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**THE UNUSUAL
NO TRUMP**

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edited by
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As an addition to the clarification of this conventional defense method it must be noted that the above illustrated pamphlet was originally published by the Devyn Press as part of the Championship Bridge Series in the year 1981 by the author, Mr. Alvin Roth. As one of the two original authors he made several, sometimes subtle and sometimes substantial changes to his original concept of the Unusual No Trump conventional defense method, which he developed together with Mr. Tobias Stone in the year 1948.

It must also be noted that the content of the pamphlet, written by Mr. Alvin Roth and edited by Mr. Ron Andersen, deviated in various ways from the original concept and is accepted by the collective bridge community to illustrate the element of *variations on a theme*, even though those variations originate with the author.

The most substantive and most relevant portion is presented below for the benefit of the bridge player. However, in order to prevail upon the entire content by purchasing this publication is, without a doubt, the most favorable manner for the individual bridge player. This synopsis, this brief and general review is only a summary.

Many bridge players, who read this pamphlet for the first time, may be confused by the content and question whether or not the author is truly only theorizing. The substance of this variation lies in the fact that any concept can be, may be altered, revised, changed, and varied to meet the necessary requirements of the bridge player and partner under prevailing circumstances. This is the essence of any devised conventional method, whether employed in defense or offense, in the game of bridge.

It is with/from this perspective, this subjective evaluation of relative significance to/for the individual bridge player that the content is to be understood, and employed or not employed.



The Unusual No Trump is a popular convention, devised to convey in a single competitive bid the information that the defensive bidder has two long suits - usually, the minor suits. Generally, it is used with a relatively weak hand (less than a sound opening bid in high cards), with considerable playing strength, or with a strong hand (at least 15 HCPs). With intermediate hands overcall in the higher ranking suit. There are four questions concerning the Unusual No Trump which every partnership that plays it must answer. (1) When is a no trump overcall unusual and not natural? (2) Which suits are shown by an Unusual No Trump? (3) What are the requirements? (4) What are the responses? This pamphlet is designed to answer these four questions.

When is a No Trump Overcall Unusual?

To avoid confusion between the unusual and the natural no trump bid, confine your unusual no trump overcalls to these five situations:

- (1) Any direct jump overcall to 2NT,
- (2) Any direct overcall in no trump by a passed hand

For example:

(a)	North	East	South	West
	Pass	1 ♥	Pass	2 ♥
	2 NT	Unusual	No Trump	

(b)	Pass	1 ♥	Pass	1 ♠
	1 NT	Unusual	No Trump	

(c)	Pass	1 ♠	Pass	Pass
	1 NT	Balancing	No Trump; hence natural, not unusual.	

(3) Any overcall in no trump after an opponent's no trump opening or response to an opening bid

(a)	North	East	South	West
	1 NT	2 NT	Unusual	No Trump

(b)	1 ♠	Pass	1 NT	2 NT - Unusual No Trump; with a natural, strong no trump you would simply have doubled 1 NT
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(c)	1 ♥	Pass	2 NT	3 NT - Unusual No Trump
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(4) Overcalling in No Trump when opponents have shown strong hands

For example:

North	East	South	West
2 ♣*	2 NT	Unusual	No Trump

* Strong, artificial and forcing

(5) Balancing with a no trump bid after opponents have stopped in a low level major suit contract

For example:

North	East	South	West
1 ♠	Pass	2 ♠	Pass
Pass	2 NT	Unusual	No Trump

Although the Unusual No Trump can be extended to cover other situations, most partnerships are best advised to confine its usage to these five. Remember, some no trump overcalls must be reserved as natural bids.

Which Suits Are Shown by An Unusual No Trump?

There are two possible answers to the question - which suits are shown by an Unusual No Trump? By partnership agreement, it shows either the minors or the two lower unbid suits. We prefer the latter, which is more flexible. Also, it eliminates ambiguity when the opening bid is one of a minor if over 1♣ or 1♦ an Unusual No Trump always shows hearts plus the other minor.

