

What To Do When The Opponents Use Michaels

Consider the auction 1S-2S. Your RHO has “preempted” and shown two 5 card suits. You know that one of them is hearts, but you don’t know what the other one is. What should you be thinning about here? Well, let’s consider what is that you are likely to want to say:

- Raise partner
- Bid a suit of your own
- Double the opponents
- Get to NT

I’m going to present to you the classic defence and then suggest my personal preferred variation.

Raise Partner

Notice that when raising partner, we’d like to have both a simple raise and a limit raise. Fortunately the opponents have given us a means of doing so *because we know one of their suits*. This means that bidding hearts should be an implied cuebid. We know that a cuebid shows a limit raise or better so in the above auction 3H = LR+ and 3S = a simple raise. 4S continues to be the weak freak.

Bid a suit of your own

Since we don’t know which minor they have, we simply revert to natural bidding and both 3C and 3D are natural, forcing to the 4 level (or 3N) and usually denies a fit. (You would typically cuebid with the values to do so and a fit)

Double the Opponents

You double the Michaels bid to tell partner that you want to penalize at least one of their suits. In practice you have their major (although you might also do it with strong holdings in both minors)

Get to NT

Bid 2N or 3N to show your values.

What about 1C-2C or 1D-2D?

In the auction where Michaels shows both majors, we face a different situation for 2 reasons - we know both of the opponent’s suits and we have no major suit that we want to play in, so NT becomes our highest priority game.

We now have 2 implied cuebids since both 2H and 2S are suits that the Michals bidder has shown. Even if we have a fit, we tend not to want to play in any trump suit in which it breaks 5-0. So instead we apply the “lower for lower” principle and have 2H (the lower cuebid) show clubs (the lower suit) and 2S (the higher cuebid) show diamonds (the higher suit). Bidding clubs or diamonds directly is weaker than cuebidding

What about NT?

If you have only one suit stopped, you typically double and then bid the suit you have stopped thereby implying a problem in the suit you didn't bid.

This classic method is nice and simple. Every bid is natural and the only trick is to recognize the implied cuebid. It also reflects our default priority to show various major suit raises and limit the ways in which we can show minor oriented hands.

To recap, in the auction 1M-2M-?

- X= penalty
- 2N = 11-12 with hearts stopped
- 3C/D = natural and forcing to at least 4 of a suit.
- 3M = simple raise
- 3H/2S (cuebid) = Limit raise+
- 3N = 13-15 with hearts stopped
- 4M = 0-7 HCP with shortness

In the auction 1m-2m-?

- X= penalty
- 2H = invitational+ (11+) in clubs
- 2S = invitational+ (11+) in diamonds
- 2N = 11-12 with both majors stopped
- 3m = simple raise
- Other minor = weak (6-10) and natural (usually 6+)
- 3N = 13-15 with both majors stopped

Suggested Variation

While the classic method is great at handling hands when you have a clear action, it leaves you high and dry with unclear hands like: ♠K2 ♥976 ♦AQ52 ♣J874. After 1C-2C or 1S-2S it's really not clear what action you should take. You don't have a penalty double or stoppers for NT, but you don't have a clear raise either. In the classic model you often end up passing and hope to muddle through later.

I have found that in practice I rarely have the penalty hand and I often have the unclear hand. So I play that X= values with no clear action. Something like 10+ points, no fit, no suit of my own and not clearly NT or penalty oriented. Often if I don't know what to do, my partner does. If they don't know either then we default to defence without a fit of our own to play in.

How do I then penalize the opponents?

I have found that passing and then doubling is a great way to penalize. This is akin to passing after an overcall and then passing partner's takeout double. But it's even better because after an overcall I need to rely on partner to reopen with a double but in this case the cuebid is forcing so I will get a chance to double them later. If they happen to bid the suit I'm not interested in penalizing then I can always bid more then instead of passing should I wish to.