

## Cue-Bids and Natural Bids of a Suit Bid Previously by an Opponent

A **Cue-bid** is a bid of a suit previously bid by an Opponent, a suit in which the Bidder has no interest in playing, and is, therefore, artificial and **forcing**, either for 1-round, else to a game-level contract. **Cue-bids, because of their universal meaning are usually *not alertable*.**

Cue-Bids can mean various things at different times, appear in all denominations and bidding levels, and for them to be understood by the Cue-Bidder's Partner, they must always be considered within the framework of the bidding environment in which they takes place.

Cue-Bids can,

- 1) show a first-round or second-round control for Slam purposes.
- 2) show a Two-suited distributional holding as seen with "**Michaels Cue-Bid**" overcalls.
- 3) show strong support (a limit raise or better) in Partner's bid suit.
- 4) create a force to a game-level contract.
- 5) create a one-round force.
- 6) ask for a stopper in the cue-bid suit.
- 7) evidence a stopper in the cue-bid suit.
- 8) signal a "**Help-Suit,**" or "**Short-Suit,**" game try (*Not herein discussed*).

Cue-Bids, bids of a suit previously mentioned by an Opponent, are **usually artificial**. They contain a specific conventional meaning, and are, therefore, **forcing**, either for 1-round, or to game. Occasionally, however, they are **natural**, and as a result, **not forcing**. Descriptions of the bidding environment in which they may take place are as follows:

### 1. Cue-bids by an Opening Bidder

**A. Cue-bids at or above Game-Level by an Opening Bidder** – The level at which any cue-bid is made is a vital consideration. At or above the level of game, there can be no doubt that such a bid is a Slam try. A Cue-Bid used under these circumstances is also sometimes called a "**Control Bid**" in that it evidences **First-Round Control** of Opener's newly-bid, second suit. **After a Major suit agreement at the 3-Level or higher, or a Minor suit agreement at the 4-Level or higher, new suits bid are Slam-oriented Cue-Bids showing first-round control.** Such bids are **not alertable**.

In such circumstances, a Cue-Bid here guarantees first round control of the new suit (**either an Ace or a void**) and asks Partner to proclaim his/her next cheapest first-round control, if one is present. Cue-bidding first round control, when seeking a Slam-level contract, is a substitute for any of the **Ace-Asking Conventions**, and is used when Opener holds either a void or a worthless doubleton, or both. Absent any first-round controls, Responder then re-bids the agree-upon suit at the cheapest level, Diamonds in this instance.

North	East	South	West
1H	Pass	2C	Pass
2D	Pass	4H	Pass
"4S" (A Slam-oriented cue-bid showing			

first-round control)

**B. Cue-Bidding Below Game-Level by an Opening Bidder** is much less precise.

Under such conditions, a Cue-Bid may or may not show Slam ambitions, and the Cue-Bidder may, or may not, have a control in the Cue-Bid suit. Such bids are *not alertable*.

West	North	East	South
1H	1S	Pass	1C "2H"

All North can tell at this stage is that South has an enormous hand and wants to be in at least a game-level contract. Indeed, hypothetically, if South liked Spades and wanted to be in a Spade contract below game, he/she could have made a competitive bid of **2S**, or a one-King-better-than-opening bid of **3S**. Here, however, South is either exploring for a contract higher than game in Spades (with holdings as in Example {a}), or is looking for a Heart stopper for a **3-NT** game (as with a holding as in Example {b}).

