

Unauthorised Information

In theory, it may seem obvious that you are only allowed to use partner's calls and plays in deciding what to do, but, in practice, players find it quite hard not to use other information from partner and many players do so, quite illegally, often without realising they are doing something wrong. Let us look at a simple example. Your LHO opens 1NT, partner bids 2♣, opposition ask, and you say, 'Both majors.' Partner looks shocked, and blurts out, 'Didn't we agree to play that 2♣ shows the minors?' You have five spades and 11 points: what do you bid after RHO doubles? If partner had just sat there quietly, no doubt you would have bid 3♠, so now you must bid 3♠, even if it turns out to be a disaster. Why? Because you are not allowed to use what partner says, and if you do not, then you have an obvious 3♠ bid.

Generally, in most clubs, rulings about unauthorised information (I shall refer to it as UI for the rest of this article) are very rare, many clubs having about one or two a year. Is this because there is not much UI being used? No, I am afraid not, use of UI is rife in clubs, but opponents very rarely call the director, and some directors would not really know what to do if they were called. Let us look at it from the point of view of the player, and in a later article from the director's side.

All sorts of information comes to you from partner during the course of a session of bridge. Probably the most common and best known is the hesitation that shows doubt: if LHO opens 1NT, and partner thinks for some time then passes, then you know he has a problem: what should you do? Well, if you have a clear and obvious bid, pass or double, then you make it and do not worry. But if you have a borderline choice, perhaps whether to make a doubtful bid or to pass, what has partner's hesitation told you? You know that he has points. If he only had two points he would have passed cheerfully, without hesitating. If you have a doubtful bid now, it is safer to

bid because of the hesitation, but you are not allowed to use the hesitation and you must pass.

That is an example of the basic rule: when you have UI from partner you must not just take no advantage, you must go further and make every effort possible to take no advantage. If you are going to play a legal and ethical game (and the game is much more satisfactory if played ethically), you really must bend over backwards to make sure you do not gain in any way from UI from partner.

Is this easy to do? Not necessarily. I have a highly ethical partner, but she sometimes gets confused about what is required in UI situations. Let me give you a real example: I bid 1♣, she bid 1♠, I rebid 2♣ and she decided to try for game by showing her diamonds, bidding 2♦. Unfortunately we had agreed to play the Bourke Relay, so 2♦ was artificial and game forcing, which she had forgotten. I alerted it, the opponents asked, and now she had UI. Now I bid 2NT: what should she have done? The answer is that she should think what she would have done if she had not seen my alert or heard my explanation. Of course, she might have had a choice: in that case she should have made sure that she chose the one not suggested in any way by the UI. In the case I have told you I think she should have passed 2NT since she was minimum, but she bid 3♣, trying to be ethical, and I bid 3NT. It went one off, so opponents were not damaged.

Note the problems of choice: there might be three choices you would consider, and then to be ethical you must choose the one that is least suggested by the UI. Some players say that they always make the call they would have made anyway. This is often illegal and sometimes unethical: players often consider various choices before a call and they cannot be certain when there is UI what call they would have made without it. Strangely, players who say this always choose the one most favourable for them. So

please be ethical: if you have only one obvious call then make it, but if you have a choice please always choose the one least suggested by the UI.

What other forms of UI are there? We looked at Unauthorised Panic in a recent article (BRIDGE 148) where partner describes your agreements as he believes them to be, you thought differently and your hand is not what he says! This situation and the hesitation showing doubt are the two commonest situations, but partners do other things, like sigh deeply, glare across the table, say, 'Oh my goodness!' after some action of yours, smile happily when you make a call or play, frown and various other things. These all give an impression of what he is thinking and so what he has in his hand or what he intends to do, so they are all UI and subject to the same laws. Be as ethical as possible, try to take no advantage, and tell partner later to behave. On occasion, you will be ruled against: so long as you have done your best to take no advantage then your actions are ethical even if a director or appeals committee decides that you have misjudged and done the wrong thing.

Suppose you feel your opponents might have UI and you are worried they will or have taken advantage, either deliberately or accidentally, what should you do? Well, first thing is to establish the UI occurred. If you felt a player has hesitated, then his partner bid, which might be affected by the hesitation, it is reasonable to say, 'Do you agree you thought before calling?' to the hesitator. If he agrees, then you can say you are, 'Reserving your Rights,' (to call the director at the end of the hand), but if he does not agree you have to call the director immediately to sort out the difference of opinion. Either way, you call (or recall) the director at the end of the hand if you are unhappy about the partner's call. Do not accuse anyone of anything, just tell the director what happened and let him sort it out. ■