

The Case for Resurrecting the Strong Cue Bid

Admittedly, advocating for the strong cue bid is not a way to win friends and influence people, given the popularity of Michaels. But I believe that a case can be made provided the requirements for the bid are loosened a bit. While elsewhere I suggest using a cue bid of a minor suit to show 4 spades and a longer minor, that still leaves the cue bid of a major to show a strong hand.

While Michaels serves its purpose—to describe a 5-5 or more distribution hand with 8-12 HCP—bidding a strong hand as overcaller is also problematic. With a very strong hand, an overcaller who doubles is frequently shut out of the auction since his partner frequently is broke, and when the advancer isn't broke, he often will not find his way to game.

While a double followed by 1NT or 2NT shows 19-20 HCP, the problem is that 2NT, the likely rebid in no trump after a major suit opening, will seldom be the best landing if the opponents are both bidding—and after a 2NT rebid it will be difficult to reach the right suit contract at the right level. Just as significantly, a strong hand may be shut out of the bidding by responder's weak jump shift or preemptive double raise. Time after time, the opponents will leave a strong overcaller with no options—if he doubles—as the advancer will remain silent. A strong cue bid takes up bidding room and makes a statement to partner. And only a strong cue bid may prevent a responder with length and weakness in a suit from preempting.

To be sure, an overcaller seldom has 22+ HCP, but 18 HCP is relatively common. Such hands occur at least as frequently as the right kind of 5-5 hands for Michaels. Used on conjunction with Lebensohl responses for weak advancer hands and Stayman responses for game going hands, a strong cue bidder and his partner can dominate an auction and land in the right place.

A strong cue bid lets advancer with limited values know right off whether game is possible and places the advancer in charge of the auction.

A 5-5 hand with a 5-card major can still be described by bidding the major first. If the major is a weak suit, a double followed by a 2-level rebid of the minor can be used to show this hand via an equal level correction double.

Guidelines for Bidding

The potential cue bidder needs to consider that his/her partner may bid 2NT as a prelude to the bid of a 4-card suit. So either a balanced hand with support for all unbid suits or an independent suit that can be bid at the 3-level is needed.. In addition, in anticipation of a Lebensohl response, two types of hand, in particular, are not suitable for a cue bid:

- Hands with length and strength in the club suit

- Two-suited hands with 5-5 or greater distribution

A cue-bidder with a 6-card suit should ignore the 3♣ expected response and bid his/her own suit. With a 5-card suit, the cue bidder has a tougher call. With 20 HCP and a stopper 2NT can be passed.

In addition, an overcaller with a running minor—a source of tricks—and a stopper in opener's suit should bid 3NT and not cue bid; and a strong overcaller with a running suit but without opener's suit stopped, should bid 3 of opener's major, asking partner to bid 3NT with a stopper or 4♣ without one.

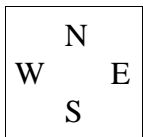
So What About Michaels?

In giving up Michaels, we are forsaking a bid that describes hands that, in most instances, can be otherwise described. Only when an overcaller has a 5-card major without honors and a stronger equally long minor, and less than 11 HCP is Michaels truly effective and uniquely descriptive. At favorable vulnerability, with more than 10 HCP an overcaller can use an equal correction double and treat the weak 5-card major as a 4-suit major. Such hands, moreover, do not occur as often as strong hands that do not have specific distribution requirements.

The first twelve hands that follow were randomly generated and represent the range of situations that arise. Several examples illustrate strong hands which are not suitable for strong cue bid treatment. The examples conclude with three hands that meet the requirements of a Michaels bid and include analyses of alternate bidding possibilities.

