



Ron Klinger

# Ghestem is much better than Michaels Cue-bids

Two top players debate a hot bridge topic. Tell us whose argument has won you over by e-mailing the Editor at [elena@ebu.co.uk](mailto:elena@ebu.co.uk)

'GHESTEM' is a system of two-suited over-calls devised by Pierre Ghestem of France.

Over 1♣:

- 2NT = the red suits
- 2♦ = the major suits
- 3♣ = diamonds and spades

Over other one-openings:

- 2NT = the two lowest-ranking suits, e.g. (1♦) – 2NT = hearts and clubs
- 3♣ = the high-ranking suits

**Cue-bid** = the other two-suiter, highest-ranking and lowest-ranking.

Knowledge is power. It is easier to judge the right action when you know the two suits held by partner than if you know only one and have to guess which is the other. With Michaels Cue-bids, a cue-bid of a minor suit shows both majors, but a cue-bid of a major suit shows the other major and an undisclosed minor. So, playing Michaels, if you do not have support for the major, you can easily miss a game or a good sacrifice if the opponents increase the bidding level.

Suppose the bidding starts:

West	North	East	South
?	1♥	2♥	4♥
?			

What action would you take with Hand 1? Playing Michaels, you would pass since your judgment tells you that partner has the black suits. Unlucky, since partner holds

**Hand 1**  
 ♠ 8 2  
 ♥ 7 6 5 4  
 ♦ A 6 5 4 3  
 ♣ A 2

Hand 2; you allow the opponents to play in 4♥, which is unbeatable, while a sacrifice in diamonds is only one down and 5♦ might well make if

**Hand 2**  
 ♠ A 10 9 5 4  
 ♥ 2  
 ♦ K Q 10 7 2  
 ♣ 8 3

the opponents do not attack clubs early. It could be worse for your side:

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

Playing Michaels, the opponents make 4♥ or perhaps go one down if the defence finds the club ruff and diamonds are 1-1, but you make 5♦. With Ghestem, it is easy to find the best spot in both cases:

West	North	East	South
5♦	1♥	3♣*	4♥
...	...	...	...

\*Two highest suits, spades and diamonds

Even when you have support for the major and either minor, it can be vital to know which minor partner holds. For example:

West	North	East	South
?	1♠	2♠	4♠
?	...	...	...

What would you do with Hand 3 as West?

You have a flat hand, but if partner has hearts and clubs, you might find that the opponents can make 4♠, while you can save in clubs or perhaps even make 5♣. Suppose partner holds Hand 4:

**Hand 3**  
 ♠ J 8 7  
 ♥ A 4 3  
 ♦ 7 6 2  
 ♣ K Q J 6

**Hand 4**  
 ♠ 2  
 ♥ K Q 8 7 6  
 ♦ 8 3  
 ♣ A 10 9 8 4

If hearts are 4-1 or clubs are 3-1, you have no defence versus 4♠, while 5♣ is only one down.

However, what if partner holds Hand 5?

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

Now you might beat 4♠ via two hearts, a diamond and a club or one heart, one diamond and two clubs. If you decide to take the save with these cards,

you are odds-on to lose at least a spade, two diamonds and a club. That is two or more down, while 4♠ might well be failing.

If (1♠) – 2♠ is Michaels, West, holding Hand 3, has no idea whether to pass 4♠ or whether to bid. Playing Ghestem, you can make the winning decision each time:

West	North	East	South
5♣	1♠	2♠*	4♠
...	...	...	...

\*Hearts and clubs

West	North	East	South
Pass	1♠	3♣*	4♠
...	...	...	...

\*Hearts and diamonds

Some players use Michaels at higher levels, after Weak Twos, for example, but the problems remain the same. If the auction starts:

West	North	East	South
?	2♥	3♥	Pass/4♥
?	...	...	...

Without decent spade support, West might be in exactly the same quandary as in the earlier examples.

What is the cost for playing specific two-suiters? You lose a weak jump-overcall in a minor suit. This is not a heavy price to pay. Many good players are already reluctant to make a weak jump-overcall when vulnerable if the suit is not so strong. We are happy to sacrifice the (1♣) – 2♦ weak jump or the 3♣ weak jump-overcall in exchange for the accuracy in the two-suiter area. □

# Michaels Cue-bids are much better than Ghestem

Or vote by post (Editor, English Bridge, 23 Erleigh Road, Reading RG1 5LR). Comments for publication (not more than 200 words, please) are welcome.



