partner is unkind enough to bid the fourth suit; i.e., the suit in which Doubler lacks support.

Modern American bidding includes two weapons for handling such two-suited hands by using bids not needed in their natural sense: the Michaels Cue-Bid and the Unusual Notrump. This chapter will focus on those two weapons, and will also include a brief description of several other methods, not part of the Foundation System, which are sometimes used for showing various types of two-suited hands. One such method was described in my first book, *3-D & the MAFIA Club*. This is one of the areas I continue to research; any new developments in this area will appear on the *Outer Space* page of this website for those who enjoy tinkering with untraditional bidding methods. Then the chapter will end with a brief summary of a few schemes for defending against a NT opening, since those methods usually include ways of showing two suits with a single bid.

The Unusual Notrump

When the opponents open with a suit bid at the one level, there is no need for a natural bid of 2NT to show, for instance, a hand which would have opened 2NT if Opener had passed. Strong balanced hands can start with a takeout double, and bid some number of notrump on the next round; a minimum notrump rebid would show a balanced hand with about 18-19 HCP, and a jump in notrump would show a still stronger balanced hand. So it is common practice to use the jump to 2NT to show a two-suited hand. If the opening bid was 1H or 1S, 2NT shows both minors. If the opening bid was 1C or 1D, 2NT shows the two lowest-ranking of the three unbid suits; i.e., hearts and diamonds when the opening bid was 1C, or hearts and clubs when the opening bid was 1D. This convention is called the Unusual Notrump.

After a minor suit opening, this treatment is not universal. Since a minor suit opening, and especially a 1C opening, can be based on a 3-card suit, some pairs like to play that a jump to 2NT always shows both minors, even when the opening bid was a minor. This agreement is not part of the Foundation System.

Aside from holding the two specified suits, what are the requirements for the Unusual Notrump bid? Since partner is expected to choose between the two suits shown, and since that choice must inevitably be made at the 3-level, the first requirement is to have at least 5-cards in each suit. High-card strength depends upon vulnerability, but is less important than the **quality** of the two suits. Possession of intermediates cards (tens and nines) is vital, since you will be attempting to develop long-suit tricks in both suits. I use the term suit texture to describe possession of such intermediates, and it is always important, but here it is **vital**. It is also important not to have wasted high-card strength in the other suits. Aces are always welcome, and a king in Opener's suit is OK, but beware of side suit queens and jacks. Defensive strength is also important. You should either be weak enough that you hope to find a good sacrifice against an opposing game, or strong enough (around 15+HCP) that you hope to compete successfully for the partscore, or perhaps bid a makeable game. You should avoid the Unusual Notrump with intermediate strength (around 12-14 HCP), since that would too often induce partner to sacrifice against a game that can probably be defeated, or to bid to a game which will have no chance. Typical hands worth a 2NT overcall of a 1H opening would be $x \quad xx \quad K1098x \quad \square \quad AJ109x$ or even (if not vulnerable) $xx \quad x \quad QJ109x \quad \square \quad KJ109x$ or $x \quad Kx \quad AQ109x \quad \square \quad KQJ98$ (the strong variety), but definitely not $x \quad xx \quad AQ109x \quad \square \quad KQJ10x$, which is worth a 2D overcall to be followed by a 3C rebid if partner shows some signs of life, and absolutely not $Ax \quad x \quad K8742 \quad \square \quad KJ963$ because of the poor intermediates, except perhaps at favorable vulnerability.

A jump overcall to 4NT is also a variation of the Unusual Notrump, and definitely not Blackwood or any other ace-asking convention. The 4NT jump is usually based on a 65 or 66 hand rather than a 55, and should have a LTC of 4 or better and very good suit texture.

