

Hesitations

From Suzanne Goodall

This is an area which causes consternation for some players.

First of all to make the picture clearer let us substitute the word 'thinking' for 'hesitate'. We all know that Bridge is a complex game and therefore it is a necessity that we think. (When we don't think there are often disastrous results!)

The problem arises when partner 'thinks' then passes versus simply passing in tempo. There is no fault on the person who does the thinking. Quite the contrary, we should all be thinking when we play this wonderful game. The problem rests with the partner of the person who has taken the time to ponder and pass. Partner was obviously thinking about something, say bidding or doubling, and not mentally compiling his or her weekly shopping list.

So what is the crux of the problem? If your partner hesitates (thinks) then passes before you take any action you should have a clear-cut bid that is in NO way influenced by your partner's hesitation. Another way to look at this is that if one of your logical options is to Pass then you should usually opt for that. Let's look at an example. You open the auction 1H. Your left hand opponent bids 2C. Your partner now thinks a bit then passes. The person on your right also passes. You hold the following hand:

- ♠ AK95
- ♥ QJ863
- ♦ AJ2
- ♣ 9

Now this hand is normally good enough to reopen the bidding with a X asking partner to bid. If your partner did not think before passing then this X would almost be automatic. But once partner thinks then passes it is possible that they are holding

clubs and waiting for you to X. Your X says 'please bid partner' but partner may convert your X to penalties holding quite a few clubs. This only becomes a problem if partner thought before passing the 2C overcall. (Some players are flummoxed and often hesitate when the opposition bids their suit. A good habit to develop is to PASS in tempo if the opposition bids your suit unless you have a no-trump bid in mind.) You, as opener, now have an ethical consideration if partner thinks before passing the overcall. But if partner has passed in tempo you can quite comfortably X to reopen the bidding and partner's PASS to penalize clubs is not in doubt.



If you feel that a hesitation has occurred please summon the Director at the end of the auction. You can also wait until after the end of the play. Having the Director called to your table is not a personal affront. The

Director is there to ensure that we are all on a level playing field. The Director will determine whether there has been a hesitation and if any damage has been done to the non-offending side. If you disagree with the Director's ruling, you can respectfully ask them to reconsider. This may be either done at the table or by stating your case away from the table. If that fails and you still feel strongly that you are in the right you may appeal the decision. The Director will advise you of the process.

By the way, fumbling with the bidding box and then passing may also be considered a hesitation.

Generally The Director will ask whether it is agreed that there has been a hesitation. Try to avoid saying 'you didn't notice'as this is not likely and thus is not a good defence.

So by all means think but remember if you THINK then PASS then partner's options may be limited.