

THANK YOU, MR. MICHAELS

You are sitting in the South. Your RHO opens 1♠ and it's up to you. You hold

South
 ♠ QJ
 ♥ KQ952
 ♦ K9652
 ♣ 2

Your spade honors are worthless. You really only have 8 HCP. But you have great shape. You have the perfect hand for a Michaels Cue Bid - 2♠. This is a two suited call that says, "Partner, I have at least 5-5 in hearts (the other major) and one of the minors. I have either a weak hand or a very strong hand. It is more likely the former and I will pass whatever you bid. If it is strong, I will bid on. However, if you bid 2NT, you are asking me to bid my minor." That's a lot of conversation with one bid. Cue bids are powerful and are used for many purposes. A direct cue bid on the first round always carries this Michaels meaning. It was named for Mike Michaels, who originally suggested it.

West passed and your partner jumps to 4♥. He knows that one of your suits is hearts and he must have extras to justify his game bid. East leads the ♦Q. Take over for North and plan how you are going to play this hand.

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This was a very aggressive bid by North. He assumed your long minor was diamonds and with his Ace doubleton, he expected lots of ruffs. But now you are declaring 4♥ and must make your plan.

You have two spade losers, no heart losers if they split no worse than 3-1, and 1 club loser. You should be able to take 10 tricks. But can you do better?

Had East made the standard lead of the ♠AK, you couldn't do any better than 10 tricks. But, for some reason he led the ♦Q – top of touching honors. This gives you opportunity. Your

spade and club losers are quick losers; but the diamonds are stopped and you have time to discard 1 or 2 spades in your hand. How can you do that? You can set up the diamond suit in the dummy and if the outstanding diamonds break 3-3 (35% probability), that will give you two spade pitches. You can get one pitch if they split 4-2 (48%).

In order to set up the diamonds, you need entries into the dummy. You need to get to the dummy with club ruffs, but you must first play one round of clubs losing the lead. You can't stand a shift to spades before you pitch them on the diamonds, so you need a deceptive play. Win the first trick in the dummy. East will know you have the $\spadesuit A$ in your hand, but West will not. Arrange the club play so that West wins it. He is much more likely to return a diamond than East would be. Play a heart to your hand and lead a low club! East will probably play "second hand low" and West will have to win it. If he returns partner's diamond suit, you have the situation well in hand. Win the $\spadesuit A$ in hand and go to the dummy with a trump. Both follow, so trumps are gone. Trump the next diamond and you find diamonds fall 3-3. Return to the dummy with a club ruff and pitch your two spades on the two good diamonds in the dummy. Now you can ruff one of your spades for 11 tricks.

You can see how this hand should be played by clicking on this link:

<http://tinyurl.com/pol6zlu>. Or, copy and paste it into your browser. Click on the "Next" button on the bottom to advance through each trick. Alternatively, by clicking on "Play" you can play all four hands and see if you can make the hand on your own.