

# Leaping and Non-Leaping Michaels

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Leaping Michaels is a bridge convention used to show a strong two-suited hand, after opponents have opened the bidding, and *partner has no more than passed*. It works well in all seats, either direct or reopening. It may be employed in these situations, by partnership agreement:

1. When an opponent opens a natural, weak 2 ♠, 2 ♥, 2 ♣, or 3 ♣, whether or not it promises a side suit. Also applies over a 2 NT response.
2. When an opponent opens a natural, intermediate (e.g. Precision) 2 ♣.
3. When an opponent opens 1 ♥ or 1 ♠ and is raised to 2 ♥ or 2 ♠.
4. When an opponent opens 1 ♣ or 2 ♣ and is raised preemptively to 3 ♣.

An extension, called ***non-leaping Michaels***, gives up minor suit overcalls over 3-bids, to permit bidding strong 2-suiters using the same methods. It may be applied in these cases:

5. When an opponent opens a natural weak bid of 3 ♠, 3 ♥ or 3 ♣.
6. When an opponent opens 1 ♠, 1 ♥ or 1 ♣ and is raised preemptively to 3 ♠, 3 ♥ or 3 ♣.
7. When an opponent opens a natural, weak 2 ♠, 2 ♥ or 2 ♣ and is raised to 3 ♠, 3 ♥ or 3 ♣.

It's one thing to agree to play non-leaping Michaels, and it's another to remember to not overcall a three-bid with four of a long minor suit.

## ***The Leaping Michaels Bids***

The leaping Michaels bids show strong hands, not just distributional. They are intended as ***forcing***, show two suits of at least five cards each, and are always made at the four level:

- A four level cue-bid shows two suits of the same rank: either both majors or both minors, whichever applies. For example, after a weak 2 ♥ opening, bid 4 ♥ holding

♠ A 3 ♥ - ♦ K Q J 10 7 3 ♣ A K J 10 5

- Four of an unbid minor shows that minor, plus an unbid major. For example, after a weak 2 ♥ opening, bid 4 ♣ with

♠ K Q 10 7 3 ♥ 9 ♦ A 3 ♣ A K J 10 5

## Continuations

- Advancer usually places the contract in one of overcaller's suits.
- When the opponent has bid a minor suit, and the overcaller bids four of the other minor, the major will not be known.
  - 4  $\diamond$ , if available, asks overcaller to name the major suit.
  - Otherwise, 4  $\heartsuit$  asks overcaller to pass with hearts, or correct to 4  $\spadesuit$ . Advancer may have slam interest in spades (with heart tolerance) for this bid.
  - 4  $\spadesuit$  asks opener to pass with spades or correct to five of the minor. Advancer may have slam interest in hearts (with spade tolerance) for this bid.

In the previous version of this article, I omitted the given meaning of 4  $\diamond$ . There is no consensus on other continuations. I still recommend:

- After a leaping or non-leaping Michaels bid, *advancer may only play in their own suit if they jump immediately in it*. This rare bid shows a great suit and slam interest.
- Other than the preceding cases, advancer's bid of a new suit is a slam try in support of one of overcaller's suits, to be named later.

The prominent alternatives of experts aim to be technically superior, not to enable playing at four of advancer's suit.

## Advanced Methods

The mess when the opponent has bid clubs is often addressed by inverting the meanings of the 4  $\clubsuit$  and 4  $\diamond$  bids:

- 4  $\clubsuit$      Diamonds and a major. Advancer's 4  $\diamond$  asks for the major.  
(It is not an offer to play diamonds.)
- 4  $\diamond$      Both majors.

If you think you can remember that, how about this technically superior system, played over both clubs and diamonds:

- 4  $\clubsuit$      Spades and a lower ranking suit. Advancer's 4  $\diamond$  asks about the second suit: 4  $\heartsuit$  is natural, and 4  $\spadesuit$  says it's the minor.
- 4  $\diamond$      Hearts and the minor.

