

How to cope with psyches and irregularities

JOHN Portwood from Co. Durham asks about psyching tactics. He psyches rarely but would appreciate advice on what to do if the opponents psyche, and when to make a psychic bid on the rare occasions he decides to do so.

At club level a psyche often upsets opponents. If you are going to psyche, then you should take the following into account:

- a. Have you done it with this partner before? If you have on several occasions, then you are moving into the territory where you have an understanding. Psyching must be as much of a surprise to partner as to the opponents. So, for example, if you have overcalled 1NT, ostensibly 15-18, on a 5-count five times with the same partner in five months, then that is an unacceptably high frequency.
- b. Is it teams? You have a responsibility to your team mates and ruining their good board will make them justifiably unhappy. The risk factor is higher because a catastrophe is worse than a simple bottom at pairs.
- c. Is it near the end and you are doing badly? If you psyche because you are bored, then it is frivolous and showing a disregard for the rest of the field, which is contrary to Law 74.
- d. Is there a reasonable chance of success? Opening 1♠ on a singleton means that there is a high chance of partner raising and even if he doesn't the opponents' contract might have foundered on bad breaks. Much better to hold three small cards!

- e. You can psyche what you want unless your club has decided to play Level 3, in which case you are not permitted to psyche a multi 2♦.
- f. If you take unexplained action opposite a psyche, then it is quite likely a director will assume you have taken advantage of previous experience. This is called 'fielding' and usually results in an adjusted score. Players often claim they knew who had psyched: 'It was obvious,' they say. Treat such claims with extreme caution.

If your opponents psyche and get a good result, then you may be suspicious of them thereafter. Don't go looking for a psyche and trust partner's bidding rather than the opponents'. It is usually the case that the psycher is a bit desperate and although he may cause some short-term damage, in the long run his tactics are likely to show a loss. Playing for him to have psyched when he has not usually leads to some very bad results. One of my 'Desert Island' bridge moments is the man who bid 4♠ because he 'knew' I had psyched 1♠. The resulting penalty was very large and enjoyable!

ROGER Gowland, by e-mail, asks about what to do when irregularities occur. He says that in his club leads out of turn and insufficient bids are not all that rare and somehow he always seems to suffer.

The law is complex, so first call the director. In a club, the committee should encourage the director to use the law book *always*.

If your partner opens out of turn and his bid is not accepted, then you are going to be silenced for the whole auction. It is less bad if the opening out of turn is a pass



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(Laws 30 and 31). Typical advice in this sort of situation is for the opener to bid 3NT and hope. It often leads to an awful result but occasionally you may get lucky and find it is the right contract. Recently a player did this, found that the rest of the field was in 4♠ on a 5-4 fit but trumps broke 4-0 and the only making game was 3NT. As you might imagine, the opponents were not happy but the law does not preclude you from being lucky!

If it is your opponents who bid out of turn or make an insufficient bid, then you should, in my view, rarely accept what they have done. It is worth knowing whether the bid they made was conventional but the bid they should have made was not, because there is a large punishment for this. An exception might be if they have made an insufficient bid in the middle of an auction and allowed you a chance to further define your hand. For example, you raised partner to the two level but had a bit in hand. Now, if your right hand opponent makes an insufficient bid, you may be able to repeat your call of the previous round!

If your opponents lead out of turn, then you have one of five choices to make (Law 54). I think it is usually right to make the opposition pay a penalty. One factor to take into account is whether you believe they have found the right or wrong lead. You are only guessing, but accepting a lead that would cause you to put dummy down rather than being declarer so the lead could go through your K-x would not be smart.

One other good reason to call the director is that if you forbid the lead and the card is picked up, then the other opponent is not permitted to use any information about the illegally led card. It is unauthorised to him. □

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