Dlr:South ♠ J 10 6 4
 Vul:N-S ♥ 3
 ♦ J 8 6 3 2
 ♣ 10 9 3

♠ Q 9 5 3
 ♥ A 6 5
 ♦ A 10
 ♣ A K Q 2



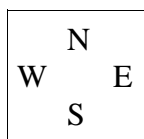
♠ K 8 2
 ♥ J 10 8 4
 ♦ K 9 7
 ♣ 8 7 4
 ♠ A 7
 ♥ K Q 9 7 2
 ♦ Q 5 4
 ♣ J 6 5

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
2 ♥	Pass	3 NT	1 ♥ All Pass

In this hand, all roads lead to 3NT. West, with 4 spades and a stopper could double, intending to bid 1NT, but after East's 1NT, West would likely bid 3 NT. Similarly, after a 2♥ cue bid, East can easily add the numbers up-18+17=25. The cue bid, however, does take the guesswork out of the jump to game.

Dlr:South ♠ J 9 7 6 5 2
 Vul:E-W ♥ 5 4
 ♦ J 7 2
 ♣ 9 6

♠ A Q 3
 ♥ A 10 3
 ♦ A K 8 5 4
 ♣ Q J



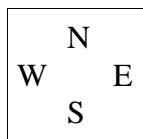
♠ 10
 ♥ K 9 7
 ♦ Q 10 9 3
 ♣ 8 7 5 4 2
 ♠ K 8 4
 ♥ Q J 8 6 2
 ♦ 6
 ♣ A K 10 3

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
2 ♥	Pass	2 NT	1 ♥ Pass
3 ♦	Pass	4 ♦	Pass
5 ♦	All Pass		

If West doubles, North might very well bid 2♠. Bidding 2♥ prevents North from preempting and allows East to show minimum values. While East-West might not reach game after a strong cue bid, then again they might. Of course with the diamond fit, 3NT also makes, but that contract will not be found, even after a double and a 2NT rebid.

Dlr:South ♠ 10 9 7 6 5
 Vul:E-W ♥ 9 2
 ♦ A 10 7 6
 ♣ 8 3

♠ A Q J
 ♥ K
 ♦ 5 4 2
 ♣ A K J 7 4 2



♠
 ♥ 8 7 6 4
 ♦ K Q J 9 8 3
 ♣ 10 9 6
 ♠ K 8 4 3 2
 ♥ A Q J 10 5 3
 ♦
 ♣ Q 5

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
2 ♥	Pass	3 ♦	1 ♥ Pass
4 ♣	Pass	5 ♣	All Pass

Here, if West doubles, North may very well get a chance to bid 2♠ or 3♥. After 2♠, West can still bid 3♣, but North will likely bid 3♠; after 3♥, West is altogether stuck. If West overcalls 2♥, however, North is blocked from bidding, and 4♣ over partner's 3♦ invites game in clubs or diamonds.

Dlr:South
Vul:Both

♠ K 6 4 3
♥ 5
♦ 9 7
♣ J 10 8 4 3 2

♠ J 10
♥ A K Q 10 9 2
♦ K Q
♣ K 9 7

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 9
♥ 8 6 4
♦ J 8 6 5 4 2
♣ A 6 5

♠ A Q 8 7 5 2
♥ J 7 3
♦ A 10 3
♣ Q

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
			1 ♠
2 ♠	Pass	2 NT	Pass
3 ♥	Pass	4 ♥	All Pass

Here, North is forced into a decision on passing or bidding 3♠ since the values are not there for a raise. If West doubles, the decision, a preemptive 3♠ is an easy choice. Both sides make game.

Dlr:South
Vul:None

♠ 6 5
♥ J 8 6 3 2
♦ K 7 2
♣ Q 5 4

♠ A 2
♥ A Q 4
♦ A Q 8
♣ K J 8 7 6

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ J 10 9
♥ 9 7
♦ J 10 9 5
♣ 10 9 3 2

♠ K Q 8 7 4 3
♥ K 10 5
♦ 6 4 3
♣ A

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
			1 ♠
2 ♠	Pass	2 NT	Pass
3 ♣	Pass	3 ♦	All Pass

If West doubles, North bids 1NT, East passes, and South bids 2♠. West could bid 2NT, but with a singleton stopper and no source of quick tricks, the bid is unattractive. While South goes down 1 in 2♠, West makes 3♣ and 3♦.

