

# AN INTRODUCTION TO TWO-SUITED OVERCALLS

by **Eddie Kantar**

It is always an advantage when a bridge hand can be described in one bid rather than two or three. Two-suited overcalls give the player making the bid that opportunity. However, telling partner you have 5-5 or 6-5 distribution is a good descriptive start, but partner also needs to know your approximate strength.

The standard ranges for two suited overcalls (Micheals and the Unusual Notrump) is /8-11 or 16-18 HCP. The in between hands with 12-15 HCP bid both suits, the higher ranking suit first. These hands we will call 'tweeners'.

Responder assumes 8-11 HCP after hearing a two-suited cue bid. If the cuebidder has the 16-18 point hand, he must bid again even after a minimum response. With no game interest facing an 8-11 point cuebid, responder normally makes a simple preference for one of partner's suits. With some game interest, responder jumps in one of the suits, invitational, or bids 2NT, also invitational. With game going values, responder either jumps to game in one of partner's suits or cuebids opener's suit. Responder should reevaluate high honor cards in partner's long suit(s). Ace and kings are worth double value and a queen is worth an extra point. On the other hand, secondary honor cards in partner's short suits (jacks and queens and often times kings) are usually worth a little less than nothing unless notrump is being considered as a final contract.

Finally, as the cuebidder, you can never have too many strong intermediates in your long suits. It is always an advantage to have high card strength and high intermediate cards in your long suits. It enhances the value of your hand. However, be wary of a two-suited hand that has high card strength in the short suits. Also be wary of a two-suited hand that does not have good intermediates in at least one of the long suits. Check the vulnerability before embarking on any two-suited adventure! Vulnerable vs. not, with a minimum hand you definitely need intermediates in at least one of the two suits. Incidentally, there is no law against making the best bid in bridge if your hand isn't strong enough for a two-suited cuebid. That bid is PASS!

## Practice Hand #1

<p><b>West</b>          ♠ A 10          ♥ A Q 4 3          ♦ Q J 7 4          ♣ Q 8 6</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;">             Game NS              Dealer N         </div>	<p><b>East</b>          ♠ K Q J 6 5          ♥ K 10 6 5 2          ♦ 5 2          ♣ 10</p>
<p><b>North</b>          ♠ 9 8 4          ♥ 8          ♦ A K 8 6 3          ♣ A J 9 4</p>		<p><b>South</b>          ♠ 7 3 2          ♥ J 9 7          ♦ 10 9          ♣ K 7 5 3 2</p>

<b>NORTH</b>	<b>EAST</b>	<b>SOUTH</b>	<b>WEST</b>
1♦	2♦	Pass	4♥
All Pass			

Opening lead: ♦A

*Bidding Commentary:* As East, your 2♦ overcall is called 'Michaels' or the Michaels Cue Bid. After a minor suit opening bid, it shows 5-5 (possibly 6-5 either way) in the majors with 8-11 HCP. However, it can also show a strong hand in the 16+ HCP range. With the 'strong' hand, the two-suited hand bids again even if partner makes a simple non-jump preference response. As West with a double fit in the majors and your phenomenal honor card holding in partner's long suits, you have more than enough to leap to game. You should count nothing, zero, zilch, for your minor suit honors. A jump to 3♥ would be invitational, but more than a trifle conservative with this hand.

*Defensive Commentary:* As North, after partner high-lows in diamonds, indicating a doubleton, you want to give partner a chance to overtrump dummy on the third diamond. BUT, be sure to cash the ♣A first. If you don't, declarer can discard dummy's club on the third diamond perhaps costing partner a natural trump trick. If you defend properly, you promote a heart trick for partner and defeat the contract.

*Play Commentary:* As West, if North plays the ace-king and a diamond, discard a club from dummy forcing South to trump. If South cashes the ♣A and then leads a third diamond, you have a problem. You can trump with the 10 and hope North has the jack or you can trump with the king and hope hearts are 2-2 or the jack is singleton. Good luck.

