

Michaels Cuebids and Tops and Bottoms

Michaels Cuebid

This cue bid is used widely. Perhaps 80% of all serious partnerships use it.

Michaels Cuebid is used to show a hand with a 5-5 distribution, and fewer high card points than would be necessary to just bid the suits naturally. Typically, a Michaels Cuebid is made with perhaps as few as six high card points and as many as 12 high card points. Holding a stronger hand, with most of the high card points in the long suits, it is usual to bid the suits naturally.

Some play that Michaels Cuebid is also used with really strong hands, 16+ high card points, as well as with the very weak hands. Then the natural bidding method applies to the 13-15 high card points range.

Having made a weak Michaels Cuebid, the bidder has fully described her hand, and should not bid again.

If you play Michaels Cuebid both weak and strong, when holding the strong hand, say 16 high card points or more, make a Michaels Cuebid, and then bid again. This shows the strong hand to partner.

Here are the cuebids:

Opponent	You	Showing
1 ♣	2 ♣	5-5 in the Major suits.
1 ♦	2 ♦	5-5 in the Major suits.
1 ♥	2 ♥	5-Spades and 5 in an unspecified Minor suit.
1 ♠	2 ♠	5-Hearts and 5 in an unspecified Minor suit.

If partner wants to know your unspecified minor, partner bids the cheapest no-trump. If you make a Michaels Cuebid in the Major suit, it may force partner to play at the three level. Your hand needs to have more playing strength than when you make a Michaels Cuebid in a Minor suit.

If your 5-5 distribution is not in the proper suits, the Unusual 2NT call covers the most of the other situation. It shows 5-5 in the lowest two unbid suits. Do not do it with a 5-4 distribution!

Here are the bids:

Opponent	You	Showing
1 ♣	2NT	5-Hearts and 5-Diamonds.
1 ♦	2NT	5-Hearts and 5-Clubs.
1 ♥	2NT	5-5 in the Minor suits.
1 ♠	2NT	5-5 in the Minor suits.

Tops and Bottoms, Bottoms and Bottoms, and Equal Level Conversion

Note: 5-5-x-x distributions occur in 3% of the hands.

5-4-x-x distributions occur in 25% of the hands.

Therefore, Michaels Cuebids are rare. Some believe that this cue bid is a waste of a good bidding opportunity. Max Hardy has recommended alternative conventions that are used with 5-4 distributions. The first is called *Tops and Bottoms*. Your cuebid shows exactly four cards in the highest (*top*) unbid suit and five or more cards in the lowest (*bottom*) unbid suit. The bids:

Opponent	You	Showing the Top and Bottom Suits
1 ♣	2 ♣	4-Spades and 5 or more Diamonds.
1 ♦	2 ♦	4-Spades and 5 or more Clubs.
1 ♥	2 ♥	4-Spades and 5 or more Clubs.
1 ♠	2 ♠	4-Hearts and 5 or more Clubs.

Bottoms and Bottoms

The second convention is called *Bottoms and Bottoms*. This is a cue bid over a minor suit bid by the opponent. It shows the two lowest (bottom) suits. Here are the bids:

Opponent	You	Showing the Two Lowest Unbid Suits
1 ♣	2 ♦	4-Hearts and 5 or more Diamonds.
1 ♦	3 ♣	4-Hearts and 5 or more Clubs.

With both of these two conventions, you can still use the Unusual 2NT to show a 5-5 distribution in the lowest two unbid suits.

Equal Level Conversion

When using Tops and Bottoms, a corollary is a treatment called *Equal Level Conversion*. It is used when the opponent opens a Major suit and you have Diamonds and the other Major suit. This holding is not covered by *Tops and Bottoms* or *Bottoms and Bottoms*, or *Unusual 2NT*. You may or may not have enough high card points to make a Takeout Double, and you do not have support in Clubs. Say your hand is something like this.

♠ 74
♥ KQJ5
♦ AQT83
♣ 42

You do not have the points, or the Club support to make a Takeout Double of the opponent's 1-Spade bid. You don,t like to bid 2-Diamonds because Diamonds are too weak, and you would never bid the Heart suit. You would usually pass. The convention called *Equal Level Conversion* can be used. It can be considered a *Tops and Tops* bid.

With this hand, when the opponent bid 1-Spade, you would double. Partner responds as if you have a real Takeout Double. Then if partner bids 2-Clubs, you bid 2-Diamonds. You are converting at the *equal-level*, the two-level, to the next suit up. It does not show the 18 playing points one usually shows by doubling and bidding their own suit. It just shows a hand that may be minimal, and has a 5-card, or more, diamond suit and a 4-card suit in the unbid Major suit.

Summary

These 5-4 bidding conventions are worth a top result in about one hand in 100, as you are able to find a 4-4 fit, or a good Minor suit sacrifice, when standard methods will not get you there. Also, when you are outbid, your defense is focused on the right suits.

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