Dlr:South
Vul:E-W

♠ J
♥ K 8 7 6 3
♦ 7 5 3
♣ 8 6 5 3

♠ K Q 4
♥ A 2
♦ A K 9 6 2
♣ Q 9 7

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 10 6 5 3
♥ 10 5
♦ Q J 10 8 4
♣ J 2

♠ A 9 8 7 2
♥ Q J 9 4
♦
♣ A K 10 4

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
			1 ♠
2 ♠	Pass	2 NT	Pass
3 ♣	Pass	3 ♦	All Pass

Here if North gets the chance to bid hearts, South may find the 4♥ game. East goes down 1 in 3♦, but this is a cheap sacrifice.

Dlr:South ♠ 4
 Vul:Both ♥ 10 9 7 6 5
 ♦ 10 4
 ♣ A 9 8 6 4

♠ K Q 3	N W E S	♠ 10 9 7 2
♥ A 8 3		♥ J 4
♦ A K Q 7 6 3		♦ 9 8 2
♣ Q		♣ 10 7 5 3

♠ A J 8 6 5
 ♥ K Q 2
 ♦ J 5
 ♣ K J 2

West	North	East	South
2 ♠	Pass	2 NT	1 ♠
3 ♦	All Pass		Pass

If West doubles instead of cue bidding, East will bid clubs and an adventuresome North may double or bid hearts after West's change of suit, depending on vulnerability. While 3♦ makes, unless 2 spades are trumped, North-South can make 3♥ if North is allowed into the bidding.

Dlr:South ♠ 9 7
 Vul:None ♥ K 8 7 2
 ♦ 5 4 3
 ♣ 10 8 6 3

♠ K J	N W E S	♠ 10 8 6 4
♥ J 5 3		♥ Q 10 9 4
♦ A K 8		♦ J 7 2
♣ A Q 7 4 2		♣ K 9

♠ A Q 5 3 2
 ♥ A 6
 ♦ Q 10 9 6
 ♣ J 5

West	North	East	South
1 NT	All Pass		1 ♠

While West could cue bid, the 5-card club suit and the single stopper make 1NT, which makes 2, a better bid.

Dlr:South ♠ K 10 7
 Vul:N-S ♥ J 7
 ♦ Q 5
 ♣ J 9 6 5 4 3

♠ J 9 5 2	N W E S	♠ Q 4
♥ K 10		♥ 8 6 5 4
♦ A K J 6		♦ 9 8 7 4 2
♣ A Q 2		♣ 10 7

♠ A 8 6 3
 ♥ A Q 9 3 2
 ♦ 10 3
 ♣ K 8

West	North	East	South
2 ♥	Pass	2 NT	1 ♥
3 ♣	Pass	3 ♦	Pass
			All Pass

Here a 2♥ bid prevents North from jump shifting into clubs. While 3♣ goes down 1, 3♦ makes 4.

Dlr:South ♠ 8 5 4 2
 Vul:None ♥ J 5
 ♦ 8 5 3 2
 ♣ K J 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A K Q ♠ J 10 9 6 3
 ♥ A 8 7 ♥ 10 9 6
 ♦ K Q 10 6 ♦
 ♣ 10 7 3 ♣ A 9 6 5 4

♠ 7
 ♥ K Q 4 3 2
 ♦ A J 9 7 4
 ♣ Q 8

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
			1 ♥
2 ♥	Pass	3 ♠	Pass
4 ♠	All Pass		

Whether West starts with a double or 2♥ will not matter much. If East bids 2♠, the bidding will end there, but East, seeing potential, might be tempted to bid 3♠ despite having only 5 HCP. If West doubles and East bids 1♠, West will raise to 3♠, again tempting East. If West bids a very strong 1NT, East might settle for 2♠ (or 3♠, if South bids 3♦), but a super accept by West might be too tempting. All roads lead to the same conundrum, but the hand only makes 3.

