Showing the red card

Steve Elliott *explains the thinking behind the often ignored Stop card.*

This article concerns that red card in your bidding box which you pull out whenever making a jump bid (i.e. a bid at a higher level than the minimum in that denomination). It is a card that is much used, but not always strictly in accordance with the laws of the game! I hope this note will help players to see why it makes sense to use the correct procedure.

A summary of the procedure is set out on the reverse of the card, and in more detail on pages 31 and 32 of the Orange Book 2006. The full, correct procedure is as follow:

- First place the Stop card on the table in front of you.
- Then make your bid.
- Leave the Stop card on the table for about 10 seconds *after* making your bid (I know this can seem like an age!), then replace it in the box. Left hand opponent (LHO) must not make a call (i.e. pass or bid) until the card is removed. Nor must he/she show impatience or indifference whilst waiting. If the card is removed too quickly, LHO should nevertheless wait the balance of the time before making his/her call.

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These procedures may seem pedantic, and often unnecessary, but they give free thinking time to the next person to call and minimise the risk of unauthorised information being passed.

When you make a jump bid, particularly early in the auction, you often give your LHO something to think about. If your bid is pre-emptive in nature this is what you are trying to do, of course, because the bid is designed to make life difficult for your opponents. By leaving the Stop card on the table the person making the jump bid gives LHO time to think without that player passing unauthorised information to his/her partner. In these circumstances the Stop card is the friend of LHO!

On the other hand, if LHO makes a pass or bid quickly, with the Stop card on the table, