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This Week in Bridge

(480) 2-Suited Overcalls: Michaels Cuebid

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Level: 4 of 10 (1 of 6)

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General

When RHO opens the bidding with a suit bid at the 1-level (1♣, 1♦, 1♥, or 1♠), we often compete in the bidding with one long suit by making a simple overcall or preemptive jump overcall, but there are bids available that allow us to compete in the bidding and show two suits with just one bid. One of these bids is the *Michaels Cuebid*. These are powerful competitive bidding tools because they allow us to take away some of the opponents' valuable bidding space, preempt the auction, and show partner both of our two 5+card suits with one call. Let's see how to make use of this convention to show our 2-suited overcalls.

The Michaels Cuebid Overcall

When RHO opens the bidding with a suit at the 1-level, an immediate cuebid of that suit is not natural but is used as a conventional call called a *Michaels Cuebid*. We use this cuebid to show two 5+card suits, either both Majors (if neither Major has been bid) or a Major and a minor (if a Major is bid).

Michaels Auctions

| | | |
|----|----|-------------------------|
| 1♣ | 2♣ | 5+cards in both Majors |
| 1♦ | 2♦ | 5+cards in both Majors |
| 1♥ | 2♥ | 5+♠ and a 5+ card minor |
| 1♠ | 2♠ | 5+♥ and a 5+ card minor |

These bids usually show 2-suited preemptive strength bids, normally about 5-11 HCP (called a minimum Michaels hand). Just as we do for preempting opening bids and jump overcalls, we may vary these HCP based on vulnerability. Non-vulnerable we may have about 4-10 HCP and when vulnerable we are more likely to have about 7-11 HCP.



Example 1

♠ KQ843
♥ KQ532
♦ 93
♣ 5

After a 1♣ opening bid, we make a Michaels Cuebid of 2♣ with this hand. This shows both our 5-card suits in one call. This lets us describe our hand immediately, before the opponents get the auction too high.

Asking for the Michaels Bidder's Minor

When partner uses a Michaels Cuebid that does not show both of their suits then they have the other Major and one of the minors. As the Advancer (the interferer's partner) we can ask them for their minor suit (this is usually done when we do not have a fit for Opener's Major suit).

Example 2

1♠ 2♠ P ___?

With interest in partner's minor suit, we can ask them for their suit. The traditional way of doing so is to bid 2NT. This leaves partner room to show their minor at the 3-level. Some partnerships choose to use 3♣ to ask partner for their minor, called *Pass or Correct*.

Michaels Shape with Stronger Hands

When we have more playing strength than 5-5 and 5-11 HCP then we need to describe our hand in a different way. This can mean having more than 11 HCP or having extra distribution and being at the top of our HCP range.

- With 12-15 HCP and 5-5 shape (or the equivalent playing strength with extra distribution), we overcall our suits naturally. We start by bidding our higher-ranking suit and later bid our lower-ranking suit if we get a chance.
- With 16+ HCP and 5-5 shape (or the equivalent playing strength from extra distribution), we can still use Michaels. This treatment is called "Max-Michaels" and is far less common. When we bid Michaels, partner assumes we have a "Min-Michaels" (5-11 HCP) unless we do something to demonstrate we have this maximum hand. This approach is called Min-Max Michaels.



Strong Michaels Cuebid Auctions

Example 3

1♥ 2♥ P 2♠
P 3♠

By taking a second bid we show a very strong hand - 16-19 pts, 6+♠, 5+minor. This is similar to a “double and bid” auction showing an extremely strong hand with one long suit. By rebidding the ♠ suit we show an additional ♠.

Example 4

1♥ 2♥ P 2♠
P 3♣

With only 5-5 distribution and extra values, 16-19 HCP, 5♠, 5+♣, we show our strength by further describing our hand. Here we show partner our minor, giving them more information for evaluating their hand.

Example 5

1♥ 2♥ P 2NT (or 3♣)
P 3NT

When partner asks for our minor and we have a hand so big we cannot just show it because that is what we would do with a minimum hand, we need something else. With 16+ HCP, 5♠, and a 5+card minor we can show our strong hand and a stopper in the opponent’s suit by bidding 3NT.

Example 6

1♥ 2♥ P 2NT (or 3♣)
P 3♥

With the same strong hand, 16+ HCP, 5♠, and a 5+card minor but no stopper in the opponent’s suit, we can make a Western Cuebid – bidding the opponent’s suit again. This shows our big hand, no extra Major suit shape, and no stopper in the opponent’s suit.

Conclusion

When the opponents open the bidding and we have a shapely hand, it is important for us to compete in the auction immediately. We want to show partner as much information about the hand as we can as quickly as possible. A simple overcall or a preemptive jump overcall allows us to show a hand with one long suit and a variety of different strengths. When we have two long suits, we try to show both of our suits to partner on the first round of the bidding by using a Michaels Cuebid (either both Majors or the unbid Major and a Minor depending on the auction). Having good agreements with your partner about the strength of these actions is important as well. Add this convention to your system; after the opponents open the bidding, it will allow you to better compete with a Major-suit-oriented 2-suited hand.