

## Two-Suited Overcalls

In overcalling, the following hand types need to be considered:

1. Balanced one suited hands (5-3-3-2 distribution)
2. Preemptive 6 and 7 card one suited hands
3. Strong balanced hands with a stopper in opener's suit
4. Two suited hands, with shortness in one of the unbid suits

Hand type 4 can be subdivided into 3 subtypes:

- a. Hands with 5-5 or greater distribution
- b. Hands with 5-4 distribution with the longer suit the major
- c. Hands with 5-4 distribution with the longer suit the minor
- d. Hands with 5-4 distribution with both major suits

It is hand type 4c and 4d that Max Hardy, in his work on two-suited hands, considers problematic in traditional methods and which he reconsiders.

The following discussion is based on Hardy's approach to overcalling with 2 suited hands, but it departs from it in several particulars:

- It distinguishes between overcalls over one of a minor from overcalls over one of a major with respect to basic approach
- It separately considers hands with 4 spades and 5 hearts
- It proposes the use of a double followed by 1 NT rebid to show a balanced hand with 15-17 HCP rather than 18-20 HCP

### 1. Hand Type

- *4-Card Major, 5+ Minor/1 of a Minor*

#### *Conventions*

- *Unusual INT*
- *Top and Bottom Cue Bid*

Max Hardy is particularly concerned with the hand that has a good 4-card or weak 5-card major and a strong 5 or 6 card minor suit.

For the last 40 years, hands with 5-5 distribution have been bid using Michael's cue bid or the Unusual 2NT. Hardy leaves the Unusual 2NT alone, but finds a better use for the cue bid. This convention titled the **TOP AND BOTTOM CUE BID**, specifically shows, when a minor is opened, 5+ cards in the unbid minor and 4-spades and near opening or better strength.

This leaves a hand with 4 hearts and a longer minor to be described. For this purpose, Hardy recommends the jump overcall of 2♦ to show 5+ diamonds and 4 hearts after an opening of 1♣ and a jump overcall of 2♥ after an opening of 1♦ to show 5+ clubs and 4 hearts.

Michael's serves a pre-emptive function, but an overcaller can still describe the character of his/her hand if allowed a second bid, so it is a matter of deciding which purpose has greater value.

However, the loss of the weak jump shift overcall of 2♦ after 1♣ opening and of 2♥ after a 1♦ opening, which Hardy recommends, uses two useful descriptive bids for a useful, but less frequently occurring purpose.

So I would propose using the 1NT overcall to describe two suited hands with a 4-card heart suit and a longer minor. This **UNUSUAL 1NT** is similar to the Unusual 2NT in describing the 2 lowest unbid suits, except that the heart suit is 4 rather than 5 cards long. I do not believe that the loss of the 1NT overcall is all that great. In standard usage, while quite descriptive of overcaller's hand, it also puts the overcaller on the line. It is a pre-emptive bid in its own, but the risk is great. With only 10-12 HCP remaining in the two hands that have yet to bid, a 1 NT overcaller frequently will find his partner broke, or without the required 8 HCP to explore a better suit contract.

While overcalling 1NT after 1 of a major serves the additional purpose of keeping the bidding at the 1 level, this purpose is not achieved after a 1♣ opening and relatively infrequently after a 1♦ diamond. In other words, with a balanced hand and stoppers, an overcaller with 1NT distribution and strength can double and then rebid 1NT if possible in response to advancer's bid (if there is no interference, only when advancer bids 2♣ in response to a double is this not possible). If advancer has bid a major, new minor forcing is used to show 5-card suits and to invite game with as few as 8 HCP. Rebidding 2 of a major shows 5+ in the suit and fewer than 8 HCP opposite no less than a doubleton. If responder enters the bidding, then 1NT may well have been a bad place to end up. The downside of this approach is that suit contracts will be wrong-sided.

In sum, using this conventional approach

the *direct* 1NT describes a 2-suited hand with a 4-card heart suit, and

the *indirect* 1NT describes a 15-17 HCP balanced hand with a stopper in opener's suit

### **Advancer's Responses**

Advancer should be guided by a preference for a 5-2 to a 4-3 fit, especially since the 4-card suit may be quite weak.

- Support a 4-card suit with a 4-card suit
- Support a 4-card major with a 3-cards only if there is a void/singleton in the minor.
- Bid at the 2-level and at the 3-level in clubs (after a cue bid) to play.
- Invite to game in a major by jumping to the 3-level.
- Bid new suits only if they are self-sufficient.

