

The Michaels cue-bid

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

North is the declarer.

The normal start to the auction will be: pass pass 1 ♥ and then West has to decide what to bid.

The choices are 1 ♠ or 2 ♣, both overcalls are too weak with the strong hand held by West, if it is passed out you will not be happy.

Starting with a double is another option, but it will be impossible to show both your suits in the following auction, especially if North raises to 3 ♥.

The best bid is 2 ♥ Michaels, which is a cue of the opponent's opened suit. Over a minor that shows at least 5/5 in the majors. Over a major as here it shows at least 5/5 in the other major and a minor.

There are different schools of thought about the strength of the hand you should have to use Michaels.

- (a) It is better to get hands with massive shape across quickly – you want to bid it on any strength
- (b) You want to bid it on weak hands (paving the way for a possible sacrifice) or on strong hands (to make your own contract – possible slam) but not on intermediate hands (on these you overcall one of a suit and aim to bid the other on a later round of bidding)

As usual there are advantages and disadvantages to either approach (a) will always get the shape into the auction, but it is impossible for partner to know whether you have a 6 count or a 20 count!

(b) makes it easier for partner to judge what to do but suffers the problem that you might never get to show your second suit (where you might have a good fit) if the auction comes back to you at an uncomfortably high level.

On this hand 5 ♣ is the “best” contract, i.e. most likely to make. However, 4 ♠ is “best” in that it will score the most.

In the bidding on this hand if North raises to 3 ♥ (risky but it takes away the bidding space from E/W) and it comes back to West, if you used Michaels to start with on this strong hand bid 4 ♥ another cue to show a big hand worthy of game and East can happily bid 4 ♠ over it.

The play in 5 ♣ is straightforward. The likely lead is a heart which declarer will win and draw trumps in two rounds. When clubs behave nicely and break 2-2, we could play the ♣ 2 across to the ♣ 6 to try the spade finesse, which fails but we still just lose 2 tricks.

The play in 4 ♠ may not be so easy. After a heart lead declarer must start on trumps and, with no entry to East, the best way to do that is to lead low to the Q being prepared to lose to the K. If North ducks, declarer plays more spades to knock out the K. The defence can play more hearts (or a diamond) forcing declarer to ruff. At this point declarer will have the ♠ 10 and North the ♠ 9 left. The best play is to draw the last trump, leaving no trumps, but the remaining cards are all club winners, making 11 tricks.