



Ask Jerry

Well-known teacher and player **Jerry Helms** answers your bridge questions.
Send your questions to askjerry@jerryhelms.com.

Dear Jerry: Do I need five cards in both hearts and spades to make a Michaels Cuebid? How many points do I need?

—U. P., Newport News, VA

Dear U. P.: When the opponent on your right opens 1♣ or 1♦ and you make an immediate cuebid of 2♣ or 2♦, you're showing an unbalanced hand with five or more cards in both major suits. That is the Michaels convention. It's popular with many of today's players since it's more useful than using 2♣ or 2♦ to show length in the same suit as that bid by opener.



This would be a typical hand for a cuebid of 2♣. You have five spades and five hearts. Instead of overcalling 1♠ and showing only one suit, the 2♣ cuebid shows both suits at the same time and asks partner to choose one of them.

Do you need five cards in both hearts and spades? Yes. With this hand you should overcall 1♥. If you were to bid 2♣, partner will assume you have at least five cards in each major and will often bid a three-card suit, expecting to land in an eight-card fit. You don't want to have the partnership playing in a seven-card fit at the two level.

You have at least five cards in both suits, but you could have more. This hand would be fine for a Michaels Cuebid.

♠ K J 9 7 5
♥ A J 8 6 3
♦ 7 4
♣ 3

♠ K J 9 7
♥ A J 8 6 3
♦ 7 4
♣ 3 2

♠ K J 9 7 5 3
♥ Q 9 8 6 3 2
♦ —
♣ 6

As for the strength, it's generally expected that for a Michaels cuebid you have a weak, distributional hand. The idea is to get into the auction, competitively. You are taking bidding room away from the opponents. If the opponents have the majority of strength, it suggests a possible sacrifice against the opponents' contract.

Partner won't be expecting strength in terms of high-card points. Partner will presume you have a weak hand with most of the cards in the major suits and shortness in the minor suits. With this understanding, partner can judge how high to bid in a competitive auction. For example:

Contract: ?
♠ Q 10 6 2
♥ K 10 5
♦ Q 9
♣ J 9 7 4

♠ 8 4 3
♥ Q 4
♦ K 10 8 6 5
♣ Q 5 2

♠ K J 9 7 5
♥ A J 8 6 3
♦ 7 4
♣ 3

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
Pass?	3♠	Double?	Pass

This might be a typical Michaels auction. East opens 1♣, and South cuebids 2♣ to show both major suits. West immediately has a problem. West would have comfortably responded 1♦ if South had passed. But now what? West isn't strong enough to bid 2♦ and doesn't want to raise clubs to the three level with only three-card support. So West would probably pass.

North, knowing the partnership has a nine-card spade fit, and also holding a useful card in hearts, can jump to 3♠. This is simply competitive.

This gives East a problem. East has extra values and doesn't want to pass. That's good, since North may well make 3♠, losing only a spade, two diamonds, and a club, if North can guess who holds the ♥Q. Even if North goes down one, it's less than the value of East-West's like contract.

Suppose East chooses to double. Now what does West do? West will probably bid 4♣ or 4♦. It's hard to jump to 5♣ or 5♦. So East-West may miss their game contract.

The bottom line is that Michaels is basically a competitive action—a way to get into the auction with a two-suited hand.

Although the cuebid usually shows a weakish hand, it can also be made with a very strong hand, planning to bid again to show the extra strength.

With this hand, for example, you could bid 2♦ over a 1♦ opening on your right. Partner will assume you have only a competitive hand, but on the next round of the auction, you'll show the extra strength by raising partner's response, or doubling if the opponents bid, or even cuebidding again.

The Michaels cuebid is so effective that it's also used over an opponent's major suit opening to show a two-suited hand. It guarantees five cards in the other major suit—which is to be expected. It also shows a five-card suit in one of the minors. The concepts on both strength and distribution still apply.

One of my Jerryisms is that it's better to find a reason to bid than an excuse to pass. The Michaels Cuebid is one way to compete in the auction, even with a fairly weak hand.—JH

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