## Practice Hand #2

<p><b>West</b>          ♠ 9 5          ♥ K Q J 10 7 6 5          ♦ 3 2          ♣ 10 8</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;">             Love All              Dealer W         </div>	<p><b>East</b>          ♠ A Q 10 5 4 2          ♥ A 2          ♦ Q 9          ♣ J 9 6 5</p>	
	<p><b>South</b>          ♠ K J 8 7 3          ♥ 8 3          ♦ 10 8 5 4          ♣ 7</p>		
<b>WEST</b>	<b>NORTH</b>	<b>EAST</b>	<b>SOUTH</b>
4♥	4NT	Pass	5♦
All Pass			
Opening lead: ♥K			

*Bidding Commentary:* As West you have a normal 3♥ opening bid. As North, in order to show both minors with one bid, leap to 4NT, unusual. Your jump shuts East out of the bidding and South is more than pleased to select diamond as the trump suit. Notice that 5♣ has no play losing two hearts and a club. This hand illustrates why it is prudent to give partner a choice of trump suits even when one suit is stronger than the other.

*Defensive Commentary:* East overtakes the ♥K and returns the suit to West. With two tricks in, where is a third to come from? West's best chance is to play partner for the ♦Q and play a third heart. As it happens this is the only defense that defeats 5♦. Declarer cannot prevent East from taking the setting trick with the ♦Q.

A good general rule on defense is this; If you are sure that there are no defensive tricks coming from the side suits, give declarer a ruff and sluff. It often promotes a trump trick for your side.

### Practice Hand #3

<b>West</b> ♠ QJ1086 ♥ AJ1095 ♦ Q3 ♣ 2	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;">           Game NS            Dealer S         </div>	<b>North</b> ♠ K94 ♥ Q83 ♦ AJ52 ♣ K83	<b>East</b> ♠ 75 ♥ K62 ♦ 10986 ♣ 10654
<b>South</b> ♠ A32 ♥ 74 ♦ K74 ♣ AQJ97			

<b>SOUTH</b>	<b>WEST</b>	<b>NORTH</b>	<b>EAST</b>
1♣	2♣	3NT	Pass
Pass	Pass		

**Opening lead: ♥2**

*Bidding Commentary:* As West, you have a maximum minimum Michaels 2♣ overcall, 'Michaels' typically showing 5-5 in the majors with 8-11 HCP. Your plethora of intermediate spot cards make the hand a maximum. North's 3NT response shows 13-15 HCP. A 2NT response would not be forcing.

*Lead Commentary:* As East, with partner 5-5 in the majors, it behooves your to lead from your stronger major. Without any bidding from partner, you would lead the ♦10.

*Defensive Commentary:* West plays the ♥A at trick one and returns the ♥J at trick two.

*Play Commentary:* As North, you have to decide who has the ♥K. If you think West is being tricky and has the ♥K, must play the ♥Q. However, if you believe West's play of the ♥A, in theory denying the king, play low at trick two and block the suit. As the cards lie, if you duck the ♥J, the defense can only take three heart tricks. If you play the ♥Q at trick two, the defense can take 5 heart tricks! Only a two trick difference.

*Key Lesson Pointer:* In general, when partner leads low, third hand plays high. However, with equal high cards, third hand plays the lower or lowest equal. Therefore, the play of an ace, supposedly denies the king. The play of a king denies the queen and the play of a queen denies the jack, etc. Both the declarer and the opening leader can use third hand's play to advantage.

### Practice Hand #4

<b>West</b> ♠ 102 ♥ 5 ♦ AQ1043 ♣ AJ972	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;">           Game NS            Dealer E         </div>	<b>North</b> ♠ J9 ♥ QJ109 ♦ J87 ♣ Q653
<b>South</b> ♠ A8754 ♥ AK42 ♦ K96 ♣ 4	<b>East</b> ♠ KQ63 ♥ 8763 ♦ 75 ♣ K108	

<b>EAST</b>	<b>SOUTH</b>	<b>WEST</b>	<b>NORTH</b>
Pass	1♠	2NT	Pass
3♣	All Pass		

**Opening lead: ♥A (Ace from AK at trick one)**

*Bidding commentary:* As West, your 2NT overcall of a major suit opening bid shows 5-5 in the minors (possibly 6-5 either way) typically 8-11 HCP. As minimums go, you have a maximum. However, you do not play partner has a club suit for that 3♣ bid. Partner is preferring clubs to diamonds and could have a doubleton in each suit! And don't bid on! If partner has a good hand for clubs, partner will jump to 4♣ or cuebid 3♠, opener's suit.