Ian Payn

THE DEBATE

RON Klinger is one of Australia's finest exports. An expert player, he writes authoritatively on the game and as a teacher he is without parallel – it's standing room only whenever Ron holds a seminar, anywhere in the world.

So, when Ron says that Ghestem is better than Michaels, then he must be right, right? Well, up to a point. But then so were the people who thought that Betamax was technically far superior to VHS. And where are all those Betamax recorders now? Well, the same place as all the VHS recorders, the bin, because history has overtaken that particular argument, but you catch my drift.

I'm sure that on the opposite page Ron is, even as I type, extolling the technical superiority of Ghestem, the accuracy, the aid to judgement. And he's right on the button. I can't oppose him on those grounds. There's only one real point I can make that will sway you, dear readers, when it's time to vote. There's one point against Ghestem that rises out above all the others, smacks the convention in the jaw, and leaves Michaels with a walk-over. It's this.

Ghestem is hopeless.

There are three reasons for this. Firstly, you lose the 3♣ overcall, one of the more effective jumps. Secondly, in order to show both majors over 1♦, you have to jump to 3♣. Thirdly, everyone always forgets it. My secret contact at the Department of Made-Up Statistics tells me that 83% of English tournament players prefer Michaels to Ghestem. They can't all be wrong.

To return to the points in order, how often do you find you want to make a jump overcall in clubs (regardless of how strong you play it)? I'd say every now and then. Playing Ghestem, this 3♣ bid is reserved for situations where opener has bid a suit, and you have two suits which aren't clubs and aren't the suit opened.

Quite apart from the half hour it takes to work all that out, that comes up less than every now and then, I'd say. There are those who might suggest that playing Ghestem you can still make a jump overcall in clubs by bidding 3♣, then at your next turn, banging the 4♣ bidding card on the table firmly and loudly. I couldn't possibly comment.

Having to use 1♦ – 3♣ to show both majors is ruinous. On grounds of frequency, most hands fall into the part-score range. Why on earth should you have to compete to the three level when the most either side can make is eight tricks or so? The Michaels method (cue-bid of a minor at the two level shows both majors) is both economic and efficient. In the diagrammed hand, for instance, East-West rest happily in 2♥ but cannot make 3♥. Similarly, North-South can't compete to the three level:

Game All. Dealer South.		
	♠ Q 5 3	
	♥ J 8 3	
	♦ Q 4 3	
	♣ A 7 4 3	
♠ A 10 9 8 7		♠ 4 2
♥ K 9 7 4 2		♥ Q 10 5
♦ 2		♦ A 10 7 6
♣ Q 2		♣ J 10 8 6
	♠ K J 6	
	♥ A 6	
	♦ K J 9 8 5	
	♣ K 9 5	

Both sides are vulnerable, and South is the dealer. South, being a bit strong for a weak no-trump, opens 1♦. West makes a Michaels overcall of 2♦. North may or may not make a slightly dodgy take-out double (dodgy because he doesn't really have the values to compete at the three

level). East will bid 2♥, and North-South will either defend this for minus 110, or bid on, for a possible minus 200, if East fancies his chances enough to double. Either way, North-South are on the ropes after the intervention. Playing Ghestem, it's East-West who are on the ropes.

Now, a Ghestem advocate might point out that the holdings required for bids which force the auction higher are more stringent. All well and good, but this cuts down on the frequency of usage not only for having the right suits but also the exact strength to wield the convention (which most players ignore, as the blood rushes to their head as they see the chance to utilise their favourite gadget).

Another loss is the jump overcall of 2♦ over 1♣ (which, by the way, is best played as Intermediate even if you play Weak Jump Overcalls).

Those sequences where pin-pointing both suits aids sacrifice (and personally, I never really have any idea whether a sacrifice is a good idea until the scores are entered up) are few and far between. Yes, a joy, surely, when Ghestem gets us a fine result, but give me more room to manoeuvre on the bread and butter stuff any day of the week. If you have world enough and time, study Ghestem, and use it wisely. For the rest of us, good old Michaels will suffice. It comes in more useful, more often.

And oh – that bit about people always forgetting it: I can't tell you how much time is wasted on this by players and directors. Why, there was even an incident about sixteen years ago, when the director was called to the table because the system had been forgotten by . . . none other than Pierre Ghestem himself. I bet Mike Michaels never forgot what a Michaels cue-bid was . . . □