This Week in Bridge

(298) Unusual v. Michaels and Unusual v. Unusual

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General

After we play the *Unusual Notrump* and *Michaels* conventions for a while, we realize how effective they can be in making the auction difficult on the opponents.   This makes it important for us to develop our own set of agreements for dealing with the opponents' use of these gadgets against us.   These sets of agreements, called defenses, are called *Unusual vs. Unusual* and *Unusual vs. Michaels*, respectively.

We construct these defenses based on two general ideas:

- Q = LR+: A cuebid of the opponents' suit shows a good hand with support for partner's suit.
- Lower for Lower, Higher for Higher -- Suit correspondence.

We will explain more about these ideas as we work through the examples below.

Unusual vs. Michaels (UvM)

Level 5

Let's start our discussion with Michaels auctions that show only one suit. These are the simplest auctions because we can treat them just as if the opponent has overcalled one suit – the suit that was explicitly shown.

Examples

1♥   2♥   __?

Treat this like the opponent overcalled 1♠.   We bid 2♠ as a "cuebid" of their suit.

- 2♠   shows 3+♥, 10+ pts.

1♠   2♠   __?

Treat this like the opponent overcalled 2♥.   We bid 3♥ as a "cuebid" of their suit.

- 3♥   shows 3+♠, 10+ pts.

For completeness let's list the meaning of all the bids in these auctions:

1♥   2♥   __?

- 2♠   3+♥, 10+ pts, *Q=LR+, forcing for 1-round (1F)*
- 2NT   Natural, 10 to 12- pts, ♠ stopper, invitational
- 3♣   5+♣, game forcing
- 3♦   5+♦, game forcing
- 3♥   Natural, 3-4♥, 7-9 pts, competitive
- 3♠   Splinter, 4+♥, 0-1♠, 12-14 pts, GF
- 3NT   Natural, 12 to 15 pts, stopper in ♠

1♠   2♠   __?

- 2NT   Natural, 10 to 12- pts, ♥ stopper, invitational
- 3♣   5+♣, game forcing
- 3♦   5+♦, game forcing
- 3♥   3+♠, 10+ pts, *Q=LR+*
- 3♠   Natural, 3-4♠, 7-9 pts, competitive
- 3NT   Natural, 12 to 15 pts, stopper in ♥

You may notice that we have not discussed what double would mean. This is always an important discussion. In these auctions double is similar to a double of a Notrump bid, and is penalty-oriented. Specifically, it promises a penalty double of at least one of the opponent's two suits.   After this first penalty double, a subsequent double by either partner is penalty. Thus, double shows at least 10 HCP and no fit for partner.

Advanced Note: Forcing Passes are generally on for one round of bidding.

More Michaels Auctions
Level 5
Now let us look at the more complex *Unusual vs. Michaels* auctions. In auctions where the opponents have shown two suits, we will generally approach the auction with the idea that *they have two suits and we have two suits.* Once we accept this idea then we have two cuebids available (bidding either of the two suits that they have shown.)   We will use bidding our suits as natural, competitive, and non-forcing. We use cuebids of the opponents' suits as artificial bids that show *our suits* in a strong way. We use the general idea of corresponding suits -- *"lower for lower and higher for higher."*

1♣   2♣   __?   *We have minors, they have Majors.*
- X   Penalty-oriented, penalty of at least one of the opponents' two suits (at least one Major)
- 2♦   5+♦, 5-9 pts, non-forcing (NF)
- 2♥*   5+♣, 10+ pts, 1F
- 2♠*   5+♦, 10+ pts, 1F
- 2NT   Natural, 10 to 12- pts, stoppers in both Majors
- 3♣   Raise, 5+♣, 5-9 pts, NF
- 3♦   Weak Jump Shift, 6+♦, 0-5 pts
- 3♥*   *Splinter*, 5+♣, 0-1♥, 12-14 pts, GF
- 3♠*   *Splinter*, 5+♣, 0-1♠, 12-14 pts, GF
- 3NT   Natural, 12-15 pts, stoppers in both Majors

1♦   2♦   __?   *We have minors, they have Majors.*
- X   Penalty-oriented, penalty of at least one of the opponents' two suits (at least one Major)
- 2♥*   5+♣, 10+ pts, 1F
- 2♠*   4+♦, 10+ pts, 1F
- 2NT   Natural, 10 to 12- pts, stoppers in both Majors
- 3♣*   5+♣, 5-9 pts, NF
- 3♦   Raise, 4+♦, 5-9 pts, NF
- 3♥*   *Splinter*, 5+♦, 0-1♥, 12-14 pts, GF
- 3♠*   *Splinter*, 5+♦, 0-1♠, 12-14 pts, GF
- 3NT   Natural, 12-15 pts, stoppers in both Majors

When Responder makes one of these artificial invitational+ bids, it forces Opener to bid and describe their hand.   With a minimum hand with 12 to 13- pts, Opener signs off somewhere non-forcing.   When Opener has a better hand and enough to accept our invite, at least a good 13 points, they do something strong - bid game or cuebid one of the opponents' suits.