*Defensive Commentary:* The lead is normal. As North, play the ♥Q at trick one to show the jack. This makes it easier for partner to continue the suit. As South, continue with a low heart forcing the longer trump hand to trump, usually a strong defensive play.

*Play Commentary:* As East, after ruffing a heart low at trick two, try a spade to the king (higher equal for deceptive purposes) intending to build up a hand entry to take the

diamond finesse. As South, win the ♠A and play a third heart forcing the dummy again. As East, enter your hand with the ♠Q and lead a diamond to the queen followed by the ♦A and a diamond ruff. Next, ruff your last heart the nine; ruff a diamond with the ♣K; ruff a spade with the ♣A, and ruff dummy's last diamond with the 10 ensuring one more trump trick with dummy's jack. Making 4.

The lead of the Ace from the AK is a trick one convention only. For the rest of the hand the king is led from both the AK and the KQ. The king is also led at trick one in any suit partner has bid whether or not it has been supported.

## Practice Hand #5

<b>West</b> ♠ A1076 ♥ AJ8 ♦ 43 ♣ J764	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;">           Game EW            Dealer E         </div>	<b>East</b> ♠ KQJ87 ♥ K10942 ♦ 62 ♣ Q	<b>North</b> ♠ 4 ♥ Q63 ♦ QJ975 ♣ AK108
<b>South</b> ♠ 932 ♥ 87 ♦ AK108 ♣ 9542			
<b>EAST</b> Pass 2♦	<b>SOUTH</b> Pass 3♦	<b>WEST</b> Pass 4♠	<b>NORTH</b> 1♦ All pass

*Bidding Commentary:* North makes a doubtful fourth hand opening bid holding a singleton spade and only four major suit cards, but many would. The price is not usually this severe. East, a passed hand, overcalls 2♦ to show the majors. As most 5-5 hands open the bidding with 11 HCP, West should place East with a little less. The importance of fitting honors in partner's long suit cannot be overemphasized. (West should count 8 HCP for each ace, nothing for the ♣J). From West point of view, if East' HCP are where they figure to be-in the two long suits- an easy 10 tricks may be available. It is certainly worth the gamble.

*Defensive Commentary:* South should discourage in clubs and North shifts to the ♦Q. South wins the second diamond (or the first and second diamond) and exits a spade, the safest exit.

*Play Commentary:* As West, the ball is now in your court and you have to find the ♥Q. After drawing trumps, noticing North's singleton, inferring heart length, start thinking about HCP. You know that North has at most 10 HCP in the minors and is a heavy favorite to hold the ♥Q. After drawing trumps, cash the ♥A and runs the ♥J through North.

## Practice Hand #6

<b>West</b> ♠ AJ1076 ♥ KQ5 ♦ A64 ♣ 52	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;">           Game All            Dealer N         </div>	<b>East</b> ♠ 98 ♥ 9874 ♦ QJ53 ♣ KJ3	<b>North</b> ♠ 2 ♥ A10 ♦ K10976 ♣ Q10876
<b>South</b> ♠ KQ543 ♥ J632 ♦ 2 ♣ A94			
<b>NORTH</b> Pass 1NT	<b>EAST</b> Pass Pass	<b>SOUTH</b> Pass 2♣	<b>WEST</b> 1♠ All Pass
<b>Opening lead: ♥K</b>			

*Bidding Commentary:* North, a passed hand, can use the Unusual Notrump at the one level after a major suit opening bid. If not a passed hand, North would have to jump to 2NT to get the same message across. Notice the minor suit intermediates in the North hand. Intermediates protect the partnership from disaster in case of a misfit.

East is not strong enough to act over 1NT and South prefers clubs to diamonds obviously. Nobody really has anything more to say and so the bidding ends in 2♣.

