

UNUSUAL OVER UNUSUAL

One of the most popular conventions for showing a two-suited hand is Unusual Notrump, wherein a notrump bid that could not be "usual" asks partner to choose between the minor suits (or two lower unbid suits). A conventional 1NT overcall showing the two unbid suits is known as Sandwich Notrump. The defense shown here may be used against other any artificial calls that shows two specific suits *without naming either*, such as:

- Michaels cue bid over a minor opening, showing both majors
- Top-and-bottom cue bid over any natural suit opening, showing the highest and lowest-ranking unbid suits
- 2♣ or 2♦ over a 1NT opening, showing both majors
- "Unusual" 2NT overcall, showing both minors

Unusual Over Unusual does not apply over a Flannery 2♦ opening, which shows five hearts and four spades. It also does not apply if one of the opposing suits is typified as a four-card suit (as many top-and-bottom bidders play). In such cases a bid in that suit is natural.

Definitions:

The "cheaper" suit is the closer of the two suits shown by the opponent going up the line from his bid. If his bid is 2♥ and the two suits shown are spades and clubs, then spades are the cheaper suit and clubs are the "dearer" suit, even though spades rank higher than clubs.

General Rules (examples will follow for all of them, but they are sufficient and there are no exceptions):

Natural new-suit bids are strong unless the bid is cheaper than either of the intervenor's suits (if cheaper, it's weak).

Rebids of the same suit and raises of partner's suit are merely competitive, not forward-going.

A bid in the dearer opposing suit is usually strength-showing and a bid in the cheaper suit usually is not.

If the partnership has bid just one suit, a bid in the dearer opposing suit shows a strong hand featuring that previously bid suit. If it is partner's suit this is called "Dear Partner." If it is one's own suit, it is called "Dear Me." Actually bidding the suit is a weaker action. In either case, bidding the cheaper opposing suit shows the suit not yet shown by either side, in a hand not good enough to make a strong bid in that suit.

If the partnership has bid two suits, then a bid in the cheaper opposing suit also shows strength. In this case the dearer suit is used for showing a strong raise for partner's suit ("Dear Partner"), and the cheaper suit is used for a strong rebid in one's own suit ("Dear Me"). This is the only case in which bidding the cheaper opposing suit shows strength. Just remember that a previously bid suit has to have a "dear" bid available. That means two "dear" bids if the partnership has bid two suits.

Note that a bid in the cheaper opposing suit allows partner a convenient bidding space for a "mark time" bid in the dearer opposing suit when he has no clear-cut action. Such bid has no significance regarding that

suit. This convenient space isn't available after a bid in the dearer suit, so we apply the general rule that bidding the dearer opposing suit is a strong action.

If neither partner has bid a suit, the rule of "Cheap-Cheap" applies, which is that a bid in the dearer opposing suit shows a moderate bid in the dearer "unbid" suit, and a bid in the cheaper opposing suit shows a moderate bid in the cheaper "unbid" suit. Actually bidding those suits is a stronger action.

All notrump bids are natural.

A double of the opponent's conventional suit bid just says "I could have bid that." The hand may be limited to that degree of strength, but could be much stronger too (which can be revealed later). A double of a conventional notrump bid just shows "cards," enough HCP to suggest that the hand belongs to one's side. It does not guarantee further action, however.

Whenever a natural bid is labeled forcing, that of course applies only to an unpassed hand.

As usual, jumps in one of the opponent's suits is a splinter bid.

Unless indicated otherwise, conventional 2NT bids in the following auctions show the minors.

After a Direct Intervention Over One of a Suit

-- A bid of the "fourth suit" (not shown by either side) is forcing:

South	West	North
1♠	2NT	3♥ - forcing

South	West	North
1♣	2♣*	2♦ - a weak bid, because cheaper than the majors
		3♦ - strong, forcing

* majors

-- Jump raises are preemptive and jump rebids of the same suit deny good defensive values, while other jumps retain their normal meaning:

South	West	North
1♠	2NT	4♠ - standard preemptive raise
		4♣/4♦/4♥ - splinter bid in support of spades

South	West	North	East
1♠	Pass	2♥	Pass
2♠	2NT	4♥/4♠	- not strong defensively (if so, double)

South	West	North
1NT	2NT	4♣ - Gerber
		4♦/4♥ - Texas transfer bids

Seeking a 4-4 fit in the majors is unwise, as the suit is likely to break badly.

South	West	North
1♣	2♣*	4♣ - weak, preemptive
		3♥/3♠ - splinter bid in support of clubs
		3♦ - strong, forcing

* majors

-- A bid in the dearer (not the cheaper) of the two suits indicated by the opponent shows full values (or better) for a raise of partner's suit. Merely raising is a weaker action

South	West	North
1♠	2NT	3♦ - limit raise or better ("Dear Partner")
		3♠ - competitive spade raise
		3♥ - forcing
		3NT - natural

If South rebids 3♠ over 3♦, North may pass. If she voluntarily bids again, she shows more than a limit raise.