## Proposed Summary of Changes to Standard Overcalls

Hand Type	After 1♣/1♦ Opening	Current Use of Bid
5+ minor and good 4-card/weak 5-card heart suit, opening strength +	1NT (“Unusual 1NT”)	Strong balanced hand (15-17 HCP)
5+ minor and good 4-card/weak 5-card spade suit, opening strength +	2♣/2♦ (Top and Bottom Cue Bid)	5-5 or longer in majors (Michaels Cue Bid) or very strong hand
15-17 HCP balanced hands with a stopper in opener’s minor	Double and rebid 1NT if possible	Very strong balanced hand (19-20 HCP)

### 2. Hand Types

- *4-Card Major, 5+ Minor/1 of a Major*
- *4 Spades, 5 Hearts/1 of a Minor*

#### *Conventions*

- *Equal Level Correction Double*

The “Bidding Box” feature of the *Bridge Bulletin* for November 2004 featured the hand to the right. After North opened 1♦, one East-West ended in 2♥ after East gave preference to his 4-card major over his 5-card minor. The other pair reached 3NT–game, “but in the wrong strain.”

<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
♠ K 7 3	♠ 2
♥ K 7 3 2	♥ A Q 6 4
♦ K J 6	♦ Q 10 3
♣ 8 5 4	♣ K Q J 7 3

The problem for East is that, using standard bidding, East cannot double without 17 HCP, so East must make an impossible choice. The first pair stopped short of game because East feared West had raised with 3-card support.

Solving the problem requires giving up on the extra strong change of suit bid after a takeout double. Equal level correction or conversion doubles but do not promise extra strength. They occur when a take-out doubler bids the next higher suit, excluding opener’s. A relatively new idea, they have been variously defined

Marty Bergen, in his *Bergen’s Bevy of Bridge Secrets*, limits such doubles to a takeout double of one of a major where the doubler has 5 diamonds and 4 cards in the unbid major. As used by Max Hardy, in a lengthier treatment, they show a two-suited hand with a four-card major and a

longer stronger minor (the anchor suit) that is not biddable using TOP AND BOTTOM CUE BIDS.

I suggest using equal correction doubles to describe hands with a 4-card major and another suit as does Hardy, but I would also limit such doubles to the following situations:

- Overcalls with 2 suits, including 4-cards in the unbid major and a longer minor over one of a major,
- OR*
- Overcalls over one of a minor where the overcaller has 5 hearts and 4 spades

Using this approach it no longer is possible to show an extra strong hand by doubling and bidding a new suit. The doubler with a strong hand needs to:

- (a) bid the suit initially and bid strongly thereafter,
- (b) cue bid and bid the suit (1♥, 1♥, Pass, 2NT [asking for the minor], Pass, 3♠), or
- (c) double and jump (1♥, Double, Pass, 2♣, Pass, 3♠ or 1♥, 1♥, Pass, 2NT [asking for the minor], Pass, 3♠).

The loss of this bid is clearly a trade-off, but while there are other ways of showing a strong hand, there is no other way to show a two-suiter with near opening or mere opening strength.

In making a take-out double, advancer responds as he/she normally would, and only after the correction occurs does advancer become aware of the nature of the doubler's hand. If the opener repeats his or her suit a heart suit at the two level, then doubler's 2♠ shows 4 spades and length in the suit that advancer has not bid. For example, in the auction 1♥, D, 1NT, 2♣, 2♥, 2♠, the double is showing 4 spades and a good 5-card or longer diamond suit.

The take-out doubler with a two-suited hand needs to exercise caution, especially when vulnerable, because the doubler does make it possible for a responder to redouble as a prelude to a penalty double.

### **Advancer's Second Bid**

1. Support a 4-card major with 4 cards in the suit
2. Support a 4-card major with 3 cards only if there is a void/singleton in the minor
3. Bid doubler's long suit at the 3-level with doubleton support to play
4. Jump raise or raise doubler's major to the 3 level to invite game
5. Bid new suits only if they are self-sufficient

**Sample Hands: Unusual 1NT**

Dlr:South ♠ 7 6  
 Vul:N-S ♥ Q 6 3  
 ♦ 9 5 4 3  
 ♣ 10 7 3 2

♠ A 5	N W     E S	♠ K J 9 4 3
♥ A K 9 8		♥ 7 4 2
♦ Q 7		♦ J 10 2
♣ A Q 6 5 4		♣ 9 8

♠ Q 10 8 2  
 ♥ J 10 5  
 ♦ A K 8 6  
 ♣ K J

East supports West's club suit, preferring the stronger 5-2 fit to the 4-3 heart fit. As the cards lie, all 2-level bids (excepting 2♦) make for east-west.

