

CONGRESS DIRECTOR COURSE  
By REG BUSCH

LESSON 6A

**PSYCHIC CALLS**

In first seat, holding S x H xxxx D xxxx C xxxx, I open 1S. Is this a psyche? The answer is 'It depends'. Let's look at the relevant areas of the Laws.

From Definitions:

Psychic Call - A deliberate and gross misstatement of honour strength or suit length.

From the body of the Laws:

SECTION SIX

CONVENTIONS AND AGREEMENTS

LAW 40 - PARTNERSHIP UNDERSTANDINGS

A. Right to Choose Call or Play

A player may make any call or play (including an intentionally misleading call - such as a psychic bid - or a call or play that departs from commonly accepted, or previously announced, use of a convention), without prior announcement, provided that such call or play is not based on a partnership understanding.

B. Concealed Partnership Understandings Prohibited

A player may not make a call or play based on a special partnership understanding unless an opposing pair may reasonably be expected to understand its meaning, or unless his side discloses the use of such call or play in accordance with the regulations of the sponsoring organisation.

C. Director's Option

If the Director decides that a side has been damaged through its opponents' failure to explain the full meaning of a call or play, he may award an adjusted score.

D. Regulation of Conventions

The sponsoring organisation may regulate the use of bidding or play conventions. Zonal organisations may, in addition, regulate partnership understandings (even if not conventional) that permit the partnership's initial actions at the one level to be made with a hand of a King or more below average strength. Zonal organisations may delegate this responsibility.

To understand the definition fully, we must realize that the misstatement is in relation to our agreed and properly announced system. If it is part of our partnership agreement that I may sometimes open 1S with the above hand, then this is part of our systemic agreements, and therefore by definition cannot be a psyche. Thus the old Kaplan / Sheinwold system incorporated what they called a 'controlled psyche'. It was common to open 1S with something like S K10975 H xxx D xxx C xx, and the system incorporated a sequence to discover this psyche. The term 'controlled psyche' was a misnomer. The essence of a psyche is that it is a gross departure from one's announced system. A bid

incorporated into your system either by explicit agreement or based on partnership experience undisclosed to the opponents simply cannot be a psyche.

But our agreement to open 1S with my initial example hand is subject to regulation. In Australia for example, the rule of 18 Opening Points for an opening bid applies. So our agreement to open 1S now makes our system a YELLOW system, which would be illegal to play in events not allowing such systems.

Let's get this clear: a bid made in accordance with your partnership agreement can never be a psyche. So a psychic bid must deceive partner as much as it does the opponents. Note also that a psychic bid must contain an *intent* to deceive the opponents. A mistaken bid or a systemic error is not a psyche.

Systemic agreements may fall into two categories: explicit agreements which have been formalized after discussion and appear on your system card; and implicit agreements which may have never been formalized by agreement, but become known to each partner on the basis of partnership experience. Where psychic bids are used with reasonable frequency by a partnership, a degree of understanding develops in relation to when partner may be psyching and what sort of bids he may psyche. This understanding becomes part of your partnership agreement, and must be disclosed to the opponents. If it is not so disclosed, it becomes a concealed partnership understanding (CPU), and is a serious breach of Law 40B ( V. above).

Take a common 'baby psyche' which may succeed against weak players but not against good players. Partner opens 1H and RHO doubles for takeout. Holding heart support and a singleton spade, you bid 1S. If partner knows from experience that you will sometimes make such a bid on such a hand, then the opponents are entitled to know this also. If he fails to alert and explain this possibility, you have a CPU, and are in breach of law. If partner fails to alert this, and subsequent bidding suggests that he has diagnosed your 'psyche' and acted accordingly, then the Director may be entitled to adjust the score on the basis that you have a CPU. For example, if partner holds a 4 card spade suit and fails to raise you, then there is strong evidence that he has acted on a CPU.

The QBA has a regulation requiring all psyches to be reported to the TD. There are several reasons for this regulation. One: it allows the TD to get a feeling for when a particular partnership may be in danger of reaching some sort of implicit agreement, and having a word to this particular pair to explain the situation. Two: the body of reported psyches forms a background for the TD to judge in a particular situation whether there is a possible CPU. Three: if he considers that there has been an illegal fielding of a psyche, then on his own initiative he is entitled to adjust the score on the basis of a CPU.

So in our example, the bidding has gone:

N	E	S
1H	Dbl	1S

What are North's obligations? If he alerts this as a possible tactical bid short in spades, he is now entitled to act on this basis, because opponents have been informed. If not, then he must act on the basis that South's 1S bid is genuine, and continue to do so unless it becomes clear from subsequent authorized information that South's 1S bid was not genuine. North in other words is allowed to diagnose partner's psyche on the basis of subsequent bidding and his own card holding. His prior experience with this partner is not authorized, because he has not revealed it. The QBA regulations, which follow the lines of the EBU regs, state that the discomfort of the opponents is of itself not sufficient to diagnose partner's psyche. There must be other supporting evidence. Thus if in this sequence South's bid of 1S had been doubled by West (showing spades) and North held a 4 card spade suit, then there is pretty strong evidence that South may have psyched and North is entitled to act on this diagnosis, because the psyche has been revealed by the legal auction.

