

Unauthorised information (again!)

E-mail your questions to Jeremy Dhondy at ebuproblems@btopenworld.com or write to the editor, Elena Jeronimidis, at 23 Erleigh Road, Reading RG1 5LR. Please include your name and address.

MIKE Craggs of Rochdale asks: Is it a legitimate ploy to use non-promissory Stayman in order to try to avoid receiving a major-suit lead? The bidding went: 1NT – 2♣ (announced as Stayman) – 2♥ – 3NT. My normal lead would have been a spade, but as I thought responder would be holding spades, I did not lead one. As a result we got an outright bottom instead of an average, when dummy went down with ♠x ♥Ax ♦Axxx ♣K109xxx.

I realise that one is at liberty to enquire whether it is promissory or non-promissory, but in a club duplicate, when there is no obligation to have convention cards, and most people do not have one, should we have to ask every time Stayman is announced: 'What kind of Stayman is it?'

Your opponents seem to have been playing something most peculiar or have been rather lucky. The 'non-promissory' element of Stayman refers to hands where you are raising to 2NT and have no direct invitational bid available. If the sequence is 1NT – 2♣ – 2♥ – 3NT, then I would expect partner to bid 4♠ (or cue-bid with an exceptional hand) if he had a four-card spade suit. Indeed in my view this sequence guarantees a four-card major, or else why bid it?

I certainly would not ask each time, if I were you, because on most occasions it would be irrelevant. Even if all have convention cards I doubt this would be on it and I guess you do have to protect yourself. If this sequence specifically denies 4♠ (perhaps 2♠ over 2♥ would be forcing with four spades), then I think they should tell you this but if they had no agreement to do this and one of them took a fancy to it, then it is just rub of the green I'm afraid. If it happened on several occasions then they have an agreement and in my view should disclose it.

MIKE McMorran of Christchurch, Dorset, says: An ethical question arose recently at a club pairs. East opened 1♥ and South overcalled 2♠. West asked the meaning and was told weak, about 6-10 points. West then bid 3♥ and North competed with 3♠. East (doubtful of the 2♠ explanation) asked North again, and got the answer: '6 to 10; we play weak jump overcalls.' East (still doubtful) inspects the North-South system card, which shows 10-13 and bids 4♥. South now bids 4♠ which is doubled to end the auction. Is it ethical for South to bid again holding the minimum of his system range, but the maximum of his partner's explanation?

There is nothing ethical or unethical *per se* about South bidding again. He might fancy a punt. To bid 4♠ over 3♠ with a 10 count even if you are playing 6-10 is a touch quixotic. It might make but will go down rather more often and sometimes be doubled. It is not sound bridge.

What South cannot do is base that decision on unauthorised information (UI). So if South bid believing the range was 10-13 and was told that North believed it to be 6-10 and bid 4♠ because of this, then he is basing his decision on information to which he is not entitled. I would expect a TD coming to that decision to adjust the score. If 4♠ has succeeded, then the most likely thing is to adjust the score to 3♠ probably plus one, but in resolving the number of tricks it would be normal to favour the non-offending side as far as is possible – maybe you defended the game differently from how you might defend a part-score. If 4♥ by your side is normally making, then the TD would adjust to that score in preference. If 4♥ might or might not make, then the TD might award some proportion of it making according to his



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EBU PROBLEMS

judgement of how likely this is and it might get really complicated.

The only time the TD might let East-West keep their score is if they have done something wild or gambling in the defence and they deserve what has happened. It is rare, however, that appeal committees view that a defence is so bad that the non-offending side must keep their score.

If 4♠ goes down, then North-South would keep their score *unless* conceding 4♥ was a worse score, in which case they would get that. East-West would score the same in this case. I don't think there is any sound reason for North-South and East-West to get different scores on this board. North-South should get the worst score that is at all likely given their infraction.

Although rare, it is open to the TD to also impose a disciplinary penalty if he takes the view that the use of UI is particularly gross and inappropriate.

Incidentally, having asked the question about the meaning of the bid I might check the answer to make sure I had not misunderstood but I would not keep asking. If the opponents' explanations and hands did not match, then I would ask the director to review the situation at the end of play.

IAN Galletti of Otford, Kent, asks:
Are Weak Jump Shifts alertable?

Section 5E1 of the *Orange Book* covers this. Bids are alertable if they are natural but have a potentially unexpected meaning. In England the vast majority plays a sequence such as 1♣ – 2♥ as strong and game-forcing. The use of weak jump shifts is not common, so that qualifies as a potentially unexpected meaning and thus they are alertable. □