West	North	East	South
1 NT	Pass	2 ♣	1 ♦ All Pass

Dlr:South ♠ Q J 10 7 4  
 Vul:Both ♥ 10 9 4 2  
 ♦ 7  
 ♣ K 10 7

♠ A 8	N W     E S	♠ 9 6 5
♥ J 8 7 6		♥ A K Q 3
♦ A K 8 6 3		♦ 10 9 2
♣ 9 4		♣ J 5 2

♠ K 3 2  
 ♥ 5  
 ♦ Q J 5 4  
 ♣ A Q 8 6 3

West's bid of 1NT permits the easy identification of the strong heart suit. With a minimum West passes East's invitation to game. East has 1 spade loser, 1 diamond loser, and 2 club losers.

West	North	East	South
1 NT	Dbl	3 ♥	1 ♣ All Pass

**Sample Hands:**  
**Top & Bottom Cue Bid**

Dir:South ♠ 2  
 Vul:N-S ♥ Q 10 9 8 4 3 2  
 ♦ A 8  
 ♣ 10 7 6

♠ A 10 4 3	N W     E S	♠ Q 9 7 6 5
♥		♥ 7 5
♦ 10 9 6 4		♦ K J 3
♣ A K Q 5 2		♣ J 8 4

♠ K J 8  
 ♥ A K J 6  
 ♦ Q 7 5 2  
 ♣ 9 3

West's bid of 2♦ shows 5+ clubs, 4 spades, and a near opening hand. North preempts, but East aware of a 9-card fit in spades, and an 8+ fit in clubs confidently competes to 4♣.

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
			1 ♦
2 ♦	3 ♥	3 ♠	4 ♥
Pass	Pass	4 ♠	All Pass

Dir:South ♠ Q 10 3  
 Vul:Both ♥ Q 6 5  
 ♦ 7 4 2  
 ♣ Q J 9 3

♠ A 9 7 2	N W     E S	♠ 8 6 5
♥ A		♥ J 10 9 7 4
♦ K Q 10 9 3		♦ A J 8 6
♣ 7 6 2		♣ 5

♠ K J 4  
 ♥ K 8 3 2  
 ♦ 5  
 ♣ A K 10 8 4

Without 4 spades, but with a known 9-card diamond fit, East bids and rebids the diamond suit.

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
			1 ♣
2 ♣	Pass	2 ♦	Dbl
Pass	3 ♣	3 ♦	All Pass

**Sample Hands:**  
**Double/Rebid of 1NT**

Dlr:South     ♠ 5 3  
 Vul:None     ♥ K J 9 8 6  
                   ♦ K 10 6  
                   ♣ Q 10 4

♠ A Q 10 4	N W     E S	♠ J 9 8 6 2
♥ Q 3		♥ 10 7 5
♦ A Q 9		♦ J 4 3
♣ K 8 7 3		♣ 6 2

♠ K 7  
 ♥ A 4 2  
 ♦ 8 7 5 2  
 ♣ A J 9 5

East-West is likely to bid and make 2♠, whether or not West opens 1NT. A likely auction after a takeout double is shown. North will bid 1♥, but may not bid 3♥ on his/her own. Were West to bid 1NT instead of doubling, North might double, but East will transfer West into spades so the contract is likely to be the same.

West	North	East	South
			1 ♦
Dbl	1 ♥	Pass	1 NT
Pass	Pass	2 ♠	All Pass

Dlr:South     ♠ Q 9 4 2  
 Vul:None     ♥ J 8 5 2  
                   ♦ J 7 6  
                   ♣ J 9

♠ K 10 6	N W     E S	♠ J 8 5 3
♥ K 9 4 3		♥ Q 10
♦ A 10 9		♦ 5 3
♣ K Q 6		♣ A 8 7 5 3

♠ A 7  
 ♥ A 7 6  
 ♦ K Q 8 4 2  
 ♣ 10 4 2

Were West to overcall 1NT instead of doubling, it would likely be passed out. While West can make 1NT, 3♣, which West will bid after a double, will do better. If North does not enter the auction, buy the contract for 2♣.

West	North	East	South
			1 ♦
Dbl	1 ♥	2 ♣	Dbl
Pass	2 ♥	Pass	Pass
3 ♣	All Pass		

## Sample Hands:

### Double/Rebid of 1NT

Dlr:South	♠ 10 4										
Vul:Both	♥ 10 8 6 5 3										
	♦ Q 10 9 8										
	♣ J 8										
♠ Q J 9 6	<table style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ A 8 2
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ A 7		♥ K Q 9 2									
♦ K 7 5		♦ 6 4 3									
♣ A Q 10 4		♣ 9 6 5									
	♠ K 7 5 3										
	♥ J 4										
	♦ A J 2										
	♣ K 7 3 2										

East, with 9 HCP invites game opposite a 15-17 HCP 1NT rebid by West. West shows the strength of the hand, given that if the bidding continues West can show the 4-card spade suit. If East has 4 spades and 8 HCP, 2♦, new minor forcing, will uncover West's 4 spades.

