

Opponent's Two-Suited Overcall

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Sorry, this is not a final version of this article. It consists of a section removed from a draft of the third edition of *EZ-Expert Bidding Tools*, preceded by this page on how to improve it. The author discovered major issues with unusual over unusual that he has not resolved.

A. Cue-bids. With these basic plans, any cue-bid can be invitational or better:

1. Cue-bid is LR+, choose the suit with better honors. Over & out. This is OK and almost no work.
2. Cheaper cue-bid is invitational or better in fourth suit. This is good and only a little more work. Other cue is LR+.

These basic plans only work well if *the cue-bid for the fourth suit is forcing to game*:

3. Bergen: Cheaper cue-bid is LR+.
4. Cheaper cue-bid has cheaper of “our” suits.
5. Lower-ranking suit for lower ranking of “our” suits. These “lower for lower” cue-bids appear to be standard.

A modification of plan [2] is described in detail as a complete system by Vic Quiros. Plan [5] has been described in detail as a complete system by GLM Gavin Wolpert. (Plans [4 & 5] are the same for Michaels over a minor suit and unusual 2 NT.)

B. Doubles.

Standard. A double of a two-suited bid is a misfit for opener's suit and the desire to double at least one of the opponent's known suits for penalty. Vic Quiros and Marshall Miles offer this approach. It's also standard that, if LHO bids and opener passes, doubler must not pass. Miles agrees but argues that pass should be permitted.

Passing may be weak, but passing and doubling later shows a good hand without a penalty double.

Wolpert. “All balanced hands that are invitational or better start with a double.” Opener may double for penalties with good trumps. Passing and doubling later is for penalties.

Removed from Third Edition

A raise is constructive, when RHO makes a two-suited overcall of partner's opening bid.

Double by responder denies primary support for opener's suit, shows values, and suggests penalties. We are forced to the cheaper of 2 NT and three of opener's suit, unless the opponents play doubled.

Pass, then double. A delayed double shows values without a clear action – perhaps five cards in the fourth suit.

Only one suit known: The cue-bid of the known suit is a limit raise or better of opener's suit, as usual. A new suit is natural and forcing.

Unusual over Unusual

When both suits are known, we employ the unusual over unusual (U/U) convention. Standard usage is to assign the lower-ranking cue-bid to the lower-ranking suit, and the higher to the higher. The cue-bid for opener's suit shows a limit raise or better, and the cue-bid for the fourth suit forces to game. There are issues with all three planks of this platform.

The main problems are with showing the fourth suit. Let's cut to the chase: we prove in "Comparison of Standard and Cheaper for 4th Methods" on page 3, that the superior but non-standard method is:

Rule: *In U/U, the cheaper cue-bid shows the fourth suit.*

With this rule, we may choose to use both cue-bids with invitational or better hands. This has been the author's plan for well over a decade. He has neither investigated this plank of it in detail nor encountered a problem with it.

A newly published plan by Vic Quiros uses the cheaper cue-bid to show a good 6+ card suit with up to invitational values. The direct bid is a natural game force, with a good 5+ carder. There's more. This plan appears best, if we can remember it. It uses space even more wisely.

Here is a summary of the three plans:

U/U	Ⓢ Standard	⓪ Superior	❏ Quiros
Cue-bids	Lower-lower	Cheaper for 4 th	Cheaper for 4 th
Raise opener	Constructive		
Cue for opener m	LR+		
Cue for opener M	LR+	LR+	LR.
3 NT [m opening]	To play.		
3 NT [M opening]	To play.	To play.	Balanced GF raise.
Bid 4 th suit	Good 6+ cards, cons. to inv.	Good 6+ cards, constructive.	5+ cards, GF.
Cue for 4 th	Game force.	Invitational+.	Good 6+ cards, cons. to inv.
Jump cue-bid	Splinter for opener's suit (singleton or void in bid suit).		
Jump to game	Weak, distributional, to play.		

⓪ **An acceptable, simpler alternative:** use both cue-bids as raises of opener - bid the stronger high card holding. The fourth suit is natural and forcing. The author often plays this way.

Comparison of Standard and Cheaper for 4th Methods

This section demonstrates in detail that Cheaper for 4th is superior to the standard lower for lower method. We apply Jeff Rubens' useful space principle, locating bidding space where it is most useful.

