

Unauthorised Information

I am surprised to learn that even experienced bridge players are not aware of some of the basic laws of bridge. One example is regarding unauthorised information from partner, and many players seem to be unfamiliar with this concept.

Anything your partner says or does during the auction, except for their legal calls (i.e. bids, doubles, passes), is unauthorised information to you, and you must not factor that into your bidding or play. This includes explanations of your bids they may make to opponents when asked. It also includes their alerts of your bids and also their failure to alert what you believe should be alerted.

The laws says that even though you know you and partner are not on the same page, you are not allowed to know this. You must keep bidding in accordance with your original plan, and only deviate from that plan if it is apparent from the subsequent auction or play that you are at odds.

This can be tricky in some cases. For example assume you open 2NT strong which your partner alerts and tells the opponents it is 5/5 in the minors and weak. They respond 3C which is, they believe, a simple preference for clubs over diamonds. You know this because of the explanation you have heard, but you must not base future bidding on it - you must assume partner knew you were showing a strong balanced hand and has bid 3C in response. For most people that would be some sort of Stayman bid asking for a major, and you would need to respond accordingly, even though you know it's not. Likewise if they bid 3D meaning to prefer diamonds over clubs, you need to interpret that based on your original plan and this may be a transfer to hearts in your system. Where it goes from there depends on many factors including the hands themselves and the partnership agreements, and in some cases you might legitimately end up in the best contract.

The confusion may become evident to the opponents who are allowed to make any deductions they like from this - for example if they ask partner about your 2NT opening and partner says "minors and weak", and ask you about partner's 3C bid and you say "Stayman", they will know there's a problem and this is authorised to them, even though it's not authorised to you or your partner.

An interesting way to look at this is to compare it to when players play behind screens, which happens in major events. A screen is placed diagonally across the table in such a way that you cannot see your partner and can only see one of your opponents (your screen-mate). The difference with alerting is that you alert your screen-mate of your own alertable bids and your partner's alertable bids in a way that your partner cannot see, and when the bidding pad or box moves to the other side of the screen, your partner will do the same. Likewise with

explanations - when asked for an explanation by your screen-mate, you do not speak to them but you write down the meaning, and your partner will do the same with their screen-mate. This way neither player knows whether or not their partner has alerted their bid, nor do they know how their partner has interpreted their bid. This is a very "pure" environment, and it is a test that will be applied by the director at your table to help decide if UI was a factor in your subsequent bidding.