

Fully Qualified, Forcing or Not Forcing

Top and Bottom Cuebids, Episode 7

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Top and Bottom cuebids are a way of showing two suited hands when the opponents have opened the bidding in front of you. This is important because such hands come up with enough frequency that a technique for competing with two suited hands is needed. Some folks like the Michaels Cuebid. I do NOT. That is NOT with a capital N. The ambiguity of the suits has always bothered me. With the Michaels Cuebid, you can show both Majors, you can show both Minors, you can show the remaining Major with an unknown Minor. You cannot show a specific Major-Minor combination.

I greatly prefer the Top and Bottom cuebid for a variety of reasons. Back in the 1940's when I was young, a French bridge player, Pierre Ghestem, invented a primitive form of the Top and Bottom cuebid. It was called Ghestem. In this article I offer some refinements and useful guidelines which apply reasonable parameters to the concept.

The basic concept of this cuebid serves to show a two suited hand: 5/5 or better following an opening bid by your opponent. As in Michaels, it is a DIRECT cuebid. That means that the bid is made by the Overcaller, the person immediately to the left of the opener. The following illustrates the concept positionally. The outstanding beauty of Top and Bottom cuebidding is that it allows you to show ANY two suits you may hold and you can do it IMMEDIATELY!

Opener LHO Responder RHO

1♦ 2♦

In the bidding pattern above, 2♦ is a direct cuebid. In the following example, 2♦ is NOT a direct cuebid.

Opener LHO Responder RHO

1♦ PASS PASS 2♦

In this example, 2♦ is most likely a very big takeout Double.

Examples of Direct cuebids and their meanings when using Top and Bottom.

Direct cuebid shows the top and the bottom suits

Jump to 3♣ shows the two top suits

Jump to 2NT shows the two bottom suits

Opener LHO **Meaning**

1♣ 2♣ The Top suit and the Bottom Suit, Spades & Diamonds

1♦ 2♦ The Top suit and the Bottom Suit, Spades & Clubs

1♥ 2♥ The Top suit and the Bottom Suit, Spades & Clubs

1♠ 2♠ The Top suit and the Bottom Suit, Hearts & Clubs

When the opponents open, an immediate jump to 3♣ shows the two top suits. This bid is Alertable.

1♣ 3♣ (*) The two Top suits, Spades & Hearts **Alertable**

1♦ 3♣ (*) The two Top suits, Spades & Hearts **Alertable**

1♥ 3♣ (*) The two Top suits, Spades & Diamonds **Alertable**

1♠ 3♣ (*) The two Top suits, Hearts & Diamonds **Alertable**

The Unusual 2NT is part and parcel of Top and Bottom and shows the two lowest of unbid suits.

1♣ 2NT The two lowest of unbid suits, Diamonds and Hearts

1♦ 2NT The two lowest of unbid suits, Clubs & Hearts

1♥ 2NT The two lowest of unbid suits, Clubs & Diamonds

1♠ 2NT The two lowest of unbid suits, Clubs & Diamonds

Top and Bottom cuebids are CONSTRUCTIVE! The bid shows a minimum of 8 HCP and if you have a minimum, your HCP are concentrated in your two suits, NOT outside.

Let's talk about the benefits of the Top and Bottom pattern.

Your hand is not worthless

Your partner knows exactly what your two suits are

Partner knows if you have a fit IMMEDIATELY

Partner can consider distributional values IMMEDIATELY

Partner does not need to ask what your other suit is, as in Michaels

Partner knows whether or not to sacrifice right away

Partner knows whether to declare or defend right away

Some theory regarding your response to partner's Top and Bottom cuebid.

Advancer should jump a level with a good fit and 9-11 HCP

Advancer should bid game with a good fit and great distribution

If partner who made the Top and Bottom Bid, makes a second bid, they have a great hand.

Here's an example I played on BBO recently. South was the Dealer.

NORTH	
♠ K853	
♥ 9	
♦ Q5	
♣ J107543	
WEST	EAST
♠ 2	♠ A107
♥ KQJ54	♥ 10876
♦ A10986	♦ K742
♣ A9	♣ 86
SOUTH	
♠ QJ964	
♥ A32	
♦ J3	
♣ KQ2	

The Bidding:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
			1♠
3♣	3♠	4♥	Passout

West's 3♣ bid was Top and Bottom showing the two top suits, Hearts and Diamonds. North's 3♠ bid show a poor hand with Spade support. Since East has a great fit in BOTH of partner's suits, 4♥ seems like a great place to land. As you can see, 4♥ is cold.

Let's look at another BBO hand. South is the Dealer.

NORTH	
♠ 87	
♥ A1083	
♦ J643	
♣ 652	
WEST	EAST

♠ K10982	♠ QJ3	
♥ 5	♥ 642	
♦ A5	♦ KQ872	
♣ AQJ43	♣ 107	SOUTH
	♠ A64	
	♥ KQJ97	
	♦ 109	
	♣ K98	

The Bidding:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
			1♥
2♥	3♥	3♠	Pass
4♠	Passout		

West's 2♥ bid was Top and Bottom showing Spades and Clubs. East shows a preference for Spades but not a game forcing hand. Since East did not have to bid, 3♠ is a hand with Spades and values to bid at the 3 level. When East bids Spades, West is comfortable bidding 4♠.

Perhaps this final hand best expresses the beauty of the Top and Bottom pattern.

	NORTH		
	♠	AJ1082	
	♥	1082	
	♦	J6542	
	♣		
WEST		EAST	
♠ K10982		♠ 3	
♥ 5		♥ K64	
♦ A5		♦ KQ87	
♣ AQJ43		♣ K10762	
	SOUTH		
	♠	Q4	
	♥	AQJ97	
	♦	A109	
	♣	985	

The Bidding:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
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1♥
2♥ 4♥ 5♣ Passout

In this example, N/S are cold for 4♥. East however knows that West's second suit is a 5 card Club suit and makes the sacrifice of 5♣. Having the knowledge of partners two suits is a fantastic advantage that gives Top and Bottom cuebids a claim to fame.

What you surrender. Sometimes you have to give something up in order to gain something. There are trade-offs everywhere. If you choose to play Top and Bottom cuebids, you have to surrender the 3♣ jump overcall meaning a long Club suit and a weak hand. Now the jump overcall of 3♣ means the two top suits. This bid is Alertable. I have been playing Top and Bottom for decades. Do I regret losing the ability to preempt in clubs in the immediate overcall position? Not at all. You decide what your partnership wants to do. ♣on Top and Bottom cuebids. ♣