



Unusual No Trump

The Unusual No Trump is a conventional overcall after an opening bid. It is artificial, because it has nothing to do with a desire to play in NT. It shows 5/5 or 6/5 or 6/6 in the two lowest unbid suits, and asks partner to show where the fit lies. (*2 NT never shows ♠s.*)

- Over opponent's major (1 ♥ or 1 ♠), 2 NT shows length in both minors.
- Over opponent's minor (1 ♣ or 1 ♦), 2 NT shows length in ♥s, and in the other minor.

This 2 NT is forcing. If RHO passes, Advancer must bid. (There are very few hands where Advancer would choose to pass, not knowing if partner was very weak. That's scary!)

The 2 NT bidder's hand is one or the other of these:

(1) It's **weaker** than an opening hand. Non-vulnerable this could be as few as 5 points! It's a hand that wants to get in the way, showing its special distribution, while making it more difficult for the opponents to find their fit. If vulnerable, though, the hand should be 7-11 points. When vulnerable, the suit quality is more important, too.

----- or -----

(2) It's **very strong** - 16+ - with a hand interested in game if partner has just a little help.

(3) So, with values equal to "**just an opening hand**," 12-15 points, just overcall the higher-ranking suit and then rebid the lower-ranking one.

Examples of 2 NT overcalling a major:

- (1) ♠ 7 ♥ 8 3 ♦ K J T 7 5 ♣ Q J 9 6 4 ← This is the **weak** hand example.
(2) ♠ 6 4 ♥ 5 ♦ A K J 7 3 ♣ A K J T 9 ← This is the **strong** hand example.
(3) ♠ 8 4 ♥ 3 ♦ A K J 7 3 ♣ K Q 7 5 3 ← This is the "**just an opening hand**" example, where overcaller bids the ♦s first and then plans to rebid the ♣s.

Wait - what? My partner has either a weak hand or a very strong hand? How will I know which one?


Since there is no way to know (yet), advancer must first always assume partner's 2 NT is the weak hand. No matter what advancer holds, they must bid the best fit at the cheapest level, and sit back to wait for what comes next. If partner passes, it's the weak hand. But if partner bids again, they show the very strong hand.

Remember that especially in a suit contract, distribution is worth more than HCP. A distributional hand wants to be in one of its suits, not in NT. Once the fit is found, the partnership can start evaluating by counting the losers. When the Unusual 2 NT is bid, there are at least 10 cards in 2 suits. The other 2 suits are at worst 2-1. And if there's a singleton honor in advancer's hand in one of partner's suits, it's not wasted!

Hand Evaluation is an upcoming lesson -- this is just the beginning! :)

Board 1

North Deals
None Vul

♠ K 9 5	♠ A 7 2	♠ J	
♥ 10 8 7 6	♥ K Q J 5 4 3	♥ —	
♦ K Q J 7 3	♦ —	♦ A 10 8 6 5 4	
♣ 6	♣ Q 10 9 2	♣ A K 8 7 5 4	
			
	♠ Q 10 8 6 4 3		
	♥ A 9 2		
	♦ 9 2		
	♣ J 3		
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1 ♥	2 N	3 ♥
5 ♦	5 ♥	6 ♦	All pass

Auction Commentary: East starts with the Unusual 2 NT, to try to find the minor suit fit. Once South bids 3 ♥, West is "off the hook," and doesn't have to bid. But advancer, holding a singleton and huge diamond support, must bid game. (The auction shows that partner has no ♥s, and the K♠ in West's hand is protected from the opening lead.) North tries to steal the contract back, but overcaller sees the free bid by partner, and bids the slam.

Opening Lead: A♠ (We lead an Ace at that level to look at dummy. In a slam, a trick must be taken now or you may never see it again!)

Planning the Play: Counting losers from the position of the "master hand," (the one with the long trumps), there is the A♠ loser right now, but partner's K♠ will provide for a ♣ pitch later. And partner's singleton ♣ will allow trumping the others.

So, the plan is to draw 2 rounds of ♦s, and cross-ruff the remainder of the suits. (We will ruff the ♥s in the East and ruff the ♣s in the West. This is a cross-ruff.)

Takeaway:

"Cross-ruff" is defined by Merriam-Webster as, "a series of plays in a card game (such as bridge) in which partners alternately trump different suits and lead to each other for that purpose."

Defenders are helpless to prevent the success of this slam. Holding only 21 HCP, the EW hands effortlessly bid and make a small slam. Ahh, the power of distribution!