<p>{a}    <b>AQ74</b>  <b>64</b>  <b>A6</b>  <b>AKJ54</b></p>	<p>{b}    <b>A5</b>  <b>75</b>  <b>AJ5</b>  <b>AKQJ86</b></p>
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North must make the most helpful bid he/she can conjure. If holding a Heart stopper, he/she must bid No-Trump. In example {a} it would have been wrong for South to go immediately to **4S**. South plans, however, to at least bid **4S** on his/her next bid whatever the response from partner. **A delayed or slow arrival to game always signifies a stronger hand than does a fast arrival.** In {a}, if North signifies a Heart stopper by bidding NT, then South will be interested in Slam. Absent a Heart stopper **4S** is the optimum contract. In {b}, South is seeking a Heart "*stopper*" for a **3-NT** contract else, absent one, a 5-Club contract appears to be the preferred game-level contract. The use of a Cue-Bid to seek a "*stopper*" (sometimes referred to as a **Western Cue-bid**) is quite common. South holds the following hand:

	West	North	East	South
<p>86 J5 Q97 AKQ864</p>	2S	3H	Pass	1C "3S"

The only way for South to determine if a **3-NT** contract were viable would be to ascertain whether North were to have, or not have, a Spade "*stopper*." If South had had a Spade "*stopper*," he/she could have simply bid **3-NT** directly.

**C. A Double Jump-Shift ("Splinter Bid") by an Opening Bidder** guarantees (1) support for Responder's bid suit, 19 + HCP's or its equivalent (5-Losers), and either a singleton (*Not a singleton Ace*) or a void in the suit in which the **Splinter Bid** was made. "**Splinter Bids**" by Opener guarantee game, suggest the possibility for a Slam, and are alertable.

	West	North	East	South
<p>86 J5 Q97 AKQ864</p>	1H	Pass	1S	Pass

"4C" (A "Splinter Bid" showing a singleton or void in Clubs, opening count (5-Losers), and support for Responder's Spades.)

## 2. Cue-bids by a Responder to an Opening Bidder

### A. Cue-bids by a Responder to an Opening Bidder in a Competitive Auction Scenario; i.e., where there is Overcall Interference by the Direct (2<sup>nd</sup>) Seat

**Opponent** signify support for Opener's suit and guarantees a **limit raise** (11-12 HCP's or its equivalent; i.e., 8-Losers or fewer), or better. There is no upper limit to the strength of the cue-bid under these conditions, and such bids are **not alertable**.

<u>West</u> 1H	<u>North</u> 1S	<u>East</u> "2S"	<u>South</u>
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Notice here that **2H**, **3H**, and **4H** bids were also available. The consensus seems to favor a **2H** bid to be a constructive, competitive bid (7-10 HCP's; i.e., 9 Losers), and **3H** or **4H** bids to be pre-emptive (0-6 HCP's) holding four (4) and five (5) pieces of Hearts, respectively. The Cue-Bid, here, thus becomes an invitational or better holding with trump support for Opener.

**B. A Double Jump-Shift ("Splinter Bid") by a Responder to an Opening Bidder** guarantees (1) support for Opener's suit, (2) opening count or better (13 + HCP's) (7-Losers or fewer), and (3) either a singleton (not a singleton Ace) or a void in the suit in which the jump was made.

"**Splinter Bids**" made by a Responder to an opening Bidder are **game-forcing** and suggest the possibility for **Slam** and **are alertable**.

<u>West</u> 1H	<u>North</u> Pass	<u>East</u> "4D"	<u>South</u> Pass
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(Here, East shows support for Hearts, 13 or more HCP's, and a singleton or void in Diamonds.)

**C. A "Fourth-Suit Forcing" Bid** by a Player, a Responder in the example shown here, is a bid at the 2-Level, or above, of the only, as-yet, un-bid, fourth suit. It is artificial and forcing to game. Such bids **are alertable**.

<u>West</u> 1H 2D	<u>North</u> Pass Pass	<u>East</u> 2C "2S" (Fourth-suit Force)	<u>South</u> Pass
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East, here, is clearly looking for a Spade-stopper for a final No-Trump contract. He/she would have bid No-Trump himself/herself if a Spade-stopper were present in this otherwise obvious misfit hand.

**(Note):** At the 1-level, The "**Up-The-Ladder**" Principle applies and does **not** constitute a "**Fourth-Suit Forcing**" bidding scenario. (Example: **1C, 1D, 1H, 1S**) A 1-Level, 4<sup>th</sup> suit "**Up-the-Ladder**" bid and "**Fourth-Suit Forcing**" bids are, mutually exclusive.

