

The Michaels Cue Bid

by Mike Michaels

The Michaels Cue Bid (as it has become known) was invented for the purpose of competing with sub-minimum hands without misleading partner. It is nothing more than the combination of a distributional double and a variation of the unusual notrump being substituted in meaning for the game forcing cue bid.

Many times when the opponents open the bidding, we feel that we have something to say. However our hand is not adequate for entry into the auction because of the meaning any action we took would normally convey to our partner. For example, suppose we are not vulnerable and the opponents are. The bidding has proceeded:

Partner	Opponent	We
Pass	1♦	?
We hold:	or:	or:
♠ Jxxxx	♠ QJ9xx	♠ KQxx
♥ AKJx	♥ J9xxx	♥ Axxx
♦ x	♦ Kx	♦ xx
♣ xxx	♣ x	♣ xxx

There is no safe way to enter the bidding. A double would imply more high cards than we own. An overcall would indicate a better suit. We feel that we want to compete, since it could conceivably be our hand, yet no bid is available for us to tell our story.

The Michaels Cue Bid is the answer to hands such as these. By giving the direct cue bid a new meaning, we immediately suggest a hand with the major suits and a range of from 6 to 11 points in high cards. This allows partner the option of selecting a fit, preempting or waiting in the shadows when he has a concentration of minor suit cards.

If partner has the type of hand in which he visualizes a game, he can ask for more information by re-cueing the opened minor. For example, the auction might go:

Opponent	We	Opponent	Partner
1 ♣	2 ♣	Pass	?
	Partner holds:		♠ Kxxxx ♥ Ax ♦ AQx ♣ xxx

He can bid three clubs. This asks us to specify if our bid was at the maximum end of our limit. If it was, we would reply with four clubs, and he selects the game contract. If we had minimum values, we would bid three diamonds, which would permit him to place the contract.

Had we originally cued the diamond suit,

Opponent	We	Opponent	Partner
1 ♦	2 ♦	Pass	3 ♦

Pass	?		
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we would reply 4 ♦ with our maximum, but would bid three hearts as a negative reply even if our hand was

♠ AQJ10x		
♥ Jxxx		
♦ xx		
♣ xx		

because we do not know which major suit partner fits. If partner prefers hearts, and we bid spades, we are forcing the contract to the game level.

Should partner have a notrump type of hand where he needs high cards from us, he invites a game by bidding 2NT in reply. We then evaluate our hand as if he had originally opened with 1NT and carry on accordingly. To illustrate: the auction is:

Opponent	We	Opponent	Partner
1 ♦	2 ♦	Pass	2NT
We hold:	♠ Kxxx		
	♥ AJxx		
	♦ Jxx		
	♣ xx		

If our hand (on this auction) is completely unbalanced such as

♠ QJxxx		
♥ A9xxx		
♦ xx		
♣ x		

we would force a preference by re-cueing diamonds. We should be willing to play game in one of the majors.

A minor suit cue bid then is actually a weak distributional double. It has an upper limit in high card points and promises no specific amount of quick tricks. The soundness of the takeout double is maintained because, by definition, the cue bid's upper limit embraces the lower limit of this takeout double.

People who are interested in using the cue bid for takeout must remember that the beauty of the bid is lost when the controls are violated. One shouldn't make a cue bid merely because his hand is in the 6 to 11 point range. The hand should have the desired shape, and the correct vulnerability situation should exist.

Along with the theme of using the cue bid for a controlled takeout double came the variation of the unusual notrump. This arose from the limits of the cue bid itself followed by an instinct for self-preservation.

When a major suit is cue bid, it forces the partnership to at least two spades. Should partner prefer one of the minors, he has to bid at the three level. If he is busted, a nine trick contract might cost 700 points in penalties. Therefore, a little care must be exercised when cue bidding the major suits. The limit of 11 points in high cards makes entry into the three level far too risky. Factually, the only conceivable distributions, limited in high cards with support for the unbid suits, are 5-4-4-0 or 4-4-4-1. These patterns would be mangled if partner had to select a three-card suit opposite one of

the four-card suits, since this hand would be subjected to the forcing game at trick 1. With a maximum of 10 or 11 points, these distributions would make better takeout doubles than cue bids. However, with TWO-suited hands, the cue bidder would not only be able to withstand a force, but he could keep within the limits of the cue bid itself, as well as safely exert a preemptive influence upon the auction. Since the unusual notrump handles two-suited minor-suit hands, it follows that the major-suit cue bid must consist of a major and a minor. Therefore, as a logical conclusion, the major-suit cue bid is the unusual notrump with the proviso that one of the suits involved is the opposing major.

The yardstick for making the major-suit cue bid is the same as that for making a normal unusual notrump bid. Here's how it works:

Not vul against vul, you hold:		♠ x	
		♥ Kxxxx	
		♦ A9xxx	
		♣ xx	
	Opponent	You	
	1 ♠	2 ♠	

This tells partner that you have five hearts and another suit. If partner doesn't have three hearts, he can ask for your minor by bidding 2NT, giving you the opportunity to name it. Naturally, vulnerable, you would not dream of forcing a preference with the above hand. However, make the hand:

Not vul against vul, you hold:		♠ x	
		♥ Kxxxx	

	♦ A9xxx
	♣ xx
Opponent	You
1 ♠	2 ♠

and you have a fine vulnerable major-suit cue bid as well as a marvelous one-pop description of your hand. The knowledge that you have a two-suiter enables partner to evaluate game potentials immediately.

To summarize, the Michaels Cue Bid has taken the rarely used Direct Cue Bid and given it a new meaning. In the minors, a cue bid is a weak distributional double. In the majors, it represents a two-suited hand with the opposite major acting as one of the suits. It has taken away nothing from the bidding format because the game-forcing hands may be controlled by doubling first, and subsequently cue bidding on the next round. The Michaels Cue Bid allows for a quick description of a weak competitive type hand, jams up the auction and is instrumental to partnerships for bidding games or partials or taking premature saves on hands which come up all too frequently and which previously had no course for action because of the inability of the partnerships to get together intelligently. The nature of the bid is easily explained to opponents, and as a consequence, the incorporation of this bid into our modern bidding systems should become a boon to the game.

(Reprinted from The Bulletin, February, 1960.)

About Mike Michaels

Mike Michaels (1924-1966) of Miami Beach FL was a bridge writer and lecturer. He was best known as the inventor of the Michaels Cuebid and for his long-time association with Charles Goren in various journalistic enterprises.