West	North	East	South
			1 ♣
Dbl	Pass	1 ♥	Pass
1 NT	Pass	2 NT	Pass
3 NT	All Pass		

Dlr:South	♠ K 10 7										
Vul:Both	♥ 8 7 5 3										
	♦ J 7 3										
	♣ 9 7 6										
♠ Q 9 3 2	<table style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ 6 4
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ A 9		♥ K J 10 6 2									
♦ K Q 9 2		♦ A 10 8 5									
♣ A J 4		♣ 5 2									
	♠ A J 8 5										
	♥ Q 4										
	♦ 6 4										
	♣ K Q 10 8 3										

East bids 1♥ in response to the double and 2♦, new minor forcing, after West's 1NT to indicate 5 hearts and at least 8 HCP. West bypasses 1♠ to show point count and rebids 2♠ to show 4 spades. East's 2NT denies a 4-4 spade fit and West's 3NT denies 3 hearts.

West	North	East	South
			1 ♣
Dbl	Pass	1 ♥	1 ♠
1 NT	Pass	2 ♦	Pass
2 ♠	Pass	2 NT	Pass
3 NT	All Pass		

**Sample Hands:**  
**Double/Rebid of 1NT**

Dlr:South     ♠ J 8 7 3  
 Vul:None     ♥ Q 10 2  
                   ♦ 5 3  
                   ♣ 7 6 4 3

♠ 10 6 5	N W       E S	♠ Q 9 2
♥ K 8 5 4		♥ A J 7 6
♦ K Q 2		♦ J 10 8 6
♣ A K 8		♣ J 2

♠ A K 4  
 ♥ 9 3  
 ♦ A 9 7 4  
 ♣ Q 10 9 5

West doubles and rebids 2♥ to show interest in game. East's 3♥ shows a maximum for the 1♥ bid. Alternately, West might rebid 1NT to show a 4-3-3-3 hand, despite the absence of a spade stopper to show 15 HCP points. As the cards lie, both 3NT and 4♥ make 10 tricks.

West	North	East	South
			1 ♦
Dbl	Pass	1 ♥	Pass
2 ♥	Pass	3 ♥	Pass
4 ♥	All Pass		

Dlr:South     ♠ K 8 7 4  
 Vul:E-W       ♥ 8 7 5 4  
                   ♦ Q 3  
                   ♣ 10 8 5

♠ Q 3 2	N W       E S	♠ 6 5
♥ K 9 6		♥ Q J 2
♦ K 9 2		♦ A J 8 7 6 4
♣ A Q J 4		♣ 7 6

♠ A J 10 9  
 ♥ A 10 3  
 ♦ 10 5  
 ♣ K 9 3 2

East bids either a conservative 1♦ or, given the double and north's pass, an exploratory 2♦. In response to 1♦ West bids 1NT, and East rebids 3♦ to show 6 diamonds and an invitational hand. West, with Kxx of diamonds, bids 3NT. Unfortunately, with a spade lead, 3NT can be set although 3♦ makes 4. This hand shows another advantage of a Dbl/1NT bid. East can rebid a drop-dead 2♦ as well as 3♦ on his/her second bid.

West	North	East	South
			1 ♣
Dbl	Pass	1 ♦	1 ♠
1 NT	Pass	3 ♦	Pass
3 NT	All Pass		

**Sample Hands:**  
**Equal Level Correction Double**

Dlr:South     ♠ J 10 4 3  
 Vul:N-S       ♥ Q 8  
                   ♦ Q 8 6 2  
                   ♣ K 10 5

♠ A K 9 5	N	♠ Q 6 2
♥ 7 5	W     E	♥ J 9 4 3
♦ K J 10 9 7	S	♦ 5
♣ 6 4		♣ A J 7 3 2

♠ 8 7  
 ♥ A K 10 6 2  
 ♦ A 4 3  
 ♣ Q 9 8

In this variation on a classic auction, an equal level correction enables East-West to locate 2♠, their best contract, even though responder already has bid spades. West's 2♦ after East's 2♣ promises 4 spades. With a singleton, East chooses to bid a natural 2♠, likely ending the auction. 2♠ goes down 1, but North-South can make 2NT, a possible contract if bid West bids 2♦.