Do not misunderstand, there is nothing wrong with an agreement that an Unusual No Trump always promises the minors. With this understanding, even over a 1♣ or 1♦ opening, 2NT should show both minors.

Irrespective of your agreement, an Unusual No Trump over a strong, artificial minor suit opening (including 2♣ or 2♦) should always show the minors.

Requirements

The requirements for an Unusual No trump overcall depend on the vulnerability, the level of the auction and your position at the table. Obviously, it takes less to balance with an Unusual No Trump after the enemy has stopped in a low-level contract than to make a direct jump to 2NT over an opening bid.

Since a direct Unusual No Trump is an overcall in two suits at the same time, it promises at least five cards in each of the lower unbid suits, usually the minors.

In general, the better your distribution, the fewer points you need.

At equal vulnerability, we would jump to 2 NT over an opening 1♠ with either:

(a) ♠ K7 ♥ 5 ♦ KQ1095 ♣ KJ1094

or

(b) ♠ 6 ♥ 8 ♦ QJ10954 ♣ AJ1093

The key to sound Unusual No Trump overcalls is the quality of your two suits. We would not use the Unusual No Trump with:

(c) ♠ KJ ♥ Q ♦ Q9763 ♣ KJ432

or

(d) ♠ A ♥ KQ ♦ J7542 ♣ Q8652

Although you have ample high card strength, the minor suits in both (c) and (d) are far too weak. Since an Unusual No trump is an overcall in two suits simultaneously at the three-level, you cannot use it when your suits are not good enough, as in (d), to mention even at the level of one.

The Unusual No Trump can be constructive, competitive or preemptive. All depends on the circumstances. Typically, it shows less than the values for an opening bid. The Unusual No trump has one thing in common with natural no trump openings and direct 1NT overcalls. With normal 5-5 or even 6-5 patterns, you do not have to bid again to confirm your fine distribution and playing strength.

Partner heard you the first time. If he permits the opponents to play the hand in spite of your bid, do not overrule him; he is in a far better position to judge how far our side should compete that you are. The exceptions are when you are 6-6 in your two suits or when you have the strong Unusual No trump hand. Raise his bid on the former and cue bid on the latter.

Responding To An Unusual No Trump

To bid accurately when partner makes an Unusual No Trump overcall, responder must keep in mind:

1. That partner usually has shown a **minimum** of ten cards (5-5) in his two suits; and,
2. Partner's playing strength is based on the level, vulnerability, and position. (Remember, the better his distribution is, the less he may hold in high card strength.)

Responding To A Direct Unusual No Trump

- (a) Choose between partner's suits. At the lowest level, this mere choice is not encouraging or invitational
- (b) Jump in one of partner's suits, which is invitational
- (c) Jump to game in one of partner's suits, expecting to make it. Alternatively, it may be preemptive, an advance save against a likely enemy game.
- (d) Cue Bid the enemy suit, which is forcing and suggest at least game interest with a good fit for one or both of partner's suits.
- (e) Introduce a suit not shown by partner's Unusual No Trump. This is a sign-off, showing a self-sufficient suit, but no interest in either or partner's.

AND, RARELY:

- (f) Pass 2NT with NO tolerance for either of partner's suits and the other suits well-stopped.
- (g) Raise to 3NT with the other suits well-stopped and adequate playing strength, usually including some fillers in one of partner's suits.

OPTIONAL:

- (h) A jump to the four-level in the enemy suit asks partner to bid his better suit. By inference, responder has support for both and values for game.
- (i) 4NT asks for aces if you use (h); otherwise, 4NT asks partner to pick the trump suit, which is the usual treatment.

Rather than memorizing a long list of rules and guidelines for the various responses to the Unusual No Trump, try to visualize partner's hand. First, you see two long suits. Then, it becomes apparent that high cards in the majors (except for Aces) are practically worthless; minor suit values (even Jacks), on the other hand, are worth their weight in gold.

