Leaping and Non-Leaping Michaels

Pete Matthews, Jr. – © August 27, 2015

Leaping Michaels is a bridge convention used to show a strong two-suited hand, after opponents have opened the bidding, and partner has no more than passed. It works well in all seats, either direct or reopening. It may be employed in these situations:

1. When an opponent opens a natural, weak 2♦, 2♥, 2♠, or 3♣, whether or not it promises a side suit.
2. When an opponent opens a natural, intermediate (e.g. Precision) 2♠.
3. When an opponent opens 1♦ or 1♠ and is raised to 2♦ or 2♠.
4. When an opponent opens 1♠ or 2♠ and is raised preemptively to 3♠.

This is as far as most partnerships go. An extension, called Non-Leaping Michaels, gives up minor suit overcalls over 3-bids, to permit bidding strong 2-suiters using the same methods. It may be applied in these cases:

5. When an opponent opens a natural weak bid of 3♦, 3♥ or 3♠.
6. When an opponent opens 1♦, 1♥ or 1♠ and is raised preemptively to 3♦, 3♥ or 3♠.
7. When an opponent opens a natural, weak 2♦, 2♥ or 2♠ and is raised to 3♦, 3♥ or 3♠.

The Leaping Michaels Bids

The Leaping Michaels bids show strong hands, not just distributional. They are forcing, show two suits of at least five cards each, and are always made at the four level:

- A four level cue bid shows two suits of the same rank: either both majors or both minors, whichever applies. For example, after a weak 2♥ opening, bid 4♥ holding ♠ A3 ♥ - ♦ KQJT73 ♣ AKJT5.
- Four of an unbid minor shows that minor, plus an unbid major. For example, after a weak 2♥ opening, a minimum 4♠ bid would be ♣ KQT73 ♥ 9 ♦ A3 ♠ AKJT5.

Continuations

- Advancer usually places the contract.
- When the opponents bid a minor, and the overcaller bids four of the other minor, his major will not be known.
  - 4♥ asks overcaller to pass with hearts, or correct to 4♠. Advancer may have slam interest in spades (with heart tolerance) for this bid.
  - 4♠ asks opener to pass with spades or correct to five of the minor. Advancer may have slam interest in hearts (with spade tolerance) for this bid.
- After a Leaping or Non-Leaping Michaels bid, advancer may only play in his own suit if he jumps immediately in it. This rare bid shows a great suit and slam interest.
- Other than the preceding cases, advancer’s bid of a new suit is a slam try in support of one of overcaller’s suits, to be named later.
The Rest of the System

- The takeout double is used with a three-suited hand, or a strong one-suiter.
- Make an overcall (or a stronger non-game jump overcall, if available) with a lesser one- or two-suiter. For example, after a weak 2♦ opening, bid 3♦ holding ♠A3 ♦K7 ♣KQT43 ♦Q53 or ♠A3 ♦KJT43 ♦AJT53.
- A three-level cue bid is used with a fistful of tricks but not necessarily points. It asks partner to bid 3NT with a stopper. Should 3NT not be bid, cuebidder’s new suit is non-forcing. For example, over a weak 2♦, bid 3♦ with ♠K4 ♦A76 ♣2 ♠AKQ962. (You don’t have a three-level cue bid over 3♠ or higher, so either double or bid your suit.)
- A jump to 4♥ or 4♠ is natural, an attempt to make game on distribution, typically with the high card strength of a normal opening bid. For example, over a weak 2♣, bid 4♥ on ♠AKT965 ♦K732 ♣Q9. Advancer should seldom try for slam.
- If Non-Leaping Michaels applies, you won’t have a natural overcall in a minor below game. You will need to bid 3NT with a stopper, jump to game, or pass. Treat the jump to game as the jump to four of a major, and double with stronger hands.
- A jump to 4NT means whatever it would, had the opponents never bid. I recommend that it ask for specific aces, typically a huge one-suiter with a void: 5♠ = none, 5♦/5♥/5♣/5♦ = that ace, 5NT = two.

Further Considerations

According to the Encyclopedia of Bridge, 7th Edition, “The Bridge World Standard 1994 expert consensus is that the cuebid over any three-bid is Michaels.” If you play it, Non-Leaping Michaels supersedes that consensus.

You could choose to play these modifications to Non-Leaping Michaels:

- Over 3♥ or 3♠, 4NT shows both minors.
- A cue bid asks partner to bid 4NT with a stopper in the enemy suit.

While an efficient use of the bids, this departure from the rest of the system could easily lead to error.

The Multi 2♦ opening shows a preempt in either major. (Some play that it could also be a strong hand.) Leaping Michaels may be played at the three level over Multi: three of a major shows that major and an unspecified minor. Multi is beyond the bounds of the General Convention Chart in North America; if you will play in events that permit Multi, you should study the matter. Also look for Multi-over-Multi.

References

2. Discussions with Gary Schwartz, Andrew Hanes, and others.
3. Sources readily available on the Internet.