

To Enquire or Not?

When one's RHO bids and the bid is alerted, what do you do?

These are the options (in tempo please);

- a) Bid a suit
- b) Double for a lead
- c) Pass (possibly to see what happens next)
- d) Enquire the meaning of the alerted bid and then do one of the preceding options.

If you ask for the meaning you are possibly giving your partner unauthorised information. If you need to know the meaning of the alerted bid to decide what to bid, you could look at your opponent's Convention Card. But if you have no intention of bidding, **why do you need to know now?** You will have other opportunities to ask what the bid means including during the Clarification Period. The Clarification Period lasts from the final call (i.e. the third consecutive Pass) until the opening lead is faced. Before the opening lead is selected the presumed leader has the right to have a review of the bidding and an explanation of the calls, as does his partner after the selected lead is face down on the table. So before you play you can easily find out what your opponents have been up to during the bidding.

However there is a better way. If when you sit down together both sides identify their basic system e.g. 'Benji, five card majors, weak NT, better minor' or 'Reverse Benji, four card majors, Weak NT' or 'Precision, five card majors' then the problem will often go away. If you don't take advantage of this courtesy, then when an opponent bids 1♣ you have a problem. Is it strong and artificial or is it a prepared club or is it really natural and the bidder's partner does not yet know? Should you now ask?

Law 20F allows any player at his turn to call to ask about either one call or the whole of the opponents' bidding to date. Explanations about a particular bid should be given by the partner of the person making the bid. Whether you ask about one or all of the bids you still run the risk of giving your partner extraneous information.

Let me remind those whose partner has asked about the alerted bid what effect the enquiry has on them. Law 16B1 states that the individual **may not select from among logical alternatives** one that could demonstrably have been suggested over another by the extraneous information (in this case, the question). So if the question makes it clear that your partner has an interest in a particular suit (e.g. the alerted 1♣) **you must not lead that suit** unless you have no logical alternative .

Let me now briefly discuss artificial systems, usually strong club type. Many of the bids in such a system are alerted, but if you have decided not to bid there is no need to ask during the bidding what each bid means. If you do, then you delay the bidding and you get little benefit. All you need to do is ask during the Clarification Period for a total explanation. It is likely to be both **more coherent** and **quicker** as both of your opponents will have now a clear understanding of their partner's holding. It also allows you time to think about supplementary questions if you need to do so.

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