*Defensive Commentary:* West makes a more or less normal lead, but it doesn't turn out so hot. Another possibility is a trump lead. If South is short in diamonds, South will probably try to trump diamonds in the closed hand and a trump lead would make it more difficult for South to do that.

*Play Commentary:* South does best to win the ♥A and exit with the ♥10 to West's queen. Fearing that South will discard dummy's spade on the ♥J, West might decide to cash the ♠A and exit with the ♠J. Dummy discards a diamond and South wins and leads a diamond. There are now many variations as to what will happen next, but South should prevail.

## Practice Hand #7

		<b>North</b>		
		♠ Q53		
		♥ J754		
		♦ 3		
		♣ 107542		
<b>West</b>	Game All Dealer E	<b>East</b>		
♠ J986		♠ 7		
♥ 106		♥ AQ9832		
♦ J9		♦ 10765		
♣ AK983		♣ QJ		
		<b>South</b>		
		♠ AK1042		
		♥ K		
		♦ AKQ842		
		♣ 6		

<b>EAST</b>	<b>SOUTH</b>	<b>WEST</b>	<b>NORTH</b>
2♥	4♦	Pass	4♠
Pass	Pass	Pass	

Opening lead: ♣Q

*Bidding Commentary:* In the modern game, South's leap to 4♦ after a Weak Two opening bid is called 'Leaping Michaels'. It describes a powerful two-suited hand with five cards in the unbid major and typically six cards in the jump suit, clubs or diamonds. The bidder usually has 15+ HCP. North likes spades better than diamonds and bids 4♠. Leaping Michaels is also used after LH0 opens 1♥ or 1♠ partner passes, RHO raises to 2♥ or 2♠ and now a jump to 4♣ or 4♦ by fourth hand shows the same hand type, five cards in the unbid major, five or six cards in the bid minor, and 15+ HCP.

*Defensive Commentary:* As East, the lead of the ♣Q stands out. After partner encourages, cash the ♥A and then a second club forcing dummy to ruff.

*Play commentary:* As North, after ruffing in dummy at trick three, play the ♦A and ruff a diamond low, then the queen of spades and a spade to the king. When spades turn out to be 4-1, cash a third high spade leaving both you and West with one spade each. Now play dummy's high diamonds until West trumps. Once West trumps, dummy is high.

Notice how important it is to start with diamonds before spades. The general rule is to start with the long suit before touching the trump suit if communications demand it. They do here.

## Practice Hand #8

		<b>North</b>		
		♠ AQ9843		
		♥ 76		
		♦ J3		
		♣ 864		
<b>West</b>	Game EW Dealer S	<b>East</b>		
♠ K5		♠ J1076		
♥ -		♥ K95		
♦ AQ10742		♦ 9864		
♣ KQJ95		♣ A10		
		<b>South</b>		
		♠ 2		
		♥ AQJ108432		
		♦ K		
		♣ 732		

<b>SOUTH</b>	<b>WEST</b>	<b>NORTH</b>	<b>EAST</b>
4♥	4NT	Pass	5♦
Pass	Pass	Pass	

Opening lead: ♠2

*Bidding Commentary:* South's 4♥ opening bid is preemptive, typically showing an eight card suit with less than opening bid values. It might also be made with a 7-4 hand pattern. West's 4NT overcall is 'unusual' showing the minors. At this vulnerability, West should have a strong hand with a likely 6-5 or 5-6 hand pattern. East has no trouble bidding 5♦. East has a very good hand for diamonds. After all East might have had a doubleton diamond and a singleton club. The ♣A is also a great card.

*Defensive Commentary:* South, fearing a heart void in dummy, decides to try his luck with a singleton spade lead. As it happens, the lead strikes gold. North takes the first two spades as South discards the ♣2. After that discard, the only chance that North can see of defeating this contract is to play South for the ♦K and lead a third spade. South should uppercut dummy with the ♦K promoting the ♦J is the setting trick. Bravo, North. Bravo South.

*Play Commentary:* Given this defense, there is not much East can do. If the defense goes any other way, East can always lead a diamond towards dummy and when the king pops up, there is not much to the play. In fact, if the ♥A is led, East makes an overtrick as the defense can take only one spade trick.