

AN "UNUSUAL" CONVENTION

You are sitting South with this hand:

South
♠ K85
♥ K
♦ AJ853
♣ AK109

When you pick up this hand it values to about 18 points. Before you can open, East opens in front of you with 1♠. What do you do now?

You can't double because partner will probably advance in hearts and you have no tolerance for that suit. You could pass and come in on the next round after you hear from partner. You could overcall in diamonds or clubs. But you might be picking partner worst suit, and you might have a fit in the other minor suit. Another option is to double and bid one of the minors after partner's heart advance. But again, you might be picking the wrong minor suit. The action I recommend is to overcall 2NT.

This is called the Unusual 2 Notrump Convention. When your RHO opens, it would be very, very unusual for you to have a hand that would be strong enough to make a natural 2NT bid. Therefore, this bid is reserved for a two suited hand: the two lowest unbid suits. It can be made with either a weak hand (5-11) or a very strong hand (17+), and should promise at least 5-4 in the two suits. The safest time to use it is when you are not vulnerable and they are vulnerable. This is because your first natural bid must be at the 3-level and with a weak or mini unusual notrump, you often go set for a trick or two.

After your 2NT overcall, LHO responds 3♥ and your partner advances with 4♣. With a maximum unusual hand, you planned to take another bid. In this case, your partner had a free bid, so his 4♣ bid suggests he has extras. You should bid the game. Even if you go down a few tricks doubled, your score will be less than the opponents' score if they can make a vulnerable major suit game. East doubles your game bid.

East leads the ♥A and you take over for North:

North
♠ A97
♥ Q
♦ 9642
♣ 85432

East
♥A

South
♠ K85
♥ K
♦ AJ853
♣ AK109

| | | | |
|------|-------|------|----------|
| West | North | East | South |
| 3♥ | 4♣ | 1♠ | 2NT |
| Pass | Pass | Pass | 5♣ |
| | | Dbl | All Pass |

Playing in the North position, East leads the ♥A. You see a possible club loser, a spade and 1 or 2 diamond losers to go along with the heart loser. You can afford 5 losers assuming East/West can make a game. If they would have ended in a part score, you can only afford 3 losers.

The standard way to play the clubs is to start with the ♣A to catch a singleton honor. Sure enough, West dropped the ♣J. Go to the dummy with a spade and finesse the ♣9. The finesse is successful and that's one loser eliminated. Now for the diamonds. You have to hope for a 2-2 break so lead the ♦A and another diamond. The diamonds are 2-2 and the ♦KQ crash onto each other. East returns a spade - your third loser. The rest of the tricks are yours.

Notice that East/West can make 2NT or 3 spades. Either way, they would score more than the 100 points they get for setting you

Here is the entire deal:

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| | N North ♠ A97 ♥ Q ♦ 9642 ♣ 85432 | W N E S 3♥ 4♣ 1♠ 2NT P P P X P P P |
| | W West ♠ 106 ♥ J10976432 ♦ Q10 ♣ J | E East ♠ QJ432 ♥ A85 ♦ K7 ♣ Q76 |
| | S South ♠ K85 ♥ K ♦ AJ853 ♣ AK109 | 5♣x N NS: 0 EW: 0 |

You can see how this hand should be played by clicking on this link: <http://tinyurl.com/zdpqjlr>, or copy and paste it into your browser. Click on the “Next” button on the bottom to advance through each trick. Alternatively, by clicking on “Play” you can play all four hands and see if you can make the hand on your own.