

Case Study: Anonymized Recording

Dir: South Vul: All	♠ K 7 ♥ Q 10 8 7 ♦ K Q J 10 5 ♣ A 2			
♠ Q J 5 2 ♥ K 5 4 2 ♦ 6 ♣ K Q J 10	W NORTH E SOUTH T	EAST	♠ A 8 6 4 3 ♥ J 6 3 ♦ A 4 3 ♣ 8 5	
			♠ 10 9 ♥ A 9 ♦ 9 8 7 2 ♣ 9 7 6 4 3	

Complaint filed by: South
 Target of Complaint: East
 Was Complaint Frivolous: No
 Was Score Adjustment Indicated: Yes
 Was there any unethical conduct by Target: No
 Was there any unethical conduct by Partner of Target: No

Brief verdict by Recorder: I view this as an honest error of judgement. East did not analyze the situation correctly, and by doing so, inadvertently caused damage to his opponents.

E-Mail Complaint from the South player

The auction at our table goes

W N E S
 (1C) -1NT - (dbl)* - pass
 (2C) - pass – (2S) - all pass

**West alerts and explains East's dbl as showing an unspecified one suit. After the auction East clarifies that the double was penalty. The EW system does specify the double is penalty, but West forgot the agreement. Recorder: Forgetting an agreement is not an ethical issue.*

Do you think East is justified in bidding 2S if partner has removed their double to 2C showing a sub minimum opening and presumably 6 clubs? Is pass not a reasonable alternative holding 2 clubs and no guarantee of a spade fit?

Recorder Replies.

Pass is indeed a reasonable option, and the contract might have been rolled back to 2C (W)
-1. It was the explanation that woke up East. Without the alert, and explanation, how

could it be anything else than a weak hand with long C on a penalty double? Opener could have

S-x H-AKxx D-xx C-KJ109xx

1NT would be cold if declarer has C-AQ and 2C would also make by EW if H behave reasonably (North has the HQ or they break 3-3).

The table result was 2S (E) +170 EW. The recorder recommended to the director that the result should be rolled back to -100 EW (2C-1).

East responds after being notified

South has got it exactly backwards. Not only would passing 2C have been a head-in-the-sand, unilateral, wild shot in the dark, it would have been unethical.

And you also got it backward if you "recorded" it. **Recorder: All complaints to me are recorded as does the National Recorder.** You should be telling him/her there's nothing to see here. Move on. Recording trash complaints is *not* the purpose of the recorder system, and *not* what the recorder is supposed to be doing. **(Not True)**

Returning to this particular hand, by our agreement my double was for penalty. After West's mis-explanation, as doubler, I must ignore the mis-explanation and bid if s/he had understood the double correctly. **Recorder: This is not what Law 16B says. The Unauthorized Information must be factored into the decision.** Over partner's penalty double of 1NT, if opener pulls the double to 2C that shows a minimum (not necessarily subminimum) hand with a long suit unsuitable to defend 1NT. In a penalty double auction where RHO has overcalled 1NT and LHO has not tried to escape, it's not only normal to bid 2S over 2C, but it simply has to be wrong *not* to bid.

(1) If opener's 2C has six clubs and a subminimum hand, then partner of the NT bidder must have short Clubs, some length in the red suits, and the overcalling side must have about half the high card points. If the doubler passes 2C, it's likely the opponents will back into a red card fit that they have missed, and perhaps even compete successfully at the three level. For example, on the actual hand, even though West had his/her opening bid, the opponents still had a 9-card Diamond fit and 19 HCP.

(2) If opener has six Clubs and an average minimum hand unsuitable to defending, which is a normal interpretation, then the doubler has a second reason for bidding. If the opponents do not have half the high card points, then, at matchpoints at least, the normal action is to try for the highest scoring contract. 2S by my hand would be the normal action showing a 5-card suit and enough HCP for a penalty double. It doesn't suggest a six-card suit because we have other bids for that. Also, West is certainly a favorite to have at least a tolerance for Spades because the opponents haven't tried to escape to a red suit. Consider:

Highlighted material was added after the exchange by the recorder, who found these arguments to be an opinion of East that is based on faulty logic. The lettered considerations all point to passing by Law 16B.

(a) If West has three or four Spades, we belong in Spades. **Recorder: But the chances that partner has 3+ S vastly improve with the UI to 54.0% vs. 30.9% without (presumption West has 6C). This is nearly twice as likely when UI is taken into account.**

(b) Even if West has a doubleton, 2S might be a reasonable contract compared to the opponents' red card fit. The doubler certainly can't expect to play 2C in an eight-card fit when the opponents have an eight or nine-card fit in one of the red suits, *as they did here*. **Recorder: I totally reject this argument. You have only half the deck, 8 presumed C and 7 presumed S without the UI. But with the UI, you have 6 presumed C and 7.6 presumed S. East forgot the fact that the UI may have deceived NS, so they may be entitled to a score correction if they indeed compete. So East deprived his opponents from a safe compete by bidding 2S.**

(c) With a singleton, opener's not going to pass opposite a hand that made a penalty double instead of transferring into Spades. With no Spade fit, and an eight-card club fit, we can retreat to 3C. **(Recorder: You contradict yourself in the paragraph below starting "After the correct.")**

Recorder: East's bullet (c) is false. Knowing nothing about West's C length (i.e. with the UI), there is only a 17.0% chance that Opener has 0-1 S. But without the UI, opener is presumed to have 6C, making the chance of a S singleton or void 33% (about twice the risk). This suggests greater safety for bidding 2S, thanks to the UI. I also argue that 2S will be the final contract opposite a void, almost regardless. The Penalty double could be based on a long and strong S suit and an entry. Besides, to arrive at this deep of an analysis, we can presume East hesitated for an extended period (perfectly ethical to do so), which gives UI to his partner, who would be obligated to pass without a 7 card C suit.

