

Responding to Michaels

Like most conventions, learning the meaning of the first bid is often the easiest part. The complexities begin once you start taking the conversation further. In other words now that my partner has bid Michaels, how should I respond?

To give you some idea of the complexity involved in this question, I'm going to list some questions that should all be answered before you should even think about your Michaels style.

- Are both of my partner's suits known?
- Did RHO pass?
- Did RHO double?
 - For penalty?
 - For values?
- Did RHO show a strong hand?
- Did RHO raise?

Each of these questions will end up causing us to have different considerations in evaluating our choice of whether or not to bid and what to bid.

Both of my partners suits are known e.g. 1C-2C showing Hearts and Spades

This gives both sides the most certainty in the auction. We know if there's a fit or not and approximately how big the fit is. The fewer unknowns the easier it is to make good decisions.

First let's consider the situation where RHO passes (1C-2C-P-?)

Basically all bids are natural since partner's shape is known.

Option 1 - Bid one of partner's suits at the cheapest level (most common) 1C-2C-P-2H/S

This neither confirms nor denies a fit. If you have a fit you are less than invitational in strength.

Option 2 - Jump raise one of partner's suits (common) 1C-2C-P-3H/S

This is typically a preemptive bid. Following the Law of Total Tricks principle it is often done with 4 card support as you have a known 9 card fit.

Option 3 - Bid game in one of partner's suits (common) 1C-2C-P-4H/S

This is often a two way bid. If you are expecting partner to be weak, then you can make this bid both with hands that expect to make game and with hands that are preemptive (ala the weak freak). If partner might have a good hand then this bid is always preemptive as you could make a cuebid with any strong hand that might have interest in game, doubling the opponents or possibly even slam.

Option 4 - Cuebid - (Normal) 1C-2C-P-3C

At least invitational values with a fit. Just like if you were cuebidding after an overcall. The strength needed to invite is based upon your style of Michaels. The Michaels cuebidder should make their cheapest bid without game interest as the suit that partner has a fit in is unknown. This allows partner to get out in either major at the 3 level. E.g. 1C-2C-P-3C-P-3D

Option 5 - NT - (Rare) 1C-2C-P-2N

This should deny a fit, but show values to expect to have reasonable chances to make the level bid.

Option 6 - The unbid suit (Rare) 1C-2C-P-2D

This should deny a fit and typically be non forcing. Therefore the strength you are showing varies based upon partner's expected strength. You should have at least 6 cards in your suit and enough suit quality to suggest that playing opposite a singleton will be better than playing in one of partner's suits.

Option 7 - Pass (Extremely rare)

After all it's in your bidding box. And you paid your entry fee. So if it's legal you can do it. Remember that your partner will feel the brunt of your decision. After all they were expecting you to bid and they end up being the declarer. I have either done this or had it done to me maybe 5 times in my bridge career. It's inherently risky and is best considered if you are playing the "Only Weak" style of Michaels. Think ♠x ♥xx ♦QJxx ♣AKQxxx

Hand evaluation after partner Michaels

You know your partner has a very unbalanced hand. Therefore you should be more concerned about how well your hands fit together rather than how many HCP you have. Points and length in your partner's suits are working with their hand and points outside are usually not. Remember misfits play poorly in NT since you will have a tough time finding entries to whichever long suit you manage to establish.

I would recommend thinking about how many tricks you can take for partner rather than focussing on how many HCP you have. HCP are often a poor way to evaluate hands when partner (or you) are highly unbalanced. (10 or more cards in 2 suits)

With regards to your style, then the stronger partner promises to be, the less you need to make invites and raises. If your partner is weak or strong then be conservative about inviting as partner will take another call with a big hand. Experiment with this bid to see what works best for you and your partner's style.

What changes if both of partner's suits aren't known (1S-2S-P-?)

There's a standard way to respond and a better way. Let's deal with the standard way first.

With no game interest

- Bid the known suit at the cheapest level with a fit
- Bid 2N to ask partner to tell you their second suit and then pass
- Bid 3 of an unbid suit to play

With game interest

- Cuebid if you have a fit and it's below 3M (1H-2H-P-3H)
- Bid 2N and then correct to 3M (1S-2S-P-2N-P-3C-P-3H)
- Bid 2N and then raise partner's suit to the 4 level (1S-2S-P-2N-P-3C-P-4C)

A better response structure

2N= invitational values, bid your 2nd suit at the 3 level if not accepting and bid it at the 4 level if accepting The invitation could be in the known or unknown suit so do not bid 5 of your second suit.

3C = pass or correct

3D = invitational in the known suit

3M = to play if hearts, preemptive if spades