Let's consider a few examples:

(1) Opener Partner Opponent You
 1 ♠ 2NT Pass ???

(a) ♠ J10542 ♥ A52 ♦ K1074 ♣ J7

Bid 3♣. Do not consider passing 2NT or introducing your poor five-card suit; you must choose one of partner's.

(b) ♠ 7632 ♥ Q7632 ♦ K1074 ♣ J10

Bid 4♦. You have an excellent fit for partner's diamonds, and both your Heart A and club holding should prove helpful. Invite game.

(c) ♠ QJ2 ♥ KQJ1095 ♦ 74 ♣ 85

Bid 3♥. A rare example where you should introduce your own suit. Partner is expected to respect your decision.

(2) Opener You Opponent Partner
 1NT* Pass 2♦* 2NT
 Pass ???

*No Trump = 15-17 range

*Forcing Stayman

♠ 653 ♥ 982 ♦ QJ ♣ K10762

Jump to 5♣. Your opponents surely have a fit in the majors and the 2♦ (forcing Stayman) response indicates that they have at least sufficient strength for game. Preempt. You have an excellent hand for a cheap sacrifice.

(3) Partner RHO You LHO
 Pass 1♠ Pass 2♥
 2NT Pass ???

♠ K104 ♥ QJ105 ♦ A1076 ♣ 52

Bid 3♦. In other circumstances this might be worth a stronger response. Partner is a passed hand and he is doubtless looking for a sacrifice. With your fine defensive values against the majors, it is clearly best to make a discouraging response and hope the opponents get overboard.

(4)	You	LHO	Partner	RHO
	Pass	1♥	Pass	2♥
	Pass	Pass	2NT	Pass
	???			

♠ A743 ♥ 76 ♦ A10 ♣ J10762

Do not punish partner for balancing. He is already bidding some of your cards and may hold as little as:

♠ 85 ♥ 984 ♦ KJ95 ♣ KQ53 or

♠ 92 ♥ J3 ♦ QJ763 ♣ A984

Other Uses For The Unusual No Trump

There are a couple of situations where the Unusual No Trump can and should be used by the side that opens the bidding or has already overcalled in a minor suit. consider the following auctions:

(a)	North	East	South	West
	1♥	2♣	2♥	Pass
	Pass	2NT		

Obviously, East wishes to compete and his 2NT suggest that he holds four diamonds in addition to five or six clubs. Had East's second suit been spades he could have bid 2♠ over 2♥ without carrying the level beyond three of his primary suit/; and with a 3-1-4-5 distribution, he would have either made a direct take-out double or re-opened with that bid.

In this auction West is given a choice between diamonds and clubs:

(b)	North	East	South	West
	1♣*	1♠	Pass	4♠
	4NT			
	*Natural			

The opener cannot be asking for Aces, so his 4 NT must be the Unusual No Trump, showing four diamonds, longer clubs and asking partner to choose.

(c)	South	West	North	East
	1♥	1♠	Pass	2♠
	Pass	Pass	2NT	

North cannot wish to play in 2NT since he could not bid over 1♠. He must have a weak hand with length in both minors.

Thoughtful partnerships also use the Unusual No Trump responding to take-out doubles, when it is clear that a no trump bid could be neither natural nor an inquiry.

(a)	South	West	North	East
	Pass	1♥	Double	4♥
	4NT			

As a passed hand, South here cannot be using the Blackwood convention. So he must be asking partner to bid his better minor.

(b)	South	West	North	East
	1♥	Double	1♠	Pass
	2♣	Pass	Pass	2NT

East's 2NT bid is obviously unusual since with sufficient values to play in 2NT he would have acted directly over 1♠.

