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Ask Jerry

Basically, the immediate cuebid should announce a source of tricks if partner can stop the opponent's suit. Over the cuebid, bid 3NT with a stopper. Otherwise, do the best you can.

Partnerships who elect to play the stopper-seeking agreement often add a convention that some refer to as "leaping Michaels." For example:

RHO	You
2♥ or 2♠	4♣
or	

RHO	You
2♥ or 2♠	4♦

Over a weak two-bid, a jump to a minor at the four level shows 5-5 or better distribution in the minor suit and the unbid major. I play this jump as 100% forcing. Therefore it shows a very good hand.

Dear Jerry,

Playing Jacoby transfers, how do you define the following sequence?

Opener	Responder
1NT	2♣
2♦	2♠

Apparently, some define this as 5-4 in the majors with a weak hand, while others play it as invitational. Which do you recommend and why?

Florida Doug

Hi Doug,

A fundamental decision that must be reached in each partnership is whether to define the meanings as geared to finding the best partscore or to give priority to the investigation of potential game contracts. My strong preference is to aim for the higher-scoring games even if it means you play in an inferior partscore on occasion. Consider these hands:

♠A8754 ♥K964 ♦10 ♣972

♠KQ74 ♥Q9653 ♦1073 ♣6

If I held either hand, after partner opened a strong 1NT, I would begin with Stayman. If partner cooperated by answering in either major, my inclinations would be to bid game. If opener instead replied 2♦, I would bid two of my five-card suit, which, by agreement, is game invitational, guaranteeing four cards in the other major. This descriptive sequence often allows the no trump opener, who holds fitting major-suit cards and perhaps minor-suit aces to intelligently bid a good game.

Playing this agreement, if I held:

♠87643 ♥QJ82 ♦92 ♣75,

over 1NT I would simply transfer to spades and pass. Every time you do this, I assure you it will feel like partner will hold a doubleton spade and four or five hearts. Take hope that these minor setbacks will be well compensated in the long run by the game bonuses you receive as a result of your agreement to play Stayman followed by a major as constructive.

This issue along with many others is one that must be discussed with partner in advance. Incidentally, if you play weak notrumps, I think you should reverse the above agreement. □

Dear Jerry,

After my left-hand opponent opened a weak 2♠, my partner bid 3♠. I thought it was Michaels showing hearts and a minor, so I responded 4♥ and went down.

My partner says that 3♠ was a Western cuebid asking me to bid 3NT if I had stopper in spades. He had 18 HCP with 2=3=4=4 distribution. I think he should have doubled for takeout. Who is right?

Raj

Hi Raj,

Who is right? There is no question about it ... both of you are! My preference is to play the immediate cuebid of a weak two-bid as asking for a stopper for notrump. The meaning your partner attached to his action is one that many experienced players use. However, the hand he held did not meet the requirements for the bid he chose. With 2=3=4=4 distribution, a takeout double, suggesting at least opening values along with three-card or longer support for all unbid suits, seems straightforward. On this particular deal, this may or may not have worked out, but regardless of the result, a takeout double would be the action that most resembles the cards partner actually held.

The type of hand with which I would cuebid, looking for a stopper, would be more like this:

♠85 ♥A4 ♦AKQ7642 ♣K9.