Board 4

West Deals
Both Vul

	♠ 4										
	♥ J										
	♦ Q J 8 6 5										
	♣ A Q J 7 6 3										
♠ Q J 9 6 3	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td style="background-color: #008000; color: white; text-align: center;">S</td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W	S	E				♠ A 10 8 7 5
	N										
W	S	E									
♥ A K 10		♥ 9 7 6 3 2									
♦ K		♦ 9 7									
♣ 10 9 4 2		♣ 8									
	♠ K 2										
	♥ Q 8 5 4										
	♦ A 10 4 3 2										
	♣ K 5										
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>								
1 ♠	2 NT	4 ♠	5 ♦								
Pass	Pass	Pass									

Auction Commentary: North shows length in the minors, with at least 5 pieces in each one. South knows these things: (1) the K♠ is protected and will be a trick if the opening lead is a ♠, and (2) there are not many ♥ losers, if partner has at least 5/5 in the minors, and (3) the K♣ is "working" -- it's not a wasted value and will help to develop partner's second suit. So, even after East preempts (with his "weak freak"), South bids the game.

Opening Lead: A♥ (promising the K♥)

Planning the Play: The A♥ created a void in the dummy in the ♥ suit. West must switch suits, and next plays the Q♠. When East wins that with the A♠, declarer starts to get the picture. Counting losers, South finds 1 ♠ loser, 1 ♥ loser and 1 ♦ loser. This is a little tricky, but it's shaping up!

Let's count the points. East opened the bidding with some form of at 13+ points. NS have 23 HCP, and East just showed up 4 HCP (A♠). West probably has the K♦ for their opener.

If West has K♦ doubleton, the contract has no chance. If West holds the singleton K♦, though, it's the only way the contract makes. So, we'll play it to make it. Winning whatever they return, play the A♦ to the next trick. If the K♦ falls, the contract comes home. If it doesn't nobody can make this contract. But we can take comfort in the fact that their 4 ♠ contract was making, so even vulnerable, down 1 will be good -- even if they doubled it!

Takeaways:

(1) First, when there is only one way your contract makes, that's the way you must PLAY it. We PLAYED for the K♦ to drop. (And we were lucky that it did.)

(2) Secondly, when you need to locate a card, (in this situation, or perhaps to decide which way to try a 2-way finesse), use the clues you have from the auction to help with your plan.

Board 10
 East Deals
 Both Vul

	♠ A 10 9 6 3		
	♥ K		
	♦ J 9 4 2		
	♣ 9 7 3		
♠ K J 8 7 2	<div style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> N W E S </div>	♠ Q 5	
♥ 8 7 5 2		♥ 9 6 3	
♦ A 3		♦ K Q 10 8 7	
♣ 10 5		♣ A K 8	
	♠ 4		
	♥ A Q J 10 4		
	♦ 6 5		
	♣ Q J 6 4 2		
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		1 ♦	2 NT
Pass	3 ♣	Pass	Pass
Pass			

Auction Commentary: A jump overcall to 2 NT shows 5/5 in the two lowest unbid suits. South was lucky that East opened 1 ♦. Using the Unusual 2 NT, South was able to offer partner a choice of two suits, ♥s and ♣s. If East had opened 1 ♣, for example, South would only have been able to overcall 1 ♥. Advancer chose ♣s and bid them at the lowest level, assuming that partner's 2 NT was weak. (If it's strong, 16+, South will make a rebid.)

Opening Lead: K♦ (promising the Q♦ and denying holding the A♦)

Planning the Play: Counting losers, North finds 2 ♦ losers and 2 ♣ losers. It looks like this contract will make.

Defenders' Plan: West must overtake the K♦ with the A♦, and return the 3♦. This shows a doubleton in the West hand, and asks partner to play the Q♠ and a third ♦, so West can get a ruff.

What happens next is important. Declarer sees the 7♦ led to trick 3. She knows LHO is planning to trump it, so declarer ruffs with the Q♣. (And if West overruffs with the A♣ or K♣, that's a loser we planned on anyway.) When the Q♣ holds, declarer must travel to the K♥ in dummy to finesse in the trump suit. (Remember a finesse is leading WITH or leading TOWARDS the card(s) you want to win the trick. South leads a small ♣.) East hops up with the K♣ and leads another ♦! South must ruff with the J♣, which promotes West's 10♣ to a winner. This is called an "uppercut;" declarer will now lose 5 tricks; the contract is down 1.

Takeway:

An "uppercut" in bridge is a defensive play where a player ruffs high, and it promotes a trump card into a winner for the defenders. Often it's a defender ruffing high to promote a trump in their partner's hand. In this deal, though, the uppercut forces declarer to ruff high. Either way, the uppercut is a type of trump promotion for the defending side.