

Enhanced Emotions

by MATTHEW MCMANUS



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Recently, I have a number of requests to write about the procedures when the director is called to a table following a hesitation by one of the players. Over the next few articles, I will look at this from a couple of different perspectives.

One of the side effects of playing bridge is the likelihood of players experiencing “*enhanced emotions*”. This is not limited to the occasionally animated discussions between partners or teammates at the end of a session. Players often experience their own personal enhanced emotions in the middle of a hand.

For instance, let’s say your left hand opponent opens 1H, and the enemy bid all the way to 7H. Not surprisingly, you don’t have many values, but what you do have is the singleton king of trumps. Dummy comes down with a trump suit of ♥AQ876. Declarer wins the opening lead in hand, and advances the ♥J on which partner plays small. Declarer starts thinking. It would be an unusual bridge player sitting in your seat who didn’t experience a slight increase in heart rate while sitting waiting for declarer to decide what to do. (If declarer has five hearts, the odds favour a finesse, while if he is in an 11 card fit, playing for the drop is the percentage line.) What will declarer do? Of course, you hope that if he has just a five card suit that he will go with the odds, or alternatively if he has six that he doesn’t know what the correct odds are and take a finesse. If you don’t feel a little “*enhanced emotion*” at this point, you may not be getting all you can out of the game!

It is possible to experience similar sensations which have nothing to do with the decisions of the opponents. Say your partner opens 1S and you reply 3S, which is a limit raise inviting game (*typically about 10-12 points with four card support*). Partner starts thinking – what can he be thinking about? In the great majority of cases, it will be whether to pass or whether to bid game. While he is thinking, you take another look at your hand – it turns out that it is really quite good, you have a maximum for your limit raise. Given that partner clearly has a borderline decision, what do you want him to do? Bid game obviously. Again, your emotions ought to be rising, hoping against hope that partner doesn’t pass. (*Of course, for most of us the reality is that eventually partner passes and we end up writing down +170 on our scoresheet!*)

Let’s look at the last example again with a very slight change to the situation. This time you and your partner have agreed to play Bergen raises. That means in order to show your limit raise, rather than bidding 3S, you make an artificial call of 3H. Partner alerts this and when the opponents enquire, he says, “*10-12 points with four card support*”. Again he starts thinking and you experience the same emotions as before. Clearly he is not a minimum – he would sign off in 3S straight away. Clearly he is not maximum – he would bid 4S straight away. He must have a hand somewhere in the middle. Given that he is in the borderline range, opposite your maximum the chances of making 10 tricks must be pretty good. With all this knowledge, when he does sign off in 3S, don’t your emotions tell you that you should bid one more for luck?

However, to do so would be very much contrary to the laws of Bridge. Let's look at why this is the case. The laws say that the only legal way of communication between you and your partner is via the bids made and the cards played and the meanings which you have attached to these. Anything else is what is known as unauthorised information. There is a wide range of things that this covers:

- any comments that one member of the partnership makes
- any gestures or signs of approval or disapproval
- anything that one player says to the opponents in answer to a question
- the fact that partner does or doesn't alert your bid
- what you can glean from the speed with which partner makes a call or plays a card

So unauthorised information embraces of wide range of situations – from the less desirable (comments and gestures) to those which are a very normal part of bridge.

Let's look in particular at the last position – speed, or as the laws refer to it: the “*tempo*” in which a call or play is made. Although the laws say that players should try to make their bids and plays in a regular tempo, it recognises that in the real world this doesn't happen – bridge is not a game for robots! There is nothing in the laws which prevents a player taking their time to consider what call they should make (*although this obviously needs to be within reason – take note slow players – but that is a completely different topic.*). A break in tempo (or “*hesitation*” to start using the common parlance) is a perfectly normal part of the game. There is no need to call the director just because one of your opponents has hesitated. They haven't done anything wrong – nothing contrary to the laws of Bridge.

What they have done is to convey information to their partner, albeit silently and unintentionally. (For instance, in our 1S-3S example from above: “*Partner, I have a borderline hand opposite your invitation.*”) The laws say that partner cannot use this information in making a decision about what to call. In the first case (1S-3S-Pass), there was nothing partner could do with the information – the final contract had already been determined. However in the second case where Bergen raises were being used (1S-3H-3S-?), partner still had the chance to make another call. To confirm what I said above: to bid on would be very much contrary to the laws of Bridge.

The actual words of the relevant law are: “partner may not choose from among logical alternatives one that could demonstrably have been suggested over another by the (unauthorised) information.”

In our example, the two possibilities (“*logical alternatives*”) that the player has are to respect partner's signoff in 3S and pass, or to bid on to game. The fact that partner took a long time to sign off indicates that they have a borderline hand and so bidding on with a maximum invitation is likely to be more successful (“*could demonstrably have been suggested*”).

The immediate reaction of the player when they are told that they might have done something wrong is to say, “*...but I was always going to bid on, look! I've got a maximum.*” The intention of the player is not relevant to the director's decision. In the next article, I will look at the processes the director follows in dealing with this situation, applying the law and coming to a ruling. ♥