



## Ask Jerry

Well-known teacher and player **Jerry Helms** answers your bridge questions. Send your questions to [askjerry@jerryhelms.com](mailto:askjerry@jerryhelms.com).

**Dear Jerry:** My partner and I are trying to figure out how to reduce the number of conventions we use. We have two questions: Are cuebids conventions? If they are, should we use them?

—C. J., Dallas, TX

**Dear C. J.:** I have broken down conventions into three categories for my students. Level One includes Stayman, Jacoby transfers, weak two-bids, weak jump overcalls, limit raises, negative doubles, Blackwood, Gerber, unusual 2NT and Michaels cuebids.

I'd classify cuebids as conventions. They fit within the definition of a convention in the Encyclopedia of Bridge: a call or play with a defined meaning that may be artificial.

The Michaels cuebid, therefore, is a convention. Now, should you use this tool? I've gone on record about what I think of conventions by quoting from S. J. Simon's book, WHY YOU LOSE AT BRIDGE. His advice is timeless. Simply put, he writes, keep it simple! You should use a convention if you understand it and you think it will help your game.

Having said that, my list of Level 1 Conventions are those I think that you need to know if you're going to play duplicate bridge. Two of the conventions on the list are unusual 2NT and Michaels cuebids. They have a lot in common. I'll tell you why they're useful and why I put them in the Level 1 category.

They're both artificial bids that describe two-suited hands; hands with at least two five-card or longer suits. These are a powerful category of hands because they have good trick-taking potential not necessarily based on high-card points but due to their distribution.

The game is much more competitive now than it used to be. One of my

Jerryisms is: **Find a reason to bid rather than an excuse to pass.** If you can find a couple of conventions that will get you into the auction based on your distribution rather than just the high-card points you are dealt, that can be an advantage for your partnership. The Michaels cuebid, for example can be used to get into the auction with hands with fewer than 10 points.

Let me give you the general concept. Your right-hand opponent opens 1♣. A direct cuebid of 2♣ shows at least five cards in both major suits. You don't need an opening bid. You can use it to get into the auction with a hand

♠	Q J 9 7 4
♥	A Q 10 6 2
♦	7 4
♣	5

like this. Without it, you would have to overcall 1♠, hoping to get to show the heart suit later. You might miss your best fit.

If your right-hand opponent opens 1♦, you would cuebid 2♦ with this same hand, showing at least five cards in each major suit.

What's partner supposed to do after you cuebid? Not pass. Partner would pick between the two major suits and bid either hearts or spades at an appropriate level. That's the general idea. If partner has a fit for one of your suits, you should be able to compete effectively in the auction. If partner has a fit for both, even better.

If the opening bid is 1♥ or 1♠, a direct cuebid of the major shows five cards in the other major and five or more cards in one of the minor suits.

There's a lot to the convention, and there is not the space here to go into a complete discussion of the Michaels cuebid. But if you are fascinated by the general idea, you could find a teacher, a book, or information on the Internet and look into the idea further with your partner.

I said that I divided conventions into three levels. In the second level, there's another cuebid—the cuebid as a limit raise showing support for partner's suit and about 11-12 points when the opponents interfere.

That's another useful 'convention', especially if your opponents tend to compete a lot—which is what happens a lot in today's game.

**Bottom line:** The thing to avoid is using a convention not because you think you like the general idea but because other players at your club are using it, even though you haven't seen them enjoying themselves while using it. You simply feel under some pressure to learn to play it. That's the wrong reason. —JH ♠

Take a bridge vacation  
with Jerry to the

*White Stallion Ranch*



Tucson, Arizona

April 19-25, 2015

**"Improve your bridge  
skills and knowledge"**

accompanied by  
ACBL Sanctioned Duplicate Games

Starting at \$2,295

For more information visit:

[www.jerryhelms.com](http://www.jerryhelms.com)

For reservations:

Liz Nixon: 888-400-2789

[cruzqueen3@gmail.com](mailto:cruzqueen3@gmail.com)