Used with discretion the Unusual No Trump can be a most effective weapon. But it should only be used under two conditions:

- (1) When you have reasonable hope of buying the contract either as a sacrifice or a make. There must be compensation for the assistance you often give the enemy in the play of the hand.
- (2) When there can be no doubt that the bidder's no trump is Unusual.

Defending Against Unusual No Trump

To compete effectively after an Unusual No Trump overcall, it is necessary to make certain adjustments to a few of the usual responses and rebids. There will enable you to turn the enemy's bidding to your own advantage. And if you buy the contract, the Unusual No Trump should help you materially in the play.

Most Unusual No Trump overcalls follow the opening bids in a major. We advise the following structure of responses.

UNUSUAL OVER UNUSUAL		
<u>Opener</u>	<u>Opponent</u>	<u>Responder</u>
1♥ / 1♠	2NT*	???
*for Minors		

Three of Opener's Major: Competitive raise; non-forcing and not highly invitational
Three of the Other Major: NON-FORCING, competitive bid.
3♣: Strong, forcing 3♥ bid if partner has opened 1♠. Limit raise or better if partner has opened 1♥.
3♦: Strong, forcing 3♠ bid if partner has opened 1♥. Limit raise or better if partner has opened 1♠.
4♣/4♦: Splinter bid in support of partner's suit.
3NT: Strong, balanced raise of opener's major.
Double: Interest in doubling one, or both, minors. Opener is invited to double any bid by the partner of the Unusual No Trump bidder or to pass it to you.

Using these methods, what action would you take in the following auctions:

(1) Partner RHO You
1♥ 2NT ???

(Both sides vulnerable)

(a) ♠ KQJ1085 ♥ J10 ♦ 73 ♣ 984

Bid 3♠. Although you are short of the values for a standard, forcing 3♠ call, here 3♠ is non-forcing and purely competitive.

(b) ♠ KJ105 ♥ K1095 ♦ AQJ6 ♣ 7

JUMP TO 4♣. A splinter bid in support of hearts.

(c) ♠ A1074 ♥ 43 ♦ KJ10 ♣ QJ105

DOUBLE. You have excellent defense against the minors and no fit for partner. This is the type of hand that might produce a large set against 3♣ or 3♦ when your side cannot even make game.

(2) Opener Opponent Responder
 1NT 2NT ???
 (Neither side vulnerable)

(a) ♠ K5 ♥ AKJ1054 ♦ 8732 ♣ 7

BID 3♣: Strong, forcing 3♥ bid. Remember, 3♥ over 2NT would be non-forcing.

(b) ♠ K1054 ♥ A52 ♦ A432 ♣ 97

BID 3♦. Describing your limit raise in spades.

(c) ♠ Q1093 ♥ AJ105 ♦ 763 ♣ 104

BID 3♠. Competitive raise; non-forcing and denies the values for a limit raise.

When an Unusual No Trump overall is used after your side opens 1NT we recommend the following responses:

UNUSUAL OVER UNUSUAL

<u>Opener</u>	Opponent	Responder
1NT	2NT	???

3♣: Stayman
3♦: Transfer to 3♥ (if you play transfers)
3♥: Transfer to 3♠ (if you play transfers)
3♠: 5-5 in the majors: forcing to game. (If you play transfers)
3NT: Natural, sign-off
 All four-level bids carry their non-competitive meaning.
Double: Interest in doubling one, or both minors.

These methods enable you to locate four-four major suit fits, use transfers when responder has a long major, and penalize 3♣ or 3♦ when he has good defense against the minors.

As a general rule, most doubles of the Unusual No trump, either by opener or by responder, show interest in doubling one of the suits, and usually both, promised by the Unusual No trump.

These treatments and adjustments will help you to counter the Unusual No trump, but you will not find in them a master key to unlock all doors, for there is none.

In practice, we attempt to follow the sage advice of S. J. Simon, the great British expert, whose philosophy in competitive auctions was *Get the best result possible; not necessarily the best possible result.*

We have found this good advice in resolving just about all bridge problems.