Unusual 2 NT: an opponent jumps to 2 NT over our opening bid, showing the two lowest unbid suits:

- i. 1 ♣ – (2 NT) [their suits are ♦ & ♥, our cue-bids]

Standard (lower for lower)	Cheaper cue for 4 th suit
1 ♣ – (2 NT); 3 ♦ = ♣ (gap=0)	1 ♣ – (2 NT); 3 ♦ = ♠ (gap=1) 4 th
1 ♣ – (2 NT); 3 ♥ = ♠ (gap=0) 4 th	1 ♣ – (2 NT); 3 ♥ = ♣ (gap=0)

Opener's gap bid below the next of "our" suits is routinely useful after a cue-bid for the fourth suit. It allows us to waffle with no clear bid – a last train bid, if you will. In this case, only one gap bid is possible, right where it's most useful. With neither method can refusal of a limit raise be played at 3 ♣.

- ii. 1 ♦ – (2 NT) [their suits are ♣ & ♥, our cue-bids]

Standard (lower for lower)	Cheaper cue for 4 th suit
1 ♦ – (2 NT); 3 ♣ = ♦ (gap=0)	1 ♦ – (2 NT); 3 ♣ = ♥ (gap=1) 4 th
1 ♦ – (2 NT); 3 ♥ = ♠ (gap=0) 4 th	1 ♦ – (2 NT); 3 ♥ = ♦ (gap=0)

Here, only one gap bid is possible, right where it's most useful. The only true advantage of the standard method is also here: refusal of a limit raise can be played at 3 ♦.

iii. 1 ♥ – (2 NT) [their suits are ♣ & ♦, our cue-bids]

Standard (lower for lower)	Cheaper cue for 4 th suit
1 ♥ – (2 NT); 3 ♣ = ♥ (gap=1)	1 ♥ – (2 NT); 3 ♣ = ♠ (gap=1) ^{4th}
1 ♥ – (2 NT); 3 ♦ = ♠ (gap=0) ^{4th}	1 ♥ – (2 NT); 3 ♦ = ♥ (gap=0)

This situation is the main justification for playing cheaper for 4th. There is no waffle bid over 3 ♦ with lower for lower. Cheaper for 4th locates the gap where it is needed, when responder shows the 4th suit. The standard method wastes the gap on the limit raise, an issue that opener can and should decide without further help.

It seems inevitable that opener will have 2=5 or 1=5 majors with a dodgy minor, when responder shows the fourth suit – we need the gap to waffle. We are talking about the master suit here – we need to get this right. (With both methods, opener can refuse a limit raise in hearts here by bidding 3 ♥.)

iv. 1 ♠ – (2 NT) [their suits are ♣ & ♦, our cue-bids]

Standard (lower for lower)	Cheaper cue for 4 th suit
1 ♠ – (2 NT); 3 ♣ = ♥ (gap=1) ^{4th}	1 ♠ – (2 NT); 3 ♣ = ♥ (gap=1) ^{4th}
1 ♠ – (2 NT); 3 ♦ = ♠ (gap=0)	1 ♠ – (2 NT); 3 ♦ = ♠ (gap=0)

Because the 4th suit is lower-ranking, these plans are the same.

Michaels: a cue-bid over our minor suit opening:

v. 1 ♣ – (2 ♣) [their suits are ♥ & ♠, our cue-bids]

Standard (lower for lower)	Cheaper cue for 4 th suit
1 ♣ – (2 ♣); 2 ♥ = ♣ (gap=2)	1 ♣ – (2 ♣); 2 ♥ = ♦ ^{4th} (gap=2)
1 ♣ – (2 ♣); 2 ♠ = ♦ ^{4th} (gap=1)	1 ♣ – (2 ♣); 2 ♠ = ♣ (gap=1)

In cases [v & vii], there is always a gap bid with either method.

vi. 1 ♦ – (2 ♦) [their suits are ♥ & ♠, our cue-bids]

Standard (lower for lower)	Cheaper cue for 4 th suit
1 ♦ – (2 ♦); 2 ♥ = ♣ (gap=2)	1 ♦ – (2 ♦); 2 ♥ = ♦ ^{4th} (gap=2)
1 ♦ – (2 ♦); 2 ♠ = ♦ ^{4th} (gap=1)	1 ♦ – (2 ♦); 2 ♠ = ♣ (gap=1)

Summary: Cheaper for 4th has an advantage in cases [i, ii & iii], while lower for lower has an advantage only in case [ii].