### **Fielding a psyche:**

When player A psyches and partner B fails to bid out his hand because he has diagnosed A's probable psyche, this is called 'fielding the psyche'. This is not in itself illegal, provided that the diagnosis of partner's psyche is based on AI. Our regulations make it clear that partnership experience (unless disclosed to opponents) is not AI. The discomfort of opponents in itself is not a sufficient diagnosis, but may be possible confirmatory evidence. And it must be clear that it is *partner* who has psyched, not one of the opponents.

There was a recent report in the QBA Bulletin of a hand from a recent congress. West opened a standard pre-empt of 3C. North passed, and East bid 3H (normally forcing). South asked about the 3H bid, agonized for some time before passing. West now decided, on the basis of South's obvious discomfort, that East may have psyched and opted to pass. This was passed out, and went off 6 tricks for a good score (NS can make 4H). East had psyched with a weak hand, club support and a 3 card heart suit.

I would have adjusted the score on this hand. East's psyche had been diagnosed solely on the basis of South's discomfort, and the Regulations state that such discomfort is not alone sufficient to diagnose partner's psyche.

Note, by the way, the difference between a psychic opening bid and a psychic bid elsewhere during the auction. The ABF System Regulations cover largely opening bids. You can't alert a psychic opening bid such as the hand at the start of this article because, if this is alerted, you are playing an illegal system. However, bids during the auction that may be deceptive to the opponents must be alerted if there is some partnership experience to suggest this. Previously I said that a bid which is a subject of partnership agreement (whether explicit or implicit, cannot be a true psychic bid. In this article, I have used the term 'psychic' (in quotes) to indicate bids which we normally think of as psychic in the sense that they intend to deceive the opponents, but which may be systemic in that there may be some partnership experience available to the psyching pair but not to the opponents.

Take another situation. Your partner will sometimes make a 'psychic' cue bid on the way to slam i.e. he may cue bid a control he does not have. If you have partnership experience of this, then you must alert the opponents, otherwise you are playing a CPU.

I'm often asked questions such as this: a player playing weak 2's showing systemically 6-10 HCP opens 2S with QJxxxx in spades and nothing else. Is this a psyche? Is this a gross misstatement of suit length or honour strength? Probably not. But, in any case, it doesn't matter. This sort of bid represents a departure from the agreed system, and the approach here is exactly the same as with psyches. If partnership history is such that you know that partner will sometimes bid with this sort of hand, then it must be announced to the opponents. If it is not, then any subsequent action which allows for the fact that partner may hold that hand will need to be justified by a legal diagnosis of the fact.

So the approach to departures from system is exactly the same as to psyches. Unjustified action which allows for the fact that partner may have such a hand is evidence of a CPU.

So let's try to summarise.

1. A psyche is a gross misstatement of your hand in length or strength within the context of your agreed and disclosed system. There is a gray area between psyches and departures from your disclosed system, but this is of no consequence. Fielding a departure from your disclosed system is treated in the same way as fielding a psyche.
2. For a bid to be a psyche, there must be an intention to deceive. And partner must be deceived equally with the opponents. Responder to a psyche is not entitled to field the psyche until the diagnosis has been made from AI.
3. The essential infraction in fielding a psyche is that of acting on the basis of a concealed partnership understanding. In other words, you know something about this auction which the opponents don't, and they are entitled to this knowledge.
4. When you are called to the table after a psyche, what is your procedure?
  - A: Examine responder's hand and decide whether his bidding is consistent with being deceived by the psyche. Has he bid his hand to the full on the assumption that partner's bid is normal? If not, he will be required to explain his actions and how he diagnosed the psyche by AI.
  - B: If he cannot so justify his action, then you are entitled (of your own initiative) to adjust the score. It does not require a claim of damage from the opponents.
  - C: There may be situations where it is not clear cut, where you feel that there may have been an element of fielding, but can't be sure. In this case, warn the pair concerned, and advise that any future similar incident will be treated as a fielded psyche.Remember that the Laws grant players the right to psyche, but provided such action is not protected by a partnership understanding.

Players who psyche frequently in a destructive manner with obvious disregard for their results on the hand may be seen to be in breach of Law 74. However, the best approach at the club level is simply to tell these players that they are not welcome if they continue this frivolous approach to the game.

**Disputed claims:**

A recent appeals committee decision at the EBL Championships in Teneriffe was interesting, in that it laid down a principle in considering disputed claims where there is a trump outstanding. Their statement was that, in such a situation where declarer thinks his hand is high, trumps will be deemed to be played last. This in effect is what we all do, but it is good to see this in print, and it will become part of EBL 'case law'.

Note that this decision was on a hand where declarer claimed when he had the master trump, but there was a lesser trump outstanding. But what if the outstanding trump was higher than declarer's? It may well be that declarer can be deemed to carelessly play his trump first, and then lose whatever further tricks opponents may be able to cash. Will keep you posted on this.

Another ruling for you.

Bd 19 Dlr S Vul EW

		K852		
		2		
		K74		
		KJ932		
A10943				Q76
Q874				KJ9653
95				Q63
A8				Q
		J		
		A10		
		AJ1082		
		107654		
W	N	E		S
				2NT#
P	4C	P*		P
4S	All pass			

Result: EW -300.

# 5 / 5 in minors, 6-10 HCP

\*Asked about the 4C bid, told it was pre-emptive, thought for some time before passing.

At the end of the hand, North calls you to explain that South has misinformed opponents.  
4C was not pre-emptive but constructive and invitational, which is correct systemically.

How do you rule?

Reg.