

## Unauthorised Panic by David Stevenson

You pick up a nice balanced hand with 21 points and open 2NT. Partner alerts, and tells the opponents you are showing five clubs, five diamonds and a weak hand. He then bids 3♦. What do you bid? The point is that you are not allowed to take any advantage of partner's alert or explanation. Presumably you play transfers, so you should bid 3♥ over 3♦. Do you?

The problem is that you may be causing yourself no end of grief. Perhaps partner will take it as a slam try in diamonds, and bid 5♦ or even 6♦! Perhaps he will merely be confused and pass thus missing an obvious game. So what a lot of people do is bid 3NT to make it clear they have a balanced hand. This is referred to amongst the Directors as "Unauthorised Panic". Players often panic when they hear an explanation that does not match their hands and make the bid that is clearest to show partner what they actually have. But this is based on the unauthorised information from partner's explanation [or alert] and so is completely illegal.

Of course the opponents may call the Director and they will get an adjustment in their favour, often seeming quite harsh and unfair. But that is what happens when you do not follow the rules, and adjustments give the benefit of any doubt to the opposition. It is much better to make sure that you try as hard as possible never to gain any advantage from unauthorised information from partner. Many players know they must not take advantage of partner's hesitations and will try hard not to do so. But Unauthorised Panic is just as bad, if not worse. It is a game, and should be played to the rules, even when this leads to a bad score for you. Don't blame the Directors, your opponents or the lawmakers: if you and your partner have completely firm agreements it will never happen, so if it does it is your fault: do not try to wriggle out of trouble illegally.

So what should you do if partner's explanation, alert or announcement makes you realise you are not on the same wavelength? First, tell yourself to be ethical: do not take any advantage. Second, if there is a clear call you would make if you had not heard or seen partner's explanation, alert or announcement, then make it, however much trouble you will be in. Third, and more difficult, if you have a choice of calls, do not choose the one that seems to get you out of trouble. Fourth, congratulate yourself on your ethics: you are now playing bridge the way it should be played. So maybe some people will sometimes get a small advantage by not being ethical: it is much easier to feel proud if you are highly ethical.

Let us look at another example from the infamous Ghestem. You have five diamonds and five spades, and your opponent opens 1♥. You bid 2NT, which shows diamonds and spades, but to your horror partner explains it as the minors. LHO doubles, and partner bids 3♣, which is doubled. What now? Probably you should pass. After all, if partner had told the opponents you had spades and diamonds and then bid 3♣, you would assume he had lots of them. It is just possible that 3♦ is acceptable, for example if you had a void club and partner had passed originally so cannot really have seven clubs. But players have an unfortunate habit of thinking "Gosh, he does not realise I have spades, I had better bid 3♠ to let him know". 3♠ is Unauthorised Panic: the only reason to bid it is because of what partner has said, and you must not use that information. Pass, or bid 3♦ with a void club if partner has passed, and take your medicine. You will feel better because you have played fairly. Now all you have to do is explain to partner why your bid follows the rules!