Dlr:South ♠ 7 4 3 2
 Vul:N-S ♥ J 9 8
 ♦ K 10 6 2
 ♣ 6 5

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K Q ♠ 9 6
 ♥ A 6 3 ♥ 7 5 4 2
 ♦ A Q ♦ J 9 8 7
 ♣ A Q 10 9 3 2 ♣ J 7 4

♠ A J 10 8 5
 ♥ K Q 10
 ♦ 5 4 3
 ♣ K 8

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
			1 ♠
Dbl	3 ♠	Pass	Pass
All Pass			

With a 6-card club suit, West doubles rather than cue bids. North preempts leaving West out in the cold, despite 21 HCP. West does best by sitting tight, provided that North preemptively jumps. 3♠ goes down for North-South, but so does 3♣ for East West.

Dlr:South ♠ 9 5 4 2
 Vul:E-W ♥ Q J 10
 ♦ 10 9 5
 ♣ K 5 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A Q 8 3 ♠ J 10 7 6
 ♥ A ♥ 9 6 4 3
 ♦ K Q 6 3 2 ♦
 ♣ Q J 2 ♣ 10 8 7 6 4

♠ K
 ♥ K 8 7 5 2
 ♦ A J 8 7 4
 ♣ A 9

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
			1 ♥
2 ♥	Pass	2 ♠	Pass
3 ♠	All Pass		

West's cue bid prevents North from raising and East's drop dead 2♠ is raised by West with a hand that improves after partner's bid. East with 1 HCP passes. If West had doubled, South might have competed to 3♥, going down 1.

Five-Five without Michaels

Dlr:South	♠ J 10 9 8 2		♠ K 7 3									
Vul:None	♥ A 8 2		♥ J 10 5 3									
	♦ Q		♦ J 2									
	♣ A 5 3 2		♣ Q J 9 8									
		<table border="1"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		
	N											
W		E										
	S											
♠			♠ A Q 6 5 4									
♥ Q 9 7 6 4			♥ K									
♦ K 9 8 5 3			♦ A 10 7 6 4									
♣ K 10 7			♣ 6 4									

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
			1 ♠
Pass	4 ♠	All Pass	

Although 6♠ makes, North-South are not likely to bid it. So a save in 5♥, biddable only with Michaels, for down 3, is worth it at favorable vulnerability, but with extra values and the heart ace, North is likely to bid on to 5♠.

Dlr:South	♠ K 10 7		♠ 8 5 4 2									
Vul:N-S	♥ J 4 2		♥ A Q 10 6									
	♦ 8 6 3 2		♦ K									
	♣ 8 5 3		♣ A 9 7 4									
		<table border="1"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		
	N											
W		E										
	S											
♠ A Q J 6 3			♠ 9									
♥ 9			♥ K 8 7 5 3									
♦ Q J 10 9 7			♦ A 5 4									
♣ 10 2			♣ K Q J 6									

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
			1 ♥
1 ♠	Pass	2 ♥	Pass
4 ♠	Pass	All Pass	

With a Michaels bid, East might not get to game, given the misfit in the minors. After 1♠, East bids strongly. In any case, North is likely to stay out of the bidding.

Dlr:South	♠ 8		♠ Q 10 7									
Vul:E-W	♥ 4		♥ A 10 9 8									
	♦ K J 7 5 3		♦ 2									
	♣ A Q 10 9 7 2		♣ J 8 5 4 3									
		<table border="1"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		
	N											
W		E										
	S											
♠ A 9 4 3 2			♠ K J 6 5									
♥ 7 2			♥ K Q J 6 5 3									
♦ A Q 10 9 8			♦ 6 4									
♣ 6			♣ K									

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
			1 ♥
Pass	2 ♣	Pass	2 ♥
Pass	All Pass		

This is the type of hand most suitable for a Michaels bid. Without Michaels, West has to choose between 1♠, 2♦, and pass. In any case, North-South, unimpeded, will likely land in either 2♥ or 3♣. Michaels enables West to show a relatively weak spade suit, and as a result, North-South are likely to end up in 3♥ or 4♣, one level higher than they otherwise might. Both contracts go down several tricks.