

Two Suiters

There are many circumstances when you have a hand where you would like to show length in two suits; covering them all is difficult. Today, we will talk primarily about traditional competitive two-suited bids (and defenses to them) and some other competitive two-suited scenarios if there is time.

Competitive Two Suited Bids:

There are two “standard” bids to show two suits when an opponent opens at the one level:

The Michaels Cuebid: Bidding two of opener’s suit. 2c and 2d show both majors; 2h and 2s show the other major and an undisclosed minor.

Unusual 2NT: In most modern systems a jump to 2NT over opponent’s opener show the two lowest unbid suits.

Note that if you play other methods which show a different pair of suits (“Top and bottom” cuebids, for instance), the following discussion still applies for the most part.

Some observations about these bids:

- **They force your side to bid to at least the two level and often the three level**
- **Because the bid itself is artificial, your opponents have a large number of options in defending against it, including immediately showing penalty interest (more on this later)**
- **With some scattered values or equal length in your suits, partner may still not know what to do and may not have the room to find out**

Thus:

Michaels and Unusual 2NT should be used conservatively (probably more so than any other bids in bridge, in my opinion).

- **You should ALWAYS, ALWAYS ALWAYS be 5-5 or longer**

- **Your suits should both be good quality**
 - **If one of your suits stinks, just overcall the other one!**
(Especially if your good suit is a major. If your good suit is a minor and you have a good hand, you may want to Michaels to avoid missing a major fit)

Range Agreements

There are two popular styles for Michaels-type bids in terms of value ranges. Both are fine; just make sure you know which one you are playing!

“Weak/Strong”: Only bid Michaels/U2NT with weakish hands (i.e., good suits, but no misgivings about playing at the 2 or 3 level if partner doesn’t raise) or very strong hands (strong enough to unilaterally bid again over partner’s preference)

- Pros: You avoid problems when you bid Michaels with an intermediate hand and partner has some scattered values but not enough to feel comfortable in game
- Cons: You don’t get to show both your suits at once with the intermediate hands

Continuous Range: There is no “break” in the strength range of acceptable Michaels hands

This reverses the pro and con above, essentially

Responding to two suiters:

Usually you are at the three level already. Thus, for majors at least, your choices are to sign off or bid game.

When partner shows one major, you can use the cue of opener’s suit to show a very good hand with that major (i.e. some slam interest).

When partner shows an undisclosed minor, you should have a bid to ask for the minor. Some people play 2NT asks; some people play 3C is pass or correct; some people play 2N and 3C both ask for the minor, but 2N shows forward-going values. (The third option is probably a good idea if you want to play continuous range Michaels)

A word about which suit to bid:

- You should essentially always bid the longer of the two suits.
- If the two suits are of equal length, you should usually bid the better quality one.
 - If the minor is of better quality than the major, you can bid the major, but only do this if you're fairly certain you will make your contract! With bad hands, bidding your best suit is your best chance to go plus—going down costs the same in majors and minors!
 - Bidding your better suit has some other advantages—you will do better when either suit breaks badly, and partner will make a better lead

Defending Against Two Suiters

This methodology for defending against a 2 suited bid is usually called “Unusual over Unusual” but it works over Michaels and other things too.

After an opponent bids a 2-suiter, we refer to the two suits shown as “their” two suits, and the other two as “our” suits.

The simplest version of Unusual over Unusual is as follows:

- Bids in either of “our” suits are natural and constructive (less than invitational)
- Bids in either of “their” suits show invitational or better hands in one of our suits—the lower of their suits shows the lower of our suits, higher shows higher
 - So for instance, 1D-(2D):
 - 3c shows clubs, non-forcing, 6-9ish
 - 3d shows diamonds, non-forcing, 6-9ish
 - 2h shows clubs 10+
 - 2s shows diamonds 10+
 - This is analogous to the way cuebidding the opponent's suit is a stronger raise of partner's suit (e.g. 1h-(1s)-2s)
- NT Bids are natural
- Jumps in partner's suit are preemptive; a jump in the fourth suit can show a good hand with both of our suits (Something like 1d-(2d)-4c)
- When the opponent's Michaels bid only shows one suit, the only cuebid is the suit they are known to have; other new suits are natural and forcing.

- For example, after 1H-(2H):
 - 2S is a good heart raise, 10+ points
 - 3H is a non-forcing heart raise
 - 3C and 3D are natural and forcing

Doubles after the opponents' 2-suited bid:

The nice thing about two suited bids (from the other side's perspective!) is that you have a lot of "time"; you can pass the original Michaels/unusual bid without any fear of not having another chance to bid. Thus, you can assign meanings to bidding directly and waiting and then bidding. Of course, you don't want to do this in too many situations because of the information it allows the opponents to convey (hence the above structure). However, it is useful for doubles.

One style I play with some regular partners:

- A direct double of the Michaels/U2N bid just shows some scattered values and a roughly balanced hand. After this double, subsequent doubles are takeout by either player, so you can still "compete" if you find your side doesn't have enough trumps to defend.
- If you have a "stack" of one or both of the opponents suits (i.e. many good trumps), pass originally and then double for penalty.
- Why is this better? Doubling initially for penalty gives them an extra option—your left hand opponent can pass and let their partner show which of their two suits is better (sometimes they are 6-5; otherwise they get to show their better quality suit). If you pass, left hand opponent *has* to take a preference right away; then when you double the opponents won't know if the other suit would have played better
- If you pass and then bid a suit when it gets back to you, that probably means you were hoping to double the other suit if they bid it
 - Here, the new suit would be forcing; partner's original suit would be non-forcing

Other Two-Suiters

There are other situations where you may have some two suited bids in your arsenal you should know about.

What if the opponents have bid two suits, for instance?

Example: (1c)-pass-(1h)

Some people play **Sandwich NT**: when the opponents have bid two suits, a 1NT overcall shows the other two suits, generally with more shape than a double (5-5 or longer) but a weaker hand

- If you play sandwich NT, you lose the ability to make a natural 1NT overcall; this causes many experts to shy away from the convention
- However, you can always play it by a passed hand, since a passed hand can't be strong enough for a 1N overcall
- A jump to 2NT also shows a very distributional hand, usually weak (if you play sandwich 1NT, then 2NT should be even more distributional—6-5 or longer!)

Also, when the opponents have pushed us to a high level, sometimes we need to be able to show “two places to play.” Consider the following hand:

S --
H AKQxx
D xx
C KQJxxx

Suppose the person on your right opens 4S. Regardless of your doubling style here, you would probably not want to double since defending 4Sx will not be a bargain (even if partner has spade cards) or your partner may bid diamonds.

In situations like this experts use 4NT as any very distributional takeout hand such as this one, typically with only two suits. Partner doesn't know what suits you have, so they try and stay low whenever possible.

In particular:

- Partner usually bids 5c or 5d, whichever suit they prefer.
 - If partner has bid one of our suits, we pass.
 - If partner bids the suit we don't have, we bid the cheaper of our suits and now partner can recorrect if they like.
- There may occasionally be instances where we play in our second-best fit instead of our best fit, but there is no way given the amount of space to do any better, and we always get at least a “decent” fit this way.

Another two-suiter showed up last week in the preempt lecture: “Leaping Michaels.”

When an opponent preempts at the two level and you have a major/minor two suiter (and a VERY good hand), you can “leap” to 4 of your minor to show that minor and the other major. Over a weak 2D bid, a 4D “leap” shows both majors.

And, of course, there are other situations when 2-suiters surface: Defending opponent’s NT, defending against strong 2C openers or precision 1C openers, etc. There are many good systems here; if you would like a recommendation, just ask!