

Michaels Cue Bid

Michaels is a cue-bid that promises a two-suited hand, with at least five cards in each suit. There is no point minimum for making a Michaels overcall, although obvious factors like vulnerability should be considered. Some partnerships also agree to specific ranges (see "Other Considerations", below).

Michaels works well in conjunction with the Unusual 2NT, which is another convention for two-suited overcalls. See also Leaping Michaels, and the conventional Defense to Michaels.

Michaels Cue Bids

Overcall	Meaning
A 2♣ overcall of 1♣	Shows 5+ hearts and 5+ spades.
A 2♦ overcall of 1♦	Shows 5+ hearts and 5+ spades.
A 2♥ overcall of 1♥	Shows 5+ spades and an unspecified minor (5+ clubs OR diamonds)
A 2♠ overcall of 1♠	Shows 5+ hearts and an unspecified minor (5+ clubs OR diamonds)

As a simple example, consider the following auction:

Opponent 1	Partner	Opponent 2	Overcaller
Pass	Pass	1♣	2♣
♠ AT985			
♥ KQ432			
♦ 4			
♣ 82			

2♣ is Michaels, showing 5+ hearts and 5+ spades.

The Michaels cuebid is forcing. Partner is asked to bid one of the two suits advertised.

Responses to a 2♣ Cuebid (Hearts and Spades)

Response Meaning

- 2♦ Natural, showing a very good diamond suit (usually 6+) since the Michaels cue-bidder usually has only 0-2 diamonds. Tends to deny 3+ card support for either suit. Non-forcing.
- 2♥ A non-forcing sign-off. May have 0 points, since the Michaels overcall is a forcing bid. Note that with equal support for both majors (e.g. ♠xxx ♥xxx), the cheaper suit (hearts) should be bid.
- 2♠ A non-forcing sign-off.
- 2NT Natural and invites partner to bid 3NT IF the partnership has agreed to a specific point range for the Michaels overcall.
- 3♣ Artificial, and shows game or slam interest in hearts or spades. Forcing.
- 3♦ A very strong diamond suit (6+ cards), and is forcing. Rare.
- 3♥ Pre-emptive and usually shows 4 hearts. Non-forcing.
- 3♠ Pre-emptive and usually shows 4 spades. Non-forcing.
- 3NT A natural sign-off. Shows a big balanced hand with no interest in major-suit game. This bid may occur IF the partnership has agreed to a specific point range for the Michaels overcall. Otherwise, it is quite rare since it is so unilateral.

Responses to a 2♦ Cuebid (Hearts and Spades)

Response Meaning

- 2♥ A non-forcing sign-off.
- 2♠ A non-forcing sign-off.
- 2NT Natural and invites partner to bid 3NT IF the partnership has agreed to a specific point range for the Michaels overcall.
- 3♣ Natural, showing a very good club suit (usually 6+) since the Michaels cue-bidder usually has only 0-2 clubs. Non-forcing.
- 3♦ Artificial, and shows game or slam interest in hearts or spades. Forcing.
- 3♥ Pre-emptive and usually shows 4 hearts. Non-forcing.
- 3♠ Pre-emptive and usually shows 4 spades. Non-forcing.
- 3NT A natural sign-off.

Responses to a 2♥ Cuebid (Spades and a Minor)

Response Meaning

- 2♠ A non-forcing sign-off.
- 2NT Asks the Overcaller to bid his minor suit at the 3-level. 2NT may be bid on a variety of hands, but is most commonly used to try signing off in 3♣/♦. Holding ♠xx ♥xx ♦Qxxx ♣Jxxxx, bid 2NT to identify the minor suit fit.
- 3♣ Natural, showing a very good club suit (usually 6+) since the Michaels cue-bidder will usually hold 5+ diamonds, not clubs. Non-forcing.
- 3♦ Natural, showing a very good diamond suit (usually 6+) since the Michaels cue-bidder will usually hold 5+ clubs, not diamonds. Non-forcing.
- 3♥ Artificial, and shows game or slam interest in spades or a minor. Forcing.
- 3♠ Pre-emptive and usually shows 4 spades. Non-forcing.
- 3NT A natural sign-off.