-- A bid in the cheaper (not the dearer) of the two suits indicated by the opponent shows the "fourth suit" but an unwillingness to force with a bid in that suit.

South	West	North
1♥	2NT	3♣ - heart suit, unwilling to force with 3♥

This agreement leaves room for opener to make a "mark-time" bid in the dearer suit when unable to raise hearts or bid something else, which permits responder to "rebid" a six-card suit and perhaps stop at the three level. The 3♣ bid ("unwilling to force with 3♥") does not necessarily show less than game-going strength. Responder might want to save bidding space for some reason, e.g., to let opener show heart support cheaply, with a 3NT bid in reserve.

South	West	North
1♣	2NT*	3♣ - good raise, not much of a stretch
		3♥ - strong raise, values for the four level
		3♦ - spades, unwilling to bid 3♠
		3♠ - forcing
		4♣/5♣ - weak, preemptive

* hearts and diamonds

North's bid of the dearer suit, hearts, is equivalent to a strong club raise, necessarily a bit better than a normal limit raise. It is not game-forcing, however, so North may pass a 4♣ bid by South. Here a minimum raise implies good values for a three-level raise, since there is no other way to show such a hand. With less strength in support of clubs North can double to show values for a 2♣ raise. With five or more clubs, the weak jump raises are available.

South	West	North
1♦	2NT*	3♣ - spades, not enough to force with 3♠ 3♠ - forcing 3♦ - good values for a raise 3♥ - strong diamond raise, too good for 3♦

* hearts and clubs

It might seem logical to reverse the general rules for this situation, using 3♣ for a strong diamond raise and 3♥ to show spades. We don't do this for two reasons: (1) to avoid an exception to the general rules, and (2) reversing the meaning might crowd the bidding too much for opener, who can rebid diamonds (perhaps stopping there!) or bid a mark-time 3♥ when unable to support spades.

-- A double of an artificial notrump bid shows "cards" (9+ HCP?), enough strength to suggest that the hand belongs to the opening side, but with no suitable bid. The double does not promise another bid, however. If opener passes RHO's response to the conventional call, the doubler may also pass if she has no reasonable alternative. Similarly, a pass or later suit bid by the doubler is not forcing on opener:

South	West	North	East
1♠	2NT	Dbl	Pass
Pass	3♣	Pass/3♥/3♠	- not forcing

Neither the pass nor a three-level bid is forcing on South. A 3♥ bid by North implies a hand that wanted to double an opposing 3♦ bid, but is not interested in defending against 3♣. The heart suit is probably five long, so South may "correct" to 3♠ with short hearts and good spades. A 3♠ bid by North at this point implies three-card support and a good hand, but is not forcing.

-- If the conventional call is a double, then a redouble shows "cards."

-- A double of a conventional suit bid shows values for a bid of that suit at that level:

South	West	North
1♦	2♦*	Dbl - diamond raise, weak or maybe three diamonds 2♥ - clubs, invitational strength 2♠ - strong diamond raise ("Dear Partner") 2NT - not forcing 3♣ - forcing 3♦ - good raise

*Michaels Cue Bid, both majors

North's double denies values for a 3♦ bid, which should be fairly sound (although not worth a limit raise).

-- A direct double by opener after partner passes is a takeout double:

South	West	North	East
1♠	2NT	Pass	3♣
Dbl - takeout double, implying four hearts and five-plus spades			

-- Balancing doubles by either partner are penalty doubles if either has acted previously:

South	West	North	East
1♠	2NT	Pass	3♣
Pass	Pass	Dbl - penalty double	
3♥ - weak balancing action			

With the double, North has enough to beat 3♣, but may not be able to support any further action by South. Bidding in a balancing position after passing is a competitive action:

South	West	North	East
1♠	2NT	Dbl	Pass
Pass	3♣	Pass	Pass
Dbl - penalty double			
3♥/3♠ - not forcing			

North's pass of 3♣ was not forcing.

-- When opener cannot support the suit responder indicates by bidding the cheaper suit, he has room to bid the dearer opposing suit as a mark-time bid, denying three-card support for responder's suit, sufficient assets to rebid his own suit, or the ability to bid notrump. It does not show values in the suit.

-- A bid in an opposing suit is conventional only when made directly over the opponent's conventional call. A later bid in one of the suits is natural, showing strength in the suit and implying none in the other:

South	West	North	East
1♦	2♦*	2♥	Pass
3♣	Pass	3♥	

* Michaels, both majors

North's 2♥ bid is Unusual Over Unusual, showing a club suit. If she had bid 3♣ instead, that would be forcing. Her 3♥ bid shows heart strength and implies spade weakness, suggesting that South bid 3NT with a spade stopper. South's 3♣ (a raise of North's known clubs) is not forcing, so 3♥ shows an unexpectedly good hand, perhaps fortified by the club raise.

