

CHAT Bridge has been going well. Some days we have 7 tables. It's fun! It's a place where you can play bridge, make mistakes, and laugh about them. I hear a lot of laughter at these sessions. I went to a Community Education class some time ago where the topic was laughter. The presenter said that laughing is very healthy for you, even if you don't mean it! That was new information for me. ...back to bridge!

I was standing by one of the CHAT tables watching the play when one player spoke up:

Partner, you are not supposed to snap the cards.

I didn't snap them. Yes you did. No I didn't... etc.

I liked it. The discussion was good. Laughter happened again. It worked out amicably. Play resumed quickly. People are learning more than just how to play the cards.

At another table, I am asked to help out with a difficult bidding sequence. We work through it and now it is time to play 3 spades. "Partner, may I lead" etc. and the opening lead is the 4 of diamonds. Dummy comes down and it has a singleton diamond. Declarer pauses for a moment and Right Hand Opponent (RHO) places a diamond on the table. Dummy now quickly plays the singleton and declarer rushes a bit to catch up with the pace and takes the trick. Declarer was harried by this sequence of events. We stopped the play and discussed this.

What happened just now? Declarer allowed herself to be rushed into play before she was ready; before she had a plan. In the play to the first trick, RHO should not consider the singleton as played until Declarer calls for it. Declarer has no option as to what to play, but the singleton is not played until the card is called for. Then, RHO plays a card.

Being too quick at trick one can be something you may regret. I see this happen regularly at CHAT. It still happens to me. If you are going to take a short pause during the play, take it before you play to trick one and put together a plan. Look at information available: what was bid, what wasn't bid, Opening lead – what does it tell you? Etc... Then plan the hand. How do I get nine tricks? Overtrick possibilities? Risky suits, How do I keep the dangerous opponent out of the lead. There is a ton of information available at this time. Use it to your advantage.

But, don't take too long. Long pauses are not appreciated. If you do a bit of planning up front, it can help you in avoiding long pauses during the play. That's because you don't have to figure out how to overcome something you didn't plan for.

Later I am called to a table and asked how many points are needed to make a certain bid. I tell them 6-10. And then: "That's not what Audrey Grant says". Nuts, now I have to deal with Audrey. Another player adds to the discussion – "Yeah, Pat told me 8-10". Now it gets worse. I have to deal with Pat as well (that's tougher than Audrey). These discussions are confusing to CHAT participants (and to mentors). But they are useful. The answer is often "partnership agreement". But, the decision can be situational. Are you vulnerable? Are you fighting for a contract? Has your partner shown a side suit that meshes with your hand? Maybe your hand has grown in value because of a few other bids?

So, now that you have partnership agreement on the convention, when will you "stretch" the rule a bit (take a flyer)? Infrequently might be a good answer. Factor in what you think partner might do with the misinformation. If you change the rule often, you might as well change the convention. Then partner knows what you are doing. Truthfully, when to stretch bids is not a good area for me to give advice. I really haven't figured this out myself. Ask Pat.

*Arne Fockler*

**When I take a 50-50 chance I expect it to come off 8 or 9 times out of 10.  
...Hideous Hog ...from "Bridge on the Menagerie"**