Responding to the Unusual Notrump

At least 99% of the time, Responder is expected to pick one of the two suits shown by the NT overcall. On a good day, you will have 3- or 4-card support for at least one of the two suits, and will bid it at an appropriate level. Jump support is often advisable with a good fit, in order to use up bidding room and make it difficult for Opener's side to find a fit in the fourth suit; they will usually have to bid game directly, or settle for a partscore without any bidding room for issuing a game invitation. On a bad day, you will have to bid with only 2-card support; I have even seen nightmare hands where it was necessary to decide which of my two singletons to bid. In such situations, it is important to choose the odious bid in tempo without any visible signs of distress. Quite often, you'll then be pleased to hear the opponents bid again and end your misery.

As a last resort, instead of bidding a weak doubleton or your best singleton, you may find occasion to bid the fourth suit instead. You should choose this option only with a 6+card suit; this is dangerous territory, since by refusing to choose one of Overcaller's suits, you are alerting the opponents to the fact that you have a misfit, which usually means that they have a misfit, too, and will be eager to start doubling.

Another fairly rare option is to pass the 2NT bid, typically with a double stopper in Opener's suit and at least one stopper in the fourth suit. A doubleton honor in at least one of Overcaller's suits is desirable, hoping for that suit to provide 4 or 5 winners. This is also misfit country, but is not quite as dangerous as the fourth suit bid; Opener will rarely double unless he has undisclosed strength, since he can't be sure whether his partner has any defensive strength. Sometimes Overcaller's partner will be hoping to be doubled, while other times he may merely want to stay at the 2-level instead of venturing to the 3-level where a double is more likely.

The final option is a cue-bid of Opener's suit. This usually implies support for both suits, and asks the NT Overcaller to pick his best suit. The bid is most useful when the opening bid was in a minor, and Overcaller has hearts and the other minor. In this situation, Overcaller is encouraged to choose the major unless it is markedly weaker than the other minor.

Defense Against the Unusual Notrump (Unusual Over Unusual)

A double of the Unusual Notrump by Opener's partner indicates a desire to double at least one of the Overcaller's two suits. Opener should usually pass to allow his partner an opportunity to make a penalty double; if a double is not forthcoming, the auction can continue with natural bidding. If Opener's partner chooses not to double, his options are to raise Opener's suit to any level, to bid the fourth suit, to bid 3NT, or to cue-bid either of the Overcaller's two suits. The lower-ranking cue-bid shows invitational strength with a 5+card holding in the fourth suit, while the higher-ranking cue-bid shows a limit raise or better in Opener's suit, usually with 4-card support. This means that the direct bid of the fourth suit (no cue-bid) is forcing to game. These agreements need partnership discussion. There is not universal agreement about how to treat these two cue-bids.

The Michaels Cue-Bid

In Culbertson's day, an immediate cue-bid of Opener's suit by Opener's LHO was treated as a strong game-forcing hand with virtually any distribution. Opportunities to use such a bid were extremely rare, so in the modern game, the immediate cue-bid is used to show a two-suited hand, usually 55 or 65, similar to the Unusual NT but showing a different pair of suits. The most popular variation, called the Michaels Cue-Bid, is included in the Foundation System. Over a minor suit opening bid, the Michaels Cue-Bid shows both majors, while over a major suit opening bid, it shows the other major and an unspecified minor.

Responding to the Michaels Cue-Bid

The responses follow the same general principles discussed above for the Unusual NT. When the cue-bid shows both majors, partner will usually choose one of the majors, but also has the option of bidding 2NT, 3NT, the fourth suit, or repeating the cue-bid of Opener's suit to ask the original cue-bidder to select his better suit. After a major suit cuebid, however, the cue-bidder's minor suit is not yet known, so partner's 2NT bid is artificial and forcing, denying support for the other major and requesting the cue-bidder to bid his so-far undisclosed minor suit.

Leaping Michaels

A special case arises after an opponent opens a major-suit weak two bid. In this situation, the Foundation System endorses a bid called Leaping Michaels, in which a jump to 4C or 4D to show a strong 5+card suit (usually a 6-card suit) with four cards in the unbid major suit. Partner can bid game in the unbid major, pass, raise the minor, or make a slam try by bidding the other minor, cue-bidding Opener's major, or bidding 4NT as RKC with the unbid major as the agreed suit.