South	West	North	East
1♠	2NT	Dbl	Pass
3♣/3♦ - stopper(s) in that suit, but not in the other			

South	West	North	East
1♠	2NT	Dbl	3♣
Pass	Pass	3♦ - diamond stopper(s), but none in clubs	

Here's how Unusual Over Unusual works against a top-and-bottom cue bid:

South	West	North
1♠	2♠*	Dbl - minimum spade raise
		2NT - not forcing
		3♣ - diamonds, invitational hand
		3♦ - forcing to game
		3♥ - strong spade raise, at least limit-raise strength
		3♠ - too good for a double
		3NT - natural
		4♣/4♦/4♥ - splinter bid in support of spades
		4♠ - preemptive spade raise

* hearts and clubs

In this case clubs are the cheaper suit, hearts the dearer.

South	West	North
1♦	2♦*	Dbl - minimum diamond raise
		2♥ - forcing to game
		2♠ - hearts, invitational hand
		3♣ - strong diamond raise, at least limit-raise strength
		3♦ - too good for a double

* spades and clubs

Now spades are the cheaper suit and clubs are the dearer. While it might be better to change one or more meanings in this case, the general rules work well enough and exceptions are to be avoided.

After a Direct Intervention Over 1NT

-- The rule of "Cheap-Cheap" applies in this case. A bid in the dearer (not the cheaper) of the two suits indicated by the opponent shows values for an invitational bid in the dearer of the two "unbid" suits, while a bid in the cheaper of the two suits shows values for an invitational bid in the cheaper of the two unbid suits. Seeking a 4-4 fit in a major is not worthwhile, since bad breaks can be expected.

South	West	North
1NT	2NT*	3♣ - invitational heart bid (or better)
		3♥/3♠ - forcing to game
		3♦ - spades, invitational hand (or better)
		4♦/4♥ - Texas Transfer
		4♣ - Gerber
		Dbl - "cards," but not enough to bid 3NT

* minors

The "or better" bids may have a 3NT bid in reserve, wanting to know first if partner has support for responder's suit.

South	West	North
1NT	2♣*	Dbl - club length, weak hand 2♥ - clubs, invitational hand 3♣ - natural, forcing to game 2♦ - natural, weak 2♠ - diamonds, invitational hand 3♦ - forcing to game 2NT/3NT - natural

* major suits

With three ways to show a diamond hand, 2♦ can be used as a weak competitive bid.

South	West	North
1NT	2♦*	Dbl - diamond length, weak hand 2♥ - clubs, invitational hand (no weak club bid available) 3♣ - natural, forcing to game 2♠ - diamonds, invitational hand 3♦ - forcing to game 2NT/3NT - natural

* major suits

With long clubs and no game interest, responder may be able to bid 3♣ on the next round.

When Neither Partner Has Bid

In this case the rule of “Cheap-Cheap” applies. A bid in the dearer opposing suit shows a strong bid in the dearer “unbid” suit, and a bid in the cheaper opposing suit shows a moderate holding in the cheaper “unbid” suit.

South	West
2NT*	3♣ - moderate heart overcall 3♦ - moderate spade overcall, or better 3♥/3♠ - strong overcall Dbl - strong hand, undefined 3NT - natural

* opening bid showing the minors

The bid of 3♦ can be based on a strong hand with both majors. With moderate strength just show hearts (3♣) and then bid 3♠ (not forcing) if partner marks time with a 3♦ bid (denying heart support).

After an Intervention Over a Raise

South West North East
1♠ Pass 2♠ 2NT
Dbl - good hand, no suitable bid, probably four spades
3♣ - hearts, not good enough for 3♥
3♥ - forcing, game try
3♦ - spade "rebid," good hand ("Dear Me")
3♠ - merely competitive
4♠ - denies good defensive values

After an Intervention Over a New Suit Response

South West North East
1♣ Pass 1♠ 1NT - diamonds and hearts
Dbl - good hand, no suitable call available
2♣ - probably six clubs, near-minimum hand
3♣ - a better hand
2♦ - strong club hand ("Dear Me")
2♥ - strong spade raise ("Dear Partner")
2♠ - normal raise
2NT - standard, 19-20 HCP, red suit stoppers
3♠/4♠ - preemptive raises (expecting to make, but defensively weak)
4♦/4♥ - splinter bid in support of spades

With three ways to describe a club hand, 2♣ can be used to deny a good hand. Note the exception in regard to the "cheaper" bid, which in this case shows a strong hand, not a moderate holding. A previously-bid suit has to have a "dear" bid available.

South West North East
1♠ Pass 2♣ 2NT - diamonds and hearts
Dbl - good hand, no suitable call available
3♣ - normal raise
3♦ - strong spade rebid ("Dear Me")
3♥ - strong club raise ("Dear Partner")
3♠ - competitive bid
4♦/4♥ splinter bid in support of clubs
4♣/4♠ - offensively good, not much defensive strength

After an Intervention Over a 1NT Response

South West North East
1♠ Pass 1NT 2NT
3♣ - moderate hand with hearts
3♥ - forcing
3♦ - strong spade rebid ("Dear Me")
3♠ - merely competitive

South West North East

1♣ Pass 1NT 2NT*

3♣ - not a strong hand

3♥ - strong club rebid ("Dear Me")

3♦ - moderate hand with spades

3♠ - forcing, strong hand

*diamonds and hearts