Unusual vs. Unusual (UvU)

Level 5

We will apply the same *lower for lower and higher for higher* cuebidding structure when the opponents bid Unusual Notrump.

| 1♠ | 2NT | __? | *We have Majors, they have minors.* |

- X   Penalty-oriented, penalty of at least one of the opponents' two suits (at least one minor)
- 3♣*   5+♥, 10+ pts, 1F
- 3♦*   3+♠, 10+ pts, 1F
- 3♥   5+♥, 5-9 pts, NF, competitive
- 3♠   Raise, 3-4♠, 6-9 pts, NF, competitive
- 3NT   Natural, 12 to 15 pts, stoppers in both minors

| 1♥ | 2NT | __? | *We have Majors, they have minors.* |

- X   Penalty-oriented, penalty of at least one of the opponents' two suits (at least one minor)
- 3♣*   3+♥, 10+ pts, 1F
- 3♦*   5+♠, 10+ pts, 1F
- 3♥   Raise, 3-4♥, 6-9 pts, NF, competitive
- 3♠   5+♠, 5-9 pts, NF, competitive
- 3NT   Natural, 12 to 15 pts, stoppers in both minors

| 1♦ | 2NT | __? | *We have ♦ and ♠, they have ♣ and ♥.* |

- X   Penalty-oriented, penalty of at least one of the opponents' two suits
- 3♣*   4+♦, 10+ pts, 1F
- 3♦*   Raise, 4+♦, 6-9+ pts, NF
- 3♥*   5+♠, 10+ pts, 1F, competitive
- 3♠   5+♠, 6-9 pts, NF, competitive
- 3NT   Natural, 12 to 15 pts, stoppers in both their suits

| 1♣ | 2NT | __? | *We have ♣ and ♠, they have ♦ and ♥.* |

- X   Penalty-oriented, penalty of at least one of the opponents' two suits
- 3♣   Raise, 5+♣, 7-10 pts, NF
- 3♦*   5+♣, 11+ pts, 1F
- 3♥*   5+♠, 10+ pts, 1F
- 3♠*   5+♠, 6-9 pts, NF, competitive
- 3NT   Natural, 12 to 15 pts, stoppers in both of their 2 suits

UvU and UvM with Safety

Level 6

These "Unusual" systems are an excellent way to deal with the opponent's two-suited interference, but from time to time, when Responder has a competitive hand, not a game forcing hand, we end up getting too high or playing in the wrong strain. In an effort to fix this problem, expert players generally make a small change to the bidding structure that is referred to as "with Safety". This is a change in strength of Responder's bid in the higher-ranking suit, so that we can attempt to not get to high in these auctions.

As Responder, when partner opens the bidding 1♥ and the opponents use the Unusual 2NT against us, we do not have a lot of space to communicate with partner. If we hold competitive values, 7-9 points, and 5-6 card ♠ suit and 2-cards in ♥, this becomes a difficult situation. We may want to play in ♥ if partner has good ♥ and ♠ shortness; but if partner has only 5-card ♥ and has some ♠ length, then we want to play in ♠. The problem is that if we bid 3♠, showing our competitive values and long ♠ suit, then we may be too high if we belong in 3♥. Let's look at how to change our agreements to add some safety to this auction.

Example

1♥   2NT   __?
- 3♦*   5+card ♠, 7-11 pts, 1F
- 3♠   5+card ♠, 12+ points, GF

By switching the meaning of the two ♠ bids, the competitive one and the strong one, and adjusting our ranges, we are now better able to handle the hands they may want to stop in 3♥ or 3♠.

The general approach is that if Responder's suit is above Opener's suit at the 3-level, then it is a strong and forcing bid and the cuebid is then used as the competitive to invitational action, because it is lower ranking thank Opener's suit and leaves Opener the option of stopping in their suit or Responder's.

Conclusion

This is not a simple idea. It is a complex solution to a difficult problem. But once you practice and get a feel for this correspondence *(lower for lower, higher for higher),* the bidding leads to an effective way of showing values or just competing in the bidding with many different types of hands.