CUEBIDDING THE OPPONENTS' SUIT

This lesson covers various meanings of cuebids of the opponent's bid suit. When your side bids a suit that the opponents have bid first, it is rarely natural. In some situations the cuebid has a very specific definition. In others, it is simply a non-descriptive way of forcing partner to bid.

This lesson is NOT about "control-bidding" (showing controls for slam), which is (confusingly) also often referred to as "cuebidding".

It would be impossible to cover, in one lesson, all the situations in which one might cuebid; the purpose of this paper is to summarize and briefly define many common situations in which a cuebid may be used. The definitions offered are in some cases my recommendations (where more than one interpretation is possible), but are usually "Standard American".

If you are unsure what your partner's cuebid means, just make your most natural bid. Cuebids are forcing!

NEVER PASS A CUEBID BECAUSE YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT IT MEANS!

NOTE: In the example bidding sequences, the CUEBID IS THE <u>UNDERLINED</u> BID. Opponents' bids are in parentheses ( ).

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1)   **MICHAELS**

North		East		
(1♣)	-	<u>2♣</u>	=	Both Majors – at least 5-5
(1♦)	-	<u>2♦</u>	=	Both Majors – at least 5-5
(1♥)	-	<u>2♥</u>	=	5-card ♠'s + 5-cards in an unspecified minor
(1♠)	-	<u>2♠</u>	=	5-card ♥'s + 5-cards in an unspecified minor

A DIRECT CUEBID of the opponent's one-level opening bid should be Michaels. While this is a convention you should discuss with your partner, it is fairly "Standard", and is NOT alertable. More specific requirements, as well as follow-up bidding, is the subject of a separate lesson.

Note: If the auction starts (1♣) – P – (1NT) - 2♣ should still be Michaels. The same is true regardless of which suit is opened.

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2)   **Cuebid = STAYMAN**

West		North		East
1NT	-	(2♦)	-	<u>3♦</u>

When the opponents overcall with 2-of a suit after your 1NT opening, a cuebid is the equivalent of Stayman, asking partner for a four-card major.

3)   **Cuebid = LIMIT RAISE OR BETTER**

When partner opens with One-of-a-Suit and the next hand overcalls, a cuebid promises a limit raise or better in support of the suit opened (10+ *support points*). This is in keeping with the modern style of preemptive jumps in competition. For example:

	West		North		East
a)	1♦	-	(1♠)	-	3♦ = Preemptive Jump Raise
					2♠ = Limit Raise or better in ♦'s
			or		

	West		North		East
b)	1♥	-	(2♣)	-	3♥ = Preemptive Jump Raise
					3♣ = Limit Raise or better in ♥'s

When partner's opening bid is a major, responder's cuebid may be made with three-card support or better (unlike limit raises without interference, which promise at least four-card support).

When partner's opening bid is a minor, the cuebidder would ideally have at least five-card support, but may sometimes have only four and no other descriptive bid.
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4)   **DIRECT Cuebids when THEY OPEN WITH A PREEMPT**

	North		East
a)	(2♦)	-	3♦
b)	(3♣)	-	4♣
c)	(3♦)	-	4♦

Any of the above cuebids should show both majors.

If the opening is two or three of a *major*, the cuebid is less clearly defined. "Standard" bidding would dictate that a cuebid, such as (3♥) - 4♥ would show *any* strong two-suited hand. It is currently popular to treat a cuebid of a *Weak-Two* opening as "Stopper Asking", which works in conjunction with an advanced convention called "Leaping Michaels."

Unless you are advanced players, with a regular partnership which has discussed this situation, it's probably best to avoid those bids. Fortunately, this issue won't come up often.

In some of the following situations, the cuebid is essentially *asking* partner for more information, without *showing* anything in particular. **As a rule, if partner cuebids and you do not recognize the context, assume that you should answer with your most natural descriptive bid.**

5) **Cuebidding after a Takeout Double**

South	West	North	East
(1♦)	Double	(P)	2♦

When partner makes a Takeout Double, a cuebid is the *only* forcing response. A jump in a new suit would be *invitational, not forcing.*

The cuebid in response to the Takeout Double does not promise anything specific, but is usually a good hand (at least game-invitational), which is unsure as to what strain the partnership belongs in. The doubler is expected to bid her cheapest four-card suit, unless she has a five-card suit to bid.

This type of cuebid is common at higher levels of bidding as well; e.g. 3♣ - X - P - 4♣.

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6) **Cuebidding in response to partner's overcall**

South	West	North	East
(1♣)	1♥	(P)	2♣

When partner overcalls a one-level opening, a new suit is NOT forcing. A cuebid is the only way to force. Therefore, while the cuebidder *usually* has a limit raise or better in partner's suit, she may, alternatively, have any very strong hand that wants to force partner to bid.