Strength of the Cue-Bid for the 4th Suit

How do we show constructive, invitational, and game-forcing strengths in the fourth suit?

Standard: The cue-bid for the fourth suit forces to game. This is required to reduce the damage caused by playing lower for lower cue-

bids. The direct bid of the fourth suit is non-forcing, with a strong 6+ card suit and either constructive or invitational values. We should be able to do better when playing cheaper for 4th.

Flexible: The cue-bid for the fourth suit shows invitational or better values in a 5+ card suit. This fits with cheaper for 4th cue-bids. The direct bid of the fourth suit shows a strong 6+ card suit and constructive values.

Invitational: The Quiros cue-bid for the fourth suit is up to invitational, maximizing space. This fits with cheaper for 4th cue-bids. The direct bid of the fourth suit is natural and game-forcing.

Examples for Case [iii]

In each of these examples, we open 1 ♥ with the hand shown, and LHO bids 2 NT showing both minor suits. Here we use the *flexible, invitational or better cue-bid for the fourth suit*. (The standard cue-bid reduces the problems by reducing the functionality – invitational hands have been removed.)

1 ♥ – (2 NT) – ?

1. ♠ K 6 3 ♥ A Q 7 5 2 ♦ J 7 ♣ K 9 5

Lower for Lower	Cheaper for 4th
– 3 ♦ [spades, GF] – Pass; ? We bid 3 ♠, showing support, but refusing an invitation.	– 3 ♣ [spades, inv+] – Pass; ? We bid 3 ♠, showing support, but refusing an invitation.

2. ♠ K 3 ♥ A Q 7 6 5 2 ♦ J 7 ♣ K 9 5

Lower for Lower	Cheaper for 4th
– 3 ♦ [spades, GF] – Pass; ? We bid 3 ♥, showing a 6-card suit without primary spade support.	– 3 ♣ [spades, inv+] – Pass; ? We bid 3 ♥, showing a 6-card suit without primary spade support.

3. ♠ K 3 ♥ A Q 7 5 2 ♦ J 7 6 ♣ K 9 5

Lower for Lower	Cheaper for 4th
– 3 ♦ [spades, GF] – Pass; ? Crying would give partner unauthorized information. The best guess is 3 ♠, possibly a 5-2 fit.	– 3 ♣ [spades, inv+] – Pass; ? We bid 3 ♦, denying either a sixth heart or primary spade support, preserving space for an opinion from partner.

4. ♠ 9 3 ♥ A Q 7 5 2 ♦ K 7 6 ♣ K J 5

Lower for Lower	Cheaper for 4th
– 3 ♦ [spades, GF] – Pass; ? This looks worse, but now we have a stopper in each minor and an extra jack, so a light 3 NT is the best guess.	– 3 ♣ [spades, inv+] – Pass; ? We bid 3 ♦, denying either a sixth heart or primary spade support, preserving space for an opinion from partner. We lack the values for 3 NT.

Backstory

U/U is a useful convention; playing it properly can be important. As I recall, in the last century, Mike Lawrence described using the cheaper cue-bid to show the 4th suit. In 1986, Marty Bergen recommended U/U with the cheaper cue-bid being a raise of opener, which suffers from the same problem over an opening 1 ♥ bid as the standard method. Of course, if the opening bid is 1 ♠, there is an intervening bid with all three methods.

Gavin Wolpert’s methods are in his master class “Dealing with Michaels and Unusual 2NT.” He supplies many examples and details. One is the use of a fit jump, promising 4-card support for opener’s suit and a good 5+ cards in the suit of a jump below game. With a fit for the new suit, we should bid game. With a misfit, we should double for penalties, if the opponents oblige by bidding again.

The five-article series, “Dealing with the opponents’ two-suited overcalls” by Vic Quiros appeared in the *Bridge Bulletin*, Feb-Jun 2026. Marshal Miles wrote about doubling a two-suited overcall in his *Competitive Bidding* book, pages 159-163. Gary Schwartz and I still play the simpler alternative.

Back in the day, I held two spades and five hearts over a 3 ♦ invitational or better cue-bid for spades more than once. It’s a likely event when an opponent bids unusual 2 NT over our 1 ♥ opening. I would much rather play the simpler alternative than play the unadorned standard method.