**D. "Michaels Over Michaels"** is a conventional bid by a Responder to an opening Bidder using either of the two suits implied by an Opponent who overcalls a two-suited, "**Michaels Cue-Bid**," following an opening bid of one-of-a-suit by the Opener. Such bids **are alertable**. **(Note):** By Partnership agreement, a Cue-Bid of the Opponent's lower-ranking suit of the Michaels pair of suits implied evidences a limit-raise {8-Losers} in Opener's suit, and a bid of the higher-ranking of the Michaels pair implied evidences a constructive raise {9-Losers} in Opener's suit.

<u>West</u> 1C	<u>North</u> "2C"	<u>East</u> "2H" (A limit-raise in Clubs)
<u>West</u> 1C	<u>North</u> "2C"	<u>East</u> "2S" (A constructive-raise in Clubs)

**E. “Unusual-No-Trump over Unusual-No-Trump”** is a conventional bid by Responder using either of the two suits implied by Responder’s right-hand Opponent who overcalls with an **“Unusual- No-Trump”** two-suited overcall following an opening bid of one-of-a-suit by Opener. Such bids *are alertable*.

By Partnership agreement, a cue-bid of the Opponent’s lower-ranking suit of the **“Unusual-No-Trump”** pair implied evidences a limit-raise {8-Losers} in Opener’s suit, and a bid of the higher-ranking of the **“Unusual-No-Trump”** pair implied evidences a constructive raise {9-Losers} in Opener’s suit.

<u>West</u> 1H	<u>North</u> “2-NT”	<u>East</u> “3C” (A Limit-raise in Hearts)
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<u>West</u> 1H	<u>North</u> “2-NT”	<u>East</u> “3D” (A constructive-raise in Hearts)
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**(Note)** Some Partnerships reverse the significance of the strengths implied by both D and E above, wherein a mention of the lower-ranking of the suits implied signifies a constructive raise, and mention of the higher-ranking of the suits implied signifies a limit raise in Opener’s suit.)

**F. A Cue-Bid by a Responder, in Response to Opener’s 1-NT Opening, Following an Opponent’s Interference Overcall** is a game-forcing **“Stayman”** call seeking a 4-4 Major suit fit. In addition, it denies a stopper in the Opponent’s bid suit. (See the **“Lebensohl Convention”**) All Lebensohl bids *are alertable*.

<u>West</u> 1-NT	<u>North</u> 2C/2D	<u>East</u> “3C”/“3D” (A game-forcing Cue-Bid seeking a 4-4 “Golden Fit” in Hearts or Spades)
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<u>West</u> 1-NT	<u>North</u> 2H/2S	<u>East</u> “3H”/“3S” (A game-forcing Cue-Bid seeking a 4-4 “Golden Fit” in the alternate Major suit)
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**G. A Cue-Bid by Opener’s Responding Partner When the Opponents have Overcalled and Supported One Suit, Following Three Other Suits Having Already Been Bid by the Opening Bidder and his/her Responding Partner** is an artificial **“ASKING BID,”** inquiring as to whether or not Partner has a **“stopper”** in the Opponent’s bid suit, thereby enabling the Partnership to bid a makeable, final, No-Trump contract. Such bids are *not alertable*, but they are *game-forcing*.

<u>West</u> 1C 2S	<u>North</u> 1D Pass	<u>East</u> 1H “3D” (An “Asking” bid inquiring whether West holds a Diamond “stopper” enabling a hoped-for 3-NT final contract. Absent one, Opener must make any other alternate suit bid. <i>When the Opponents have bid one suit, a cue-bid asks, and when they have bid two suits, a cue-bid tells, while asking for the other.</i>	<u>South</u> 2D
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**H. A Cue-Bid by Opener's Responding Partner When the Opponents have Overcalled Two Different Suits, Following Two Alternate Suits Having Already Been Bid by the Opening Bidder and His/Her Responding Partner** is an artificial "TELLING BID," proclaiming the possession of a "stopper" in that singular suit bid by one of the Opponents, and inquiring whether or not Partner has a "stopper" in the other suit bid by the Opponents, seeking a possible, makeable, final, No-Trump contract. Such bids are not alertable, but they are game-forcing.

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
1D	1H	1S	1C "2D" (A "Telling" bid

evidencing to North that South holds a Diamond "stopper," and seeking a final No-Trump contract if North holds a Spade "stopper" (the suit bid by the alternate Opponent). *When the Opponents have bid one suit, a cue-bid asks, and when they have bid two suits, a cue-bid tells, while asking for the other.*

### 3. Cue-bids By an Overcaller.

**A. Cue-bids of Opener's Suit by an Overcaller (A "Michaels Cue-Bid"), used in either the Direct (2<sup>nd</sup>) Seat or in the Balancing (4<sup>th</sup>) Seat** signifies a two-suited overcall, either very weak (5-10 HCP's) or very strong (16 + HCP's). The distribution is usually 5-5 or better in the two suits referenced. Michaels Cue-Bids are not alertable.

<u>West</u> 1C	<u>North</u> "2C" (Hearts & Spades)	<u>West</u> 1D	<u>North</u> "2D" (Hearts & Spades)
<u>West</u> 1H	<u>North</u> "2H" (Spades & Minor)	<u>West</u> 1S	<u>North</u> "2S" (Hearts & Minor)

**B. A 4-Level Jump-Overcall by an Overcaller ("Leaping Michaels")** is a conventional "Michaels Cue-Bid" made following an Opponent's opening weak 2-bid in a Major suit (Hearts or Spades). This special "Michaels Cue-Bid" shows that particular Minor suit bid and the alternate Major, 5-5 or better, and 18 + HCP's. "Leaping Michael" bids, because they reference an infrequently-used convention, are alertable.

<u>West</u> 2H	<u>North</u> "4D" (Spades & Diamonds)	<u>West</u> 2S	<u>North</u> "4C" (Hearts & Clubs)
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**C. A Cue-Bid at the 3-Level, by Either a Direct (2<sup>nd</sup>) Seat or a Balancing (4<sup>th</sup>) Seat Overcaller, Following an Opponent's Opening Major Suit, Weak 2-Bid** is an "Asking-Bid," showing 17-18 HCP's, or more, seeking a "stopper" in Opener's suit in Partner's hand, thereby enabling a sought-after, and desired final 3-NT contract for the overcalling team. This type of Cue-Bid is not alertable, but is forcing.

<u>West</u> 2H/2S	<u>North</u> "3H"/"3S"	<u>West</u> 2H/2S	<u>North</u> Pass	<u>East</u> Pass	<u>South</u> "3H"/"3S"
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#### 4. Cue-bids by a Responder to an Overcaller

A. A Cue-Bid by a Responder to Partner's "Take-Out Double" Overcall shows game-values, with support for several, alternate suits and/or for a possible final 3-NT contract, should Opener hold one or more stoppers in the Opener's bid suit. Such bids are not alertable.

<u>West</u> 1C	<u>North</u> "Double"	<u>East</u> Pass	<u>South</u> "2C" (showing support
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for both Major suits and accompanying game-values.)

A jump-response to Partner's Overcall "Take-Out Double" evidences a good hand with 9 HCP's or more. Such jump responses, however, although encouraging a response, are not forcing to game, indeed they are not even forcing for 1-round. The Doubler is invited to move towards game if he/she holds extra strength, but much of the time, he/she will "Pass," when holding minimum "Take-Out Double" values. Bids by the Responder to Partner's "Take-Out Double," when even stronger (12 + HCP's), need invite or insist a game-level final contract. A Cue-Bid of the Opponent's bid suit initiates such an encouragement.

<u>South Holds:</u>	<u>West</u> 1H	<u>North</u> Db1.	<u>East</u> Pass	<u>South</u> "2H"
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KQXX  
 XXX (With this hand worth 15 points, South is too strong for a  
 AQJXX jump to 2S, or to 3D, for, indeed, the Doubler might "pass."  
 X South desires to be in game, but where? The way to find out  
 is to cue-bid. If Doubler answers 2S, South will jump to 4S. If he/she answers  
 3C, South can now bid 3D without fear of being passed there, for South will have  
 described a hand too strong for merely just an original jump-response.