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7) **Cuebidding to ASK for a stopper**

In many situations, a cuebid of the opponent's suit is an attempt to get to 3NT if partner has a stopper. Even if you are not sure this is the cuebidder's intention, it is usually best, if it seems like that *might* be what partner is doing, to bid 3NT with a stopper. Essentially, this is simply making the most natural bid you can, when partner's cuebid is not specifically defined. For example:

South	West	North	East
1♥	(1♠)	2♣	(P)
3♣	(P)	3♠	

The responder probably wants opener to bid 3NT with a spade stopper.

8) **Cuebidding to SHOW a Stopper**

When the opponents have bid TWO suits, and you end up looking for Notrump, a cuebid *presumably* SHOWS a stopper in the suit bid. For example:

South	West	North	East
1♣	(1♦)	1♠	(2♥)
3♣	(P)	3♥	

The 3♥ bid would be presumed to **show** something in hearts, and ask partner to bid 3NT with diamonds covered. It is also possible that the 3♥ bidder has no intention of playing in 3NT, and is just using 3♥ as a forcing bid, to elicit more information.

ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR MORE ADVANCED PLAYERS

A) Natural "CUEBIDS"

1- A "cuebid" should be *NATURAL* if the bidder passes originally over a opponent's bid of a suit, then bids that suit later, **without partner having bid**. For example:

North	East	South	West
(1♣)	P	(1♠)	P
(2♠)	3♣		

East's 3♣ bid is clearly natural. But if W had overcalled (2♥, in this case) 3♣ then would be a cuebid.

2- The discussion of Michaels (see page 1) assumed that the opponent's opening bid was natural. Sometimes the opening bid is alerted, in which case I recommend the following:

- If their opening bid is **completely artificial** (e.g., a Precision 1♣ opening), your "cuebid" of their suit (2♣, in this case) should be NATURAL - showing a club suit.

- If they alert the opening bid, and announce "could be short", yet the bid promises at least two cards in that suit, treat it as a natural bid, which means that your cuebids would still be Michaels.

B) Cuebids by the opening bidder

South	West	North	East
1♣	(P)	1♠	(2♥)
3♥			

A cuebid by the opening bidder does NOT promise support for responder's suit. A jump to 3♠ by opener would <u>not</u> have been weak, so opener does not need the cuebid to show support in the same way responder does on an auction such as 1♠ - (2♥) - 3♥.
   In the example auction, it is likely that opener has a strong hand with long clubs, and wants partner to bid 3NT with a heart stopper.

C)   "Sandwich" CUEBIDS

"Sandwich seat" means that you are in fourth position, and the opponents have bid two suits at the one level. For example:

Opener	Partner	Responder	You
(1♦)	P	(1♠)	2♦ or 2♠?

Nearly all experts would treat a bid of responder's suit (2♠ in this case) as a Natural bid in this type of auction. Some would also treat opener's suit (2♦ in this case) as Natural, leaving either double or 2NT as your only Takeout bids (some also play 1NT as T.O. here – "sandwich NT"). Others prefer for the cuebid of opener's suit to be a "Michaels" type bid (5-5 in the other suits). I strongly suggest you avoid making ANY of these bids unless you have explicitly discussed them with your partner in advance.

Advanced players section, continued:

JUMP CUEBIDS
The meaning will depend on the situation. Some examples:

D)   A *jump* cuebid is often used as a Splinter Bid. If partner opens at the one-level, and RHO overcalls, Splinters should definitely apply. For example:

      a)   1♠   -   (2♣)   -   <u>4♣</u>
                         or
      b)   1♣   -   (1♠)   -   <u>3♠</u>

E)   How about a *DIRECT JUMP CUEBID*? Most play it as natural and preemptive in the minors, but as a "stopper ask" in the majors. Specifically:

      a) (1♣) - <u>3♣</u> OR (1♦)- <u>3♦</u>   is natural and preemptive.

      b) (1♥) - <u>3♥</u> OR (1♠) - <u>3♠</u>   asks partner to bid 3NT with a stopper in the opponent's suit. The jump cuebidder has a good hand with a long minor and expects to take nine tricks if partner can bid 3NT. Without a stopper, the partner would bid 4♣ (or 5♣ with a better hand) to play in the jump cuebidder's minor.

F)   How about a jump cuebid in response to partner's one-level major suit overcall? Something known as "**MIXED RAISES**" has become a nearly universal treatment amongst high-level tournament players. A "mixed" raise shows a mixture of high cards and distribution, with four-card trump support. The strength is too much for a preemptive jump raise, but not enough for a limit raise (about 7-9 pts.).   For example:

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
(1♦)	1♥	(P)	<u>3♦</u>

South's 3♦ bid shows four-card heart support, and about 7-9 HCP.

SUMMARY (all levels)

Whenever you are in a situation in which you want to force partner to bid, but are not sure how to do so, consider a cuebid - assuming the opponents have bid a suit, of course ☺. Cuebids can be made in many additional auctions, which have not been defined in this paper.

When in doubt as to the meaning of partner's cuebid, assume she wants more information from you and make your most natural bid. This will often, but not always, be to bid Notrump with a stopper in the opponent's suit.

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