



Partner Makes a Slow Pass (Part 1 of 2)

The most frequent "ethical" problem is when a player takes advantage of his partner's slow pass. For example, with both sides vulnerable:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
3♠	Pass*	Pass	??

* Slow (45 seconds)

After North takes an exceedingly long time (45 seconds) to Pass, South has an ethical dilemma. He knows that his partner has some values (isn't broke). North didn't pass in tempo (normal would be 5-10 seconds). He thought 45 seconds and passed. Clearly, North was thinking of doubling or overcalling. Suppose South holds:

♠ A4
 ♥ AQ9652
 ♦ Q42
 ♣ 32

Should South balance with 4♥? It is very dangerous, but not as much as when you are sure your partner has some values. Had North passed in tempo, he could easily have held an ugly 5-count. The slow pass makes it clear that North has close to opening bid values.

Is South "allowed" to bid 4♥? Is he allowed to take advantage of his partner's tempo? In other words, is it "authorized information" to South that his partner has a decent hand?

This is an unfortunate part of the game. The speed/tempo of an action gives away information.



The proprieties state that information is not supposed to be conveyed by anything other than the bid itself. The speed of the bid (or heaven forbid, the emphasis of the bid--such as "snappy" or "fumbling") must be ignored by the partner of the bidder.

So, when North makes his slow pass, South must not draw any inferences. In fact, he should ethically bend over backwards to NOT take advantage. With the example hand above, he should not bid 4♥. To do so would be utilizing the information that his partner has some values. If South does bid 4♥, the opponents can (and should) call the director. The director call is not an "accusation of cheating." It is just proper procedure to draw attention to the fact that North slow-passed and South then bid. Is South *allowed* to bid? If his hand warrants it, of course he is allowed. Suppose South held:

♠ A2
♥ AKJ107652
♦ 32
♣ 2

Who would not bid 4♥? I don't care how long North took or even if he did a cartwheel on the table. South has every right to bid what is in his hand. I've heard uniformed players erroneously state: "South was barred--his partner's slow pass *barred him from bidding*." Not so. It bars partner only in marginal cases. If the partner has 100% action, he can still take it.

But, when it gets "marginal," the partner should not bid after obtaining "unauthorized information." He should take his medicine, be a good person, and make the ethical pass.

To be continued....

Next article:

- 1) What is "marginal" action?
- 2) Is it rude to call the director?
- 3) Other tempo auctions/examples
- 4) Is this for all levels of players?