

BB

What's Standard?

by David Lindop

This series is based on Grant Standard, a set of conventions and agreements that are in popular use today, such as 15-17 INT openings, five-card majors, and weak two-bids. A summary chart of Grant Standard and the corresponding convention card can be found at www.AudreyGrant.com. The site also has Grant Basic, a simpler set of agreements.

Earlier articles in this series appeared in the Bridge Bulletin and can also be found under 'Articles' at www.AudreyGrant.com.

In the previous issue we looked at the unusual notrump, a way to compete with a two-suited hand when the opponents have opened the bidding. This convention proved so effective, that Mike Michaels of Miami suggested another 'unusual' way to show a two-suited hand over an opponent's opening bid.

The Direct Cuebid

When the opponent on our right opens the bidding in one of a suit, it's rare that we want to suggest playing in the same trump suit. So the classic meaning assigned to a direct overcall in the opponent's suit was to show shortness in the suit and a very strong hand—a sort of 'super' takeout double. The artificial bid of an opponent's suit is termed a **cuebid**.

Over the years, the cuebid was expanded into a general forcing bid used in a variety of situations. Experience showed that a direct cuebid of right-hand opponent's suit wasn't very useful to show a strong hand. Such hands occur rarely and can be shown by starting with a takeout double and bidding strongly thereafter—perhaps following up with a cuebid of the opponent's suit.

So Mike Michaels suggested that a direct cuebid of the opponent's suit could be used to show a two-suited overcall as follows:

The Michaels Cuebid

MICHAELS CONVENTION

- A direct cuebid of 2♣ or 2♦ shows 5+ cards in both majors.
- A direct cuebid of 2♥ shows 5+ spades and 5+ clubs or diamonds.
- A direct cuebid of 2♠ shows 5+ hearts and 5+ clubs or diamonds.

Suppose the auction starts:

WEST NORTH EAST SOUTH
1♦ ?

This would be an ideal hand to make a Michaels cuebid of 2♦, showing at least five cards in both major suits.

Suppose the auction begins:

WEST NORTH EAST SOUTH
1♥ ?

With this hand, we can bid 2♥, showing at least five spades and a five-card or longer minor suit—which could be clubs or diamonds.

The advantage of showing two suits at once is that we have a better chance of landing on our feet. Partner likely has a fit for at least one of our suits. Knowing we have a distributional hand might help partner to compete, perhaps taking a sacrifice against the opponents' contract. The cuebid also takes more bidding room away from the opponents.

Of course, there is a downside. We risk getting the partnership overboard when we don't have a fit. The opponents might then double our contract for penalty. However, the Michaels convention has proved so popular it is used by almost all club and tournament players.

Length of the Suits

As with the unusual notrump, a Michaels cuebid typically promises at least five cards in each suit. The more distributional, the safer it is to compete. For example:

WEST NORTH EAST SOUTH
1♠ ?

A 2♠ cuebid will commit the partnership to bidding a suit at the three level, but with 6-6

distribution, there's little danger. The opponents likely have a fit of their own and won't want to defend, even with the majority of the high cards.

By promising at least 5-5 in the two suits, partner, as advancer, will be able to compete knowing that only three-card support is needed for an eight-card fit.

Strength of the Hand

The Michaels cuebid is primarily designed as an obstructive tool. It does not promise much strength, only good distribution. Typically, it shows less than the values for an opening bid. With a stronger hand, we can overcall the higher-ranking suit, planning to show the other suit at the next opportunity.

WEST NORTH EAST SOUTH
1♦ ?

With this hand, South can simply overcall 1♠ rather than cuebidding 2♦. South can bid hearts later if it is convenient. If South were to start with 2♦, it would be difficult to judge whether to bid again if advancer bids at the cheapest level. The hand has lots of defensive strength, so South doesn't want to 'over'-compete when the opponents can't make anything.

Some partnerships prefer a wider range for Michaels and would use that call with the above hand.