

REVELATIONS

About Hesitations and other Ethical considerations

By Steven Gaynor

Misconceptions abound regarding many bridge proprieties. Both newer and experienced players do not always handle situations properly and it may cause hard feelings due to those actions. I am hoping to clear the air regarding some of these topics and make the game more enjoyable for everyone, including our directors and caddies!

CALLING THE DIRECTOR: Speaking of directors and caddies, did you know they are all related? Each one has the same last name: **PLEASE**. Call 'Director Please', or 'Caddy Please'. It is especially bad form to call a director over to your table by using their name. It can be intimidating to a new or visiting player when you call for the director, saying, 'Mike, or 'George', or 'Tony'. The director will treat everyone the same, but that new or visiting player may feel they will not get a fair shake since you are on first name basis with the director.

THE 'STOP' CARD: The official ACBL rule is that ANYTIME someone makes a skip bid, the next player is required to 'hesitate' for 5-10 seconds before making their call. It does not matter if the 'Stop' card is used, and it does not matter how long it is kept on the table. Even when you have an easy 'pass' call, you should still count out a few 'Mississippi's' before you pull that pass card out. A fast pass gives your partner unauthorized information just like a slow pass and can end up with your side receiving a negative scoring adjustment based on your partner taking advantage of that out-of-tempo call.

THOSE HEAVY BIDDING CARDS: Even when you are in the pass out chair it is a good idea to pull out the 'pass' card so that everyone is sure the auction is over. Please do not ever tap the table or verbalize pass when it is your turn - especially when you are not the last bidder. Doing this sends a message to your partner that you do not expect any more bidding from your side. This is unethical and can also lead to penalties for your side, particularly in competitive auctions.

IN-TEMPO CARD PLAY: When you are on defense be careful about the card you play. You may have adopted complicated signaling systems, count, suit preference, whatever. If you hesitate over which card to play when it is your turn you send a clear message that you have at least two cards left in that suit. That may give partner unauthorized information which can lead to penalties, and worse can often help declarer figure out a hand with the extra distributional clue you give him.

INDECISION: Sometimes you may not immediately be sure of the call you want to make – pass, double, bid – whatever. That is OK. What is not OK is to reach into your bidding box toward one action, touch one card and then switch to another. Please keep your hands off the box until you have made your final decision on what you want to do. That is why it is good practice to keep an even keel on all of your actions, do not make 'bullet' bids when you have nothing to

think about, and try not to think too long when you have a problem. Make all of your calls in a deliberate tempo, even when you have nothing to think about. That gives you some latitude when you **do** need to take some time to make up your mind.

WATCHING YOUR OPPONENT: If you are playing against someone like Brad Pitt or Scarlett Johansson, I guess you may be looking at them, but not due to any bridge related issues. However, it is bad form to gaze at your opponent or you partner for any reason and it is against the rules of bridge to watch where your opponent or partner pulls a card from their hand. Still, many will do that anyway, so to protect yourself, make it hard for someone to take advantage of you.

INQUIRING MINDS: Your opponents have made a bid that has been alerted of that you do not quite understand. At your turn you do have the right to ask about it, but you have to be careful. Is your next bid or call dependent on knowing what their bid means? If so, ask, but if not, it may be best to wait until the end of the auction to ask your questions. Also, if they make a bid in a suit in which you have a robust holding, you should not ask about that bid unless you plan to make a call, like a lead-directing double of what turns out to be an artificial bid or whatever. It is bad form to ask about a bid in a suit where you have values in order to encourage partner to lead it. When you do want to ask, do it at your turn and not before. That also means waiting until partner has made their face-down opening lead.

OBVIOUS PLAYS: Let's say your side gets the bid and you are dummy. Your hand has a singleton in the suit led. Well, for sure your partner, the declarer, will end up playing that card, but you have to keep your fat paw off of it until declarer calls for you to play the card. There are two real good reasons for this: **First:** give your partner the courtesy of taking the time they need to plan out the play of the hand. By pulling the card you are rushing your partner, especially if third hand now plays a card. Don't you want partner to do the best they can do? Where's the fire? **Second** (and most compelling): You are the dummy. ACBL rules state that after you table your hand you have no right to touch a card until declarer calls for it. Another point is that when there are two or more cards in a suit and you if you think declarer has called for the wrong one, you must obey silently. It is not proper to ask, "which one?" or "what?" hoping to awaken partner to a possible error. If declarer says something like 'play a spade', you **MUST** play the lowest card in the suit. Only if declarer names the specific card can you play another one.

WE GET SO WRAPPED UP IN IT: The round has been called and a new pair is coming to your table (or you are going to a new table). The last hand may have been tough and you want to talk about it, but you need to stop your conversation and get to the next hand. When you discuss old hands in front of new players you may be giving them info they can use later when they play that hand. Plus, recriminations, like – 'why did you do that?' etc. are not welcome at the table. If you have a quick question regarding methods, like, 'We are playing upside-down attitude, right?' and you need to clarify a future situation, that is OK. But to get into specifics or trying to win a post-mortem, well, save it for dinner!

MOVING THE BOARDS: At tournaments, directors will usually call the round with about 2 minutes to go. If you and your opponents are ready to start that new round, great – congratulations on your timely play! Please, though, do NOT ask another table for the boards before the round is called. Everyone has the right to finish their play within the allotted time without you nagging them for boards prematurely. On the other hand, when the round is called and you are still playing the last round the boards should be moved WITHOUT someone having to ask for them. Whoever is dummy should be attuned to this. This also applies to premature moving of the boards. The bottom line is: do nothing to disturb another table until the round has been called by the director.

LEAD FIRST, WRITE LATER: Once the bidding is over and the play starts, the opening leader should make their lead and only then do their paperwork. It is rude to be scribbling on your sheet while the rest of the table is waiting for your opening lead. The same thing applies to dummy. When the opening lead is made, place your dummy face up on the table. Do not make people wait for you to enter the score. You will have plenty of time to do that later.