**Setting trump with slam interest:** A common theme is to use bid the cheapest off-suit or 4 NT to show a good raise in the major (or higher ranking) suit, which might permit overcaller to ask for keycards. The next off-suit or 4 NT shows a good raise in the lower ranking suit. These meanings could be reversed or

otherwise optimized.

**Asking for keycards:** An alternative is to prioritize keycarding. Once both suits are known, it makes sense to play kickback for a single major suit: 4 NT asks for keycards when spades are trump, and 4 ♠ asks for keycards when hearts are trump. As we know, it's dangerous to ask with 4 NT in hearts holding one keycard – and this is a likely situation after leaping Michaels. Kit Woolsey plays that the cheapest artificial bid over each suit as RKC; the other artificial bid is an unspecified slam try (often for a minor).

## *The Rest of the System*

- The takeout double is used with a three-suited hand, or a strong one-suiter.
- Make an overcall (or a stronger non-game jump overcall, if available) with a lesser one- or two-suiter. For example, after a weak 2♥ opening, bid 3♦ holding either of these hands:

♠ A 3 ♥ K 7 ♦ K Q 10 7 4 3 ♣ Q 5 3

♠ A 3 ♥ - ♦ K J 10 7 4 3 ♣ A J 10 5 3

- A three-level cue-bid is used with a fistful of tricks but not necessarily points. It asks partner to bid 3NT with a stopper. Should 3NT not be bid, cue-bidder's new suit is non-forcing. For example, over a weak 2♦, bid 3♦ with

♠ K 4 ♥ A 7 6 ♦ 2 ♣ A K Q J 9 6 2

(If the auction is already at the three level, either double or bid your suit with such a hand.)

*Alternative:* Some experts play that over a natural 2♣ or 2♦ opening, the 3-level cue-bid is regular Michaels, not good enough to leap. These folks are willing to give up the asking cue-bid on the hand above.

- A jump to 4♥ or 4♠ is natural, an attempt to make game on distribution, typically with the high card strength of a normal opening bid. For example, over a weak 2♠, bid 4♥ on

♠ - ♥ A K 10 9 6 5 3 ♦ K 7 3 2 ♣ Q 9

Advancer should seldom try for slam.

- If non-leaping Michaels applies, you won't have a natural overcall in a minor below game. You will need to bid 3 NT with a stopper, jump to game, or pass. Treat the jump to game as an attempt to make game on

distribution (see 4 ♥ or 4 ♠ above), and double with stronger hands.

- A jump to 4NT means whatever it would, had the opponents never bid. I recommend that it ask for specific aces, typically a huge one-suiter with a void: 5 ♣ = none; 5 ♦, 5 ♥, 5 ♠, 6♣ = that ace; 5 NT = two.

## ***Further Considerations***

According to the Encyclopedia of Bridge, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition, “*The Bridge World Standard* 1994 expert consensus is that the cue-bid over any three-bid is Michaels.” If you play it, non-leaping Michaels supersedes that consensus. Later versions of BWS do not consider this issue.

You could choose to play these modifications to non-leaping Michaels:

- Over 3 ♥ or 3 ♠, 4 NT shows both minors.
- A cue-bid asks partner to bid 4 NT with a stopper in the enemy suit.

While an efficient use of the bids, this departure from the rest of the system could easily lead to error.

Leaping Michaels may be played over a multi 2 ♦ opening, which usually shows a preempt in either major. (Some play that it could also be some kind of strong hand.) It may instead be played at the 3-level over multi: three of a major shows that major and an unspecified minor. If you will play in events that permit multi, you should study the matter. Also look for multi-over-multi.

## ***References***

Encyclopedia of Bridge, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition, Brent Manley, et. al, editors, ©.

Discussions with Gary Schwartz, Andrew Hanes, and others.

Sources readily available on the Internet, especially Bridge Winners, including <http://bridgewinners.com/article/view/advancing-a-two-suited-overcall-of-an-opponents-wesk-two-bid-methods-inquiry/>.