

CONGRESS DIRECTOR COURSE
By REG BUSCH

LESSON 2B

My comments on the rulings in Lesson 2A.

Reg.

Ruling 1:

Board 8

Nil Vul

Dealer West

♠QT932

♥J4

♦J9865

♣J

♠754
 ♥KT7
 ♦AQ4
 ♣9864

♠8
 ♥A65
 ♦T732
 ♣AQT52

♠AKJ6
 ♥Q9832
 ♦K
 ♣K73

	W	N	E	S
The bidding:	P	P	P	1♣*
	P	1♦	P	1♥
	P	P	2♣	P
	P	2♥	P	P
	3♣	P**	P	3♥

All pass

* Precision

** Agreed hesitation

I'm not sure if the Director was called before the hand was played and EW reserved their rights (whatever that means)

However 3♥ was allowed to make. Director was called after the play of the hand and restored the contract to 3♣ making for EW and an equal top. Most of the field were in some number of spades NS.

Do you agree with the Director's ruling?

Comment: Here we have a clear hesitation by North in a competitive auction. South is in possession of UI – that North was contemplating some action other than pass. What are his obligations? Look at law 73C: when a player has UI, he must **'carefully avoid taking any**

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advantage that might accrue to his side'. Or Law 16A: he may not choose from logical alternative actions one that could demonstrably be suggested over another by the extraneous information'.

Players used to be told that, when in possession of UI, they should ignore the UI and bid what they would normally bid. This is incorrect. There are more constraints than this. If their normal action is one that may have been suggested over another logical action by the UI, then by law they must not take that 'normal' action. The Laws don't define a 'logical alternative'. In Australia, the National Authority has given us guidelines: if the action taken is one that 75% of the players in this field would have taken without the UI, then there is no logical alternative. The corollary then is that a LA is one that 25% of players in this field may have taken. Implicit in this is the assumption that the other players would be playing a similar system with similar agreements. An example:

You open 1♣, LHO bids 2♠ (weak), partner thinks for some time and then passes. Round to you. You now double. If you can convince me that it is your partnership agreement that, because you play negative doubles in this situation, it is almost mandatory for you to reopen with a double with a reasonable hand short in spades, then I would have no difficulty in accepting this call. This, by the way, is why it is important that players have an adequate system card, because the Director can confirm this from your card. So partnership agreement may justify your action.

Partnership style is perhaps another matter. It's harder to confirm from your system card, and, in any case, your individual or partnership style is now constrained, because you have UI and must conform with Laws 16 & 73.

On to our question. In assessing South's action, try to ignore the other hands. Look at South's hand and at the bidding, and treat it as a bidding problem. What action do you take, and importantly, what action would other players take when the bidding comes round to South?

South has three possible actions – pass, bid 3♥ or double. I myself would pass, as I believe would many players. This might be our last chance for a plus score – I have good defensive values and partner is weak. At pairs, I might even double. But I would not bid 3♥. So South has at least two LA's. 3♥ is not a 75% action.

However, we don't automatically disallow the 3♥ bid yet. We know have to decide whether the 4♥ bid was 'demonstrably suggested' by the UI. North's options when he hesitated were pass, bid on, or double. South knows from his own holding that North was not contemplating a double of 3♣. So the 3♥ bid was demonstrably suggested by North's hesitation. I would disallow the bid, and adjust the score to the result expected in 3♣ by East.

I see this situation as so clear cut that I would be tempted to apply a procedural penalty to South (if South was an experienced player) for a clear infraction of Law 16 and Law 73. Players who blatantly infringe the law should learn that an adjusted score is not the worst thing that can happen to them, and that sometimes a procedural penalty will also apply.

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To say this is not saying anything about South's ethics. South has shown insufficient regard for his obligations under the Laws, and so is subject to penalty.

If, instead of bidding 3♥, South had doubled (and it had worked), I would have had much more difficulty in reaching a decision. Double was not nearly so demonstrable by the UI. But, on balance, I think I would have disallowed it, because the knowledge that North may have some extra values makes the double more attractive than pass.

Let's go back to 'demonstrably' in Law 16. A little bit of history may help. This word appears for the first time in the 97 Laws. Pre 1997, there was an increasing tendency, especially in the ACBL, to apply a policy of 'If it hesitates, shoot it'. In other words, players who guessed right after partner's hesitation would have their good score taken from them, even though the hesitation may not have been informative. The classical situation:

Partner bids 1♠, you respond with 2♠, partner ponders for some time and then bids 3♠. Round to you. Obviously he has extra values. But what was his problem? He could have been thinking of passing 2♠, or he could have been thinking of bidding 4♠. In the bad old days, whether you passed or bid 4♠ and your decision was right, you were likely to lose your good score. Now we can say that North's hesitation didn't demonstrably suggest pass over 4♠, or suggest 4♠ over pass. Now you would be allowed to keep your score. Whilst partner's hesitation was UI, it didn't demonstrably suggest one action over another.

Another example. Partner opens 1♥, 1♠ from RHO, 4♥ from you and 4♠ from LHO. Long think from partner then pass. Many regular pairs have an agreement in this situation: we don't sell out to 4♠; either we bid on in hearts or double them in spades. So, after the 4♠ bid, a double from partner suggests defending the hand, and 5♥ wants to play 5♥. A pass says 'I'm not sure what to do. Partner, you make the decision'. In effect, partner's pass is forcing, and the long think doesn't provide any more info than does the pass. If the Director is satisfied that this is your agreement, he will have no problem in accepting your subsequent action.

But contrast this with the same situation, but partner after his long think now doubles. The double says 'I think we should defend this hand' but the long think adds 'But I'm not really sure about it'. Now you need to consider the Laws before taking your action. You would need to have a pretty defenseless hand to justify pulling the double.

Director's guidelines on doubles: if a player makes a fast double, he will be unhappy if partner pulls it. If a player makes a slow double, he won't be unhappy if partner pulls it.

Discussion of the second problem from Lesson 2A follows in Lesson 2C.

Reg.