Other Two-Suited Bids

This is fertile ground for bidding theorists. Many other schemes for showing two-suited hands have been proposed. A brief description of a few such schemes is included here so that you will be familiar with them should they be used by an opponent, but they, of course, are not part of the Foundation System.

Top & Bottom Cue: This scheme uses the immediate cue-bid to show the highest-ranking and the lowest-ranking of the three unbid suits. Kathryn and I have used this, in conjunction with the Unusual NT and with a jump cue-bid to show the two highest ranking unbid suits.

Colorful Cue: This scheme uses the immediate cue-bid to show the two suits whose color is different from the color of Opener's suit. Thus over 1C or 1S, the cue-bid shows hearts and diamonds, while over 1D or 1H, it shows clubs and spades.

Roman Jump Overcalls: This scheme was popularized by the great Italian Blue Team. It uses a jump overcall to show two 5+card suits: the suit of the overcall plus the next higher-ranking unbid suit. Thus over 1C, 2D shows diamonds and hearts, 2H shows hearts and spades, and 2S shows spades and diamonds. This scheme can show all possible combinations of two unbid suits, so the Unusual NT is not needed and can be assigned some other meaning. In *3-D & the MAFIA Club*, I extended this principle to its ultimate (some would say ridiculous) limit by using simple non-jump overcalls to show the same combinations of two 4+card suits.

Defense Against NT Openings

So far, this chapter has treated various ways of showing two-suited hands after an opening bid of a suit at the one level (or after a weak 2H or 2S bid). It is often desirable to show two suits after an opposing 1NT opening bid (and much more rarely after a 2NT opening). The two most popular systems are described below. Both are endorsed by the Foundation System; each partnership must select one or the other, unless electing to use one of the dozens of other schemes which are available but not described here.

Hamilton/Cappelletti: This scheme (called Cappelletti in the East and Hamilton in the West) uses a double of 1NT for penalty to show a balanced hand at least as strong as Opener's or a strong 1-suiter good enough to lead, with a sure outside entry. A one-suiter not suitable for a penalty double is shown by a 2C bid; partner is expected to bid 2D, which the 2C bidder will pass or raise if diamonds is his suit, and otherwise will merely bid his long suit. A 2D bid is used to show both majors, and 2H or 2S are used to show that major and an unspecified minor. Subsequent bidding is mostly natural; but after 2H or 2S, a 2NT bid is used to ask for the unspecified minor.

DONT: Originally named by Marty Bergen as **D**estroy **O**pponent's **N**o**T**rump, this simple scheme has been growing in popularity because it is simple to learn and remarkably annoying to the opponents. A double shows an unspecified one-suiter. Partner is expected to bid 2C. Doubler will pass 2C, raise to 3C, or bid his suit when it is not clubs. Twosuiters are shown by bids of 2C, 2D, or 2H. Each bid shows two 4+card suits: that suit plus a higher-ranking suit. Suit bids of 2S and higher show one-suiters but are mainly preemptive in nature; one-suiters strong enough to contend for the partscore will start with the double first. The use of 2C, 2D, and 2H with two

4-card suits seems risky at first, but there is a 70% chance of finding a 44 fit at the 2-level, so the Law of Total Tricks will usually protect you from disaster. But if you're the conservative type, you might want to restrict yourself to 55 hands when vulnerable.

Kathryn and I use a theoretically superior variant of DON'T which I learned from Godfrey Chang, the top-ranked Hawaiian player. I offer it here for the curious, but it is not an official part of the Foundation System, although it is highly recommended for serious regular partnerships.

Double is a multi-purpose bid, showing either a club one-suiter, a diamond one-suiter, or both majors. Partner is expected to bid 2C. Then a pass or raise shows the club one-suiter, 2D shows the diamond one-suiter, and 2H shows both majors. Instead of the double, 2C shows clubs and a higher-ranking suit, and 2D shows diamonds and a higher-ranking suit. These are both DONT-like bids and can be made with two 4+card suits. Finally, 2H and 2S instead of the double show natural one-suiters. This scheme allows us to show any one-suiter or two-suiter at the 2-level.