Responses to a 2♠ Cuebid (Hearts and a Minor)

Response Meaning

- 2NT Asks the Overcaller to bid his minor suit at the 3-level.
- 3♣ Natural, showing a very good club suit (usually 6+) since the Michaels cue-bidder will usually hold 5+ diamonds, not clubs. Non-forcing.
- 3♦ Natural, showing a very good diamond suit (usually 6+) since the Michaels cue-bidder will usually hold 5+ clubs, not diamonds. Non-forcing.
- 3♥ A natural sign-off.
- 3♠ Artificial, and shows game or slam interest in hearts or a minor. Forcing.
- 3NT A natural sign-off.

Overcaller's Rebids

- If partner raised the cue-bid, e.g. (1♥) 2♥ : 3♥, the Michaels cue-bidder is expected to bid his cheapest suit at the cheapest level (in this case, 3♠) with a weak hand of around 0-10 points. All other bids show at least 10 points and are game forcing.
- If partner has bid 2NT asking for Overcaller's minor suit, e.g. (1♥) 2♥ : 2NT, the Michaels cue-bidder is expected to bid his minor. If he has clubs, he bids 3♣; if he has diamonds, he bids 3♦.

Other Considerations

- When responding to Michaels with equal length in both of the cue-bidder's suits, bid the cheapest suit first, especially when holding only two doubletons. If partner shows hearts and spades and you hold ♠Kx ♥xx, do not make the mistake of bidding spades, thinking that your king will make spades a better trump suit. If you get doubled in 3♠, there is no turning back, whereas if you bid 3♥, you can run to spades if necessary.
- Some players only use Michaels on weak hands (around 0-10) and strong hands (around 16+). With the intermediate two-suiters of 11-15 points, they bid the higher-ranking suit first and hope they can rebid the other suit at their next turn. Other players simply use Michaels on hands of all point ranges, believing that it is more important to immediately show shape than to only show one suit first and then hope the auction allows them to show the other suit and their 11-15 point range.
- When the opponents have bid TWO suits, there are a couple of possible agreements.

The ACBL's SAYC system stipulates that a cuebid of either suit is Michaels. Easy enough.

However, some experts treat a cue bid of opener's suit as Michaels, while a cue bid of responder's suit is NATURAL, showing an extremely good suit and a decent hand. The latter approach is espoused in Bill Root and Richard Pavlicek's fine book "Modern Bidding Conventions". For example:

Opponent 1 Partner Opponent 2 Overcaller
1♣ Pass 1♠ 2♣

♠6
♥A75432
♦AKT98
♣T

2♣ is Michaels, showing 5+ diamonds and 5+ hearts. Note that a takeout double would show lesser distribution, e.g. 4 diamonds and 4 hearts.

Opponent 1 Partner Opponent 2 Overcaller
1♦ Pass 1♠ 2♠

♠AKJ932
♥A2
♦QT92
♣8

Playing the Root/Pavlicek style, 2♠ is NATURAL. It shows a very good spade suit of at least six cards, and sufficient values for a two-level overcall.

- Over an opening weak two bid, a cue bid promises two unspecified suits and a good hand, with at least five cards in each suit.

Opponent	Overcaller
2♦	3♦

- - ♠KQJ532
 - ♥void
 - ♦63
 - ♣AKQT9
- 3♦ is Michaels, but since it is over a preempt it only promises a good hand with two suits other than diamonds. Partner is expected to bid 3♥ with heart tolerance. Hopefully the cue-bidder can clarify which two suits he holds at his next opportunity; if he has spades and clubs, for example, he can now bid 3♠.
- Do not confuse this bid with a Western cue bid.

Origins

The Michaels convention is named for its inventor, Mike Michaels (1924-1966) of Miami Beach, FL. In their book *Modern Bridge Conventions*, Bill Root and Richard Pavlicek list Michaels as a "bridge writer, lecturer and prominent player." I also received a helpful email from his niece Cassie Stern: "He was an excellent bridge player who unfortunately died in 1966 at the early age of 42 of throat cancer. Charles Goren and he were partners and he ghost wrote for Charles Goren in the newspaper."