B. A Cue-Bid of Opener's Bid Suit by a Responder to Partner's One-of-a-Suit Overcall shows primary support for Partner's overcall suit and a potential interest in game (a limit-raise or better). Such bids are not alertable. A Cue-Bid is the only forcing bid that a Responder to an Overcaller can make. All other bids are natural and non-forcing.

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u> 1H
1S	Pass	"2H" (Limit raise or better in support of Spades)	

#### 5. Natural Bids of a Suit Previously Bid by an Opponent

There are three situations in which bidding a suit previously bid by an Opponent is natural; i.e., either (1), evidencing an interest in that specific suit, as the Trump suit, notwithstanding the fact that that same suit was previously bid by one of the Opponents, or, (2), as a means to find out if Partner holds support for a second suit ("Help-Suit"), when seeking a game-level contract with fewer HCP's than is customarily needed. None of these three circumstances require an alert since they all represent natural suit calls, not Cue-Bids.

**A. A Natural Overcall of a Minor Suit by a Responder to an Overcaller When the LHO of that Responder Has Opened with that Same Minor Suit, Partner Has Overcalled, and that Same Responder to an Overcaller’s RHO Has Bid a Major,** is a *natural*, simple, suit overcall – a bid to Play!

<u>West</u> 1C/1D	<u>North</u> 1H	<u>East</u> 1S	<u>South</u> 2C/2D
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(A natural simple overcall with 10 or more HCP’s and a 6-card or longer Minor suit holding). Alternatively, a bid of the Major (Spade) suit, here, would have been a Cue-Bid showing a limit-raise or better in support of the North’s Heart suit, as in **4B**, previously discussed.

**B. A Jump-Overcall, at the 3-Level, in either the Direct (2<sup>nd</sup>) Seat or in the Balancing (4<sup>th</sup>) Seat, of the Same Minor Suit Previously Opened by an Opponent,** is *natural*, and is *not* a “Michaels Cue-Bid.” Because a Minor suit Cue-Bid in the Direct (2<sup>nd</sup>) or in the Balancing (4<sup>th</sup>) seat is a “Michaels Cue-bid,” and because an opening bid of a Club or a Diamond by an Opponent can, in reality, have as few as three (3) pieces in that Minor suit, it is important for a **Would-Be Overcaller** to be able to evidence a natural Minor suit overcall with the requisite HCP’s and a 6-card or longer Minor suit holding. A jump to the 3-level of the Minor is used for that purpose, and is *not* a “Michaels Cue-bid,” but rather a *natural* Minor suit overcall.

<u>West</u> 1D	<u>North</u> 3D	<u>East</u> Pass	<u>South</u> 3C
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(A natural 6-card Diamond suit with a good 11, or more HCP’s)

<u>West</u> 1C	<u>North</u> Pass	<u>East</u> Pass	<u>South</u> 3C
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(A natural 6-card Club suit with near Opening count or better)

**C. A 3-Level Overcall of a Minor Suit, Following an Opening Bid of That Same Minor Suit by the Overcaller’s Right-Hand Opponent** is a *natural*, simple overcall of that Minor suit, usually showing 6 or more pieces, or a very chunky 5-card holding, and near-opening count, or better. The 3-level bid is required, here, since an overcall of that Minor suit, if made at the 2-level, would have been misinterpreted by the Overcaller’s Partner as a “Michaels Cue-Bid.”

<u>West</u> 1C/1D	<u>North</u> 3C/3D
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(A Natural, 2-level-like, simple overcall)

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## Summation

Cue-bids constitute a significant tool to evidence a myriad number of special circumstances that cannot be shown in any other manner. The understanding of these circumstances and the proper use of these Cue-Bids ensures a more productive Partnership bidding communication.