Did you consider any of that? If not, why not?

Recorder: I did take this into account, but the argument is utterly wrong, and what the player's peers would do is the pivotal issue in any case.

After the incorrect explanation, West would pass 2S even with a singleton or void if, as his/her misexplanation shows, s/he expected me to have 6-card or longer suit. Had I passed 2C to eliminate the risk of West passing 2S, based on unauthorized information, that would have been an *unreasonable* alternative. I'm ethically obligated to avoid that. **Recorder: Good intentions, but a wrong analysis, as East failed to look at the UI, and the direction it leads him. His call should make the decision in the opponents' favor amongst logical alternatives, in this case passing rather than 2S. It appears he actually tried to do this, but failed.**

Did you consider that? If not, why not? **Recorder: I did, but the East analysis was clearly way off to me, so I did not go into much detail, especially as I was away at the time. But all of**

the above as well as outside opinions stated below make it obvious to me that the correct recorder decision was reached.

Addendum 1. Law 16B of the 2017 Laws of Contract Bridge

1. Any extraneous information from partner that might suggest a call or play is unauthorized. This includes remarks, questions, replies to questions, **unexpected alerts** or failures to alert, unmistakable hesitation, unwonted speed, special emphasis, tone, gesture, movement or mannerism. (a) **A player may not choose a call or play that is demonstrably suggested over another by unauthorized information if the other call or play is a logical alternative.** (b) **A logical alternative is an action that a significant proportion of the class of players in question, using the methods of the partnership, would seriously consider, and some might select.**

How I ruled. Clearly, there was unauthorized information. The logical alternatives are Pass and 2S. The West player is expected to have fewer than 6C, given the unauthorized information, so bidding is more likely to succeed given this than it would without it.

The rebuttal clearly reinforces the notion that Pass is a logical option, and it is not critical that it is not a logical option to this East player. The key is, would it be logical to East's Peers?

Nonetheless, after reviewing the rebuttal, I posed the exact problem East faced to Jeff Rubens, as Addendum 2. He is editor of the Bridge World Magazine, and arguably, the premier Bridge Ethicist. Note it was posed in an unbiased fashion.

Addendum 2: Jeff Rubens Query and His Reply:

Hi Jeff:

Here is a question that occurred in a club game.

Both Vul, East deals.

s/he holds: S-A8643 H-J63 D-A43 C-85

West	North	East	South
-	-	P	P
1C	1NT	X(1)	P
2C	P	?	

(1) Alerted as any one-suited hand, but system agreement is penalty (East's intent).

What call should East make here?

Best wishes,

Jon
Jon Shuster

Dear Jon:

Regarding this: East should ignore the unauthorized information and take his normal action, which is pass.

Best wishes,
Jeff Rubens

Summary of East's Rebuttal:

This statement in the Rebuttal shows a genuine attempt to explain the 2S call, but also shows a fundamental misunderstanding of Law 16B.

“After West’s mis-explanation, as doubler, I must ignore the mis-explanation and bid if s/he had understood the double correctly.”

Law 16B does not let you do that, and for a good reason. You have to consider all logical alternatives and make the least favorable looking choice. Bidding over passing is strongly suggested as favorable by the unauthorized information and passing is a logical alternative to his peers. Law 16B tells us that Pass is required.

Technical Section that clearly motivates passing over 2S as the correct Law 16B option.

The Math incentivizes the fact that bidding 2S is a more likely successful call than passing under the unauthorized information than without. Therefore, Law 16B demands a pass.

With the unauthorized information (UI), East can expect West to have on average 4C, making the expected combined length of the club trump suit just six. On the other hand, with the unauthorized information West is expected to have on average 9 non-clubs of the remaining average of 28 non-clubs in the other 3 hands. So West is expected to have 9/28 of the remaining eight Spades or 2.6 expected length. Bidding 2S will on average expect a total of 7.6 Spades and 6 C. It is a no brainer that S is the preferred bid thanks to the UI.

Without the unauthorized information, East can expect West to hold 6C, and therefore only 7 (one quarter) of the remaining 28 non-clubs. This means an expected 2 of the remaining 8 Spades. So, the expected C length is 8 and the expected Spade length is 7. Clearly, this makes bidding 2S more dangerous without the unauthorized information than with. Comparing the expected trump lengths, there is a whopping 2.6 expected S-C length differential with vs. without the UI.

End of Technical Section

Rebuttal Logic Rejected.

The important issue is that without this Law 16B wording, players could use unauthorized information with impunity, saying the UI had no impact on the player's next call. **I am certain this did not occur in this case, and I believe the player's analysis that the 2S bid was the only logical option in East's mind. But this logic is not only wrong, but clearly does not apply to East's Peers, the ones who really count in Law 16B.**

I asked Josh Feldstein and Evelyn Kleinsasser what they bid, blinded to any unauthorized information, and both chose to pass. I would also pass. I also asked my nephew Mike Shuster, a star player and certified director to weigh in. He was given only the E-mail by South. He showed an expert defense that is likely to see NS set the contract +200 NS, but settled on +100 NS. So, 5/5 peers opted to pass. The UI clearly predicts that bidding is more likely to be successful than it would absent UI. **I respectfully reject the rebuttal, but find no wrongdoing on the part of East.**