

## TD NEWSLETTER 4

There was a very good article by Simon Cochemé in the June edition of English Bridge. The last paragraph reads:

*English Bridge* can only do so much in making players aware of how they could or should improve their behaviour. The clubs need to play their part too, otherwise bad habits will be copied by those who don't realise that they are bad. Newsletters explaining best practice can help, or a tip of the month program. The Only Way is Ethics.

So here goes with a few reminders.

Mike Rothwell

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## STOP CARD

The correct use of the Stop card is very straightforward.

1. Before making a jump bid (i.e. a bid at a higher level than the minimum in that denomination) a player should place the Stop card in front of them, then place their call as usual, and eventually remove the Stop card. Their LHO should not call until the Stop card has been removed.
2. The Stop card should be left on the table for about ten seconds, to give the next player time to reflect. It should not be removed prematurely.
3. After a jump bid, the next player **MUST** pause for about ten seconds before calling. It is an offence either not to pause or to show indifference when pausing. If the Stop card has been removed prematurely or has not been used, an opponent should nevertheless pause as though the Stop card had been used correctly.

The following errors (or offences) are seen all too often:

The Stop card is put away immediately after the bid has been made.

LHO calls before the Stop card is put away.

LHO doesn't wait for the full 10 seconds when the Stop card is put away prematurely.

LHO shows indifference when pausing.

### **What if I take the Stop card out and then change my mind?**

If a Stop card is taken from the box no call has been made until the card for the actual bid is taken out. Thus a player who has pulled out the Stop card is entitled to change their mind and make a call which is not a jump bid. But unauthorised information (UI) is available to partner.

### **Why should I wait when it is clear that nobody is going to bid?**

It is true that the enforced 10-second pause is sometimes a bit of a pain. For example, 1NT – (stop) 3NT. But there are times when the Stop card really helps both sides. It is best to be consistent.

### **Give me an example of when it is useful.**

West	North	East	South
1♥	1♠	4♥	4♠

South might well have a difficult decision. There might be various options, e.g. double 4♥, bid 4♠, investigate slam or pass. The enforced 10-second pause gives South time to make a decision without passing UI to North. The enforced pause also gives the other players time to think as well.

## BIDDING BOXES

### **Make your mind up before reaching for the box.**

It is very simple. Decide what you are going to bid and then reach for the box to take out the appropriate card. Don't fiddle with the box whilst thinking. Suppose partner opens 1♥ and the opponents bid 1♠. You start fingering the pass card before reluctantly playing the 2♥ card. There is now a potential problem because partner knows you are minimum purely through unauthorised information.

### **Mechanical error.**

Suppose, as South, you hold this hand

♠ 32

♥ KQJ832

♦ 32

♣ 832

You plan to open a weak 2♥. You put the Stop card down and pull out the 2♥ card but, without your noticing it, the 2♠ is stuck to it. North announces "weak". West correctly waits for 10 seconds and then bids 3♣. North hesitates for quite some time. You then look down and notice that the 2♠ card is sitting on the table and not the 2♥ card you intended. You call the director. Since your partner has not yet called, you are allowed to correct your "mechanical error" and replace the 2♠ card with the 2♥ card. West can change their call if they wish. (If North had called before you noticed your error, it is too late to do anything about it).

Here's another example:

♠ KJ82

♥ KJ82

♦ 2

♣ KJ82

You decide to open 1♥. You take the 1♥ card just out of the bidding box, but then remember that your system agreement on this sort of hand is to open 1♣. So you put the 1♥ card back and the TD is called. This is certainly not a mechanical error. The Law states "If the player's original intent was to make the call selected or voiced, that call stands. A change of call may be allowed because of a mechanical error or a slip of the tongue, but not because of a loss of concentration regarding the intent of the action." In this example, at the moment your hand reached out to the bidding box you intended to bid 1♥, so that bid stands. It doesn't matter that you changed your mind very quickly.

## HESITATIONS

### Hesitations in the bidding.

Sometimes you have a difficult bidding decision and you can't avoid hesitating. That is one of the reasons that the Stop card should be used correctly. But if you do hesitate it might suggest a course of action to partner which he otherwise wouldn't have taken. So the hesitation is potentially unauthorised information (UI) to partner. Suppose you open 1♥, the next hand passes and your partner thinks for a long time before bidding 2♥. What do you make of his hesitation? Nothing: he is entitled to think. You don't know if he is good or bad for his bid. He might have been considering a pass, or a raise to 3♥ or 2♣ or 1NT or 1♠.

Suppose instead that your LHO opens 1NT and now your partner starts thinking and eventually passes, as does RHO. What do you make of his hesitation? It is quite likely that partner has a hand suitable for opening 1NT. In any case he must have some points. So now you have to be careful not to use that knowledge. For example suppose you hold:

♠ Q9873

♥ KQ2

♦ 32

♣ 832

If you decided to bid 2♠ and it gave you a good score then the opposition might well politely call the TD. The TD would take the details and then might well consult with a couple of other players to see what they would call after 1NT – pass - pass. Here it looks as though there is a logical alternative to 2♠, i.e. pass. It also looks as though the 2♠ bid could have been suggested by the UI. In that case the good score would be taken away from you. (Of course if partner had passed in tempo then you can make whatever call you like.)

### Hesitations in the play.

It is a breach of the proprieties for a defender to hesitate unduly when following suit with insignificant small cards. The ideal scheme is for you to play cards in rhythm, neither too slowly nor too quickly. This brings to mind a story about Albert Dormer, the English Bridge expert and journalist who died in 2014. Some years ago Dormer sat East defending a contract of 6♠. The trump layout was as follows:

	A 9 8 5	
7 2		Q 6 3
	K J 10 4	

Winning the first trick in an outside suit, declarer shrewdly continued with the jack of trumps. West, the club smart-aleck, hesitated before playing low. South was fooled and finessed but he won the trick when Dormer contributed the three. Declarer then cashed the king of trumps and claimed his contract, conceding a missing side-ace. West inspected Dormer's cards. You had the queen of trumps, partner, and did not make it?"

"Sorry." said Dormer drily, "you hesitated so long I was fooled into thinking you had it!"

## ASKING QUESTIONS

Remember the advice given in newsletter 1

### TIPS ABOUT ASKING QUESTIONS

1. **Don't ask during the auction.** Wait until you are about to make the opening lead or your partner's opening lead is face-down on the table.
2. **The exception is when it might affect your bidding.** Then ask at your turn.

This is from the EBU's Blue Book – "A player has the right to ask questions at his turn to call or play, but exercising this right may have consequences. If a player shows unusual interest in one or more calls of the auction, then this may give rise to unauthorised information. His partner must avoid taking advantage. It may be in a player's interests to defer questions until either he is about to make the opening lead or his partner's lead is face-down on the table."

The Law states that "A player may not ask a question if his sole purpose is to benefit partner." So even though you might think partner hasn't noticed or understood a particular bid by the opposition, for example fourth suit forcing, you may not ask the meaning of the bid during the auction unless it affects your own bidding.

Also remember that you should explain only your partnership understanding not how you intend to interpret it. You must **never** say "I am going to take it as ...". You should admit that you don't really know and offer to call the TD.