West	North	East	South
			1 ♥
Dbl	1 ♠	2 ♣	Pass
2 ♦	Pass	2 ♠	All Pass

Dlr:South     ♠ 2  
 Vul:None       ♥ K 9 5 2  
                   ♦ 8 5 3 2  
                   ♣ J 7 6 3

♠ K Q 9 8	N	♠ 10 6 5 4
♥ Q	W     E	♥ J 7 6
♦ K 9	S	♦ Q J 7 6
♣ A K 10 9 5 2		♣ Q 4

♠ A J 7 3  
 ♥ A 10 8 4 3  
 ♦ A 10 4  
 ♣ 8

In this hand, West can double to show both a solid 6-card club suit and a good 4-card spade suit. If North raises to 2♥ instead of jump raising to 3♥, as some North's will do, East can enter the bidding and West can compete to 3♠. While 3♠ goes down 1, despite the 4-1 break, 3♥ makes 3.

West	North	East	South
			1 ♥
Dbl	2 ♥	2 ♠	3 ♥
3 ♠	All Pass		

**Sample Hands:**  
**Equal Level Correction Double**

Dlr:South ♠ 6  
 Vul:N-S ♥ K 8 5 3 2  
 ♦ J 10 7 5  
 ♣ J 10 7

♠ J 8 7 3	N W     E S	♠ K Q 10 9 5
♥ 7		♥ 10 9
♦ K Q		♦ 9 6 4 2
♣ A K Q 9 6 2		♣ 8 5

♠ A 4 2  
 ♥ A Q J 6 4  
 ♦ A 8 3  
 ♣ 4 3

Here again, East-West locate their spade fit, and in this case, East bids over North's preemptive 3♥. West with a strong second suit bids game which makes. Had West overcalled 2♣, East would be taking a greater risk in entering the bidding.

West	North	East	South
			1 ♥
Dbl	3 ♥	3 ♠	Pass
4 ♠	All Pass		

Dlr:South ♠ J 3  
 Vul:Both ♥ K 7 5  
 ♦ 10 8 5 2  
 ♣ 9 7 6 5

♠ A 10 9 6 2	N W     E S	♠ K 7 5 4
♥ A		♥ 10 6 3 2
♦ 6 4		♦ K 9
♣ K J 10 4 3		♣ A 8 2

♠ Q 8  
 ♥ Q J 9 8 4  
 ♦ A Q J 7 3  
 ♣ Q

In this hand, West, with only a moderate 5-card spade suit, chooses to hedge his/her bets by doubling and is rewarded with an invitational spade raise.

West	North	East	South
			1 ♥
Dbl	2 ♥	3 ♠	Pass
4 ♠	All Pass		

**Sample Hands:**  
**Equal Level Correction Double**

Dlr:South      ♠ A J 10 9 6  
 Vul:E-W        ♥ 10 7 5 4 2  
                   ♦ 7 5  
                   ♣ J

♠ Q 8 5 3	N	♠ K 7 4 2
♥ Q	W	♥ 8
♦ J 4	E	♦ K Q 10 8 3
♣ A K Q 10 7 2	S	♣ 9 8 4

♠  
 ♥ A K J 9 6 3  
 ♦ A 9 6 2  
 ♣ 6 5 3

North's initial jump raise is weak, so North bids 4♦. West either has a balanced opening hand with diamond support or 4 spades for a 4-4 spade fit. West corrects to 4♠, showing not a strong hand with a long spade suit, but 4 spades and a strong club suit. With a strong spade suit, West would likely have bid spades initially. After the penalty double, East escapes to 5♣, West's longer suit. While 5♣ goes down 1 played from the East (1 club, 1 diamond, 1 spade—and no ruff), North-South make game, if they can find it.

West	North	East	South
			1 ♥
Dbl	3 ♥	4 ♦	4 ♥
4 ♠	Dbl	5 ♣	Dbl
All Pass			

Dlr:South      ♠ J 5 3  
 Vul:Both        ♥  
                   ♦ 10 8 6 5 3 2  
                   ♣ J 9 4 2

♠ Q 7 4 2	N	♠ A 8 6
♥ K 7 2	W	♥ J 10 9 5 4
♦ A	E	♦ Q 7 4
♣ A Q 8 5 3	S	♣ 7 6

♠ K 10 9  
 ♥ A Q 8 6 3  
 ♦ K J 9  
 ♣ K 10

In this rather ordinary hand, West chooses to correct to 2♣ and East with no reason to bid on passes. Ironically, East-West can make 2 in South's suit. 1NT is a better contract than 2♣, but better than 2♠—and better to ask than to wonder.

West	North	East	South
			1 ♥
Dbl	Pass	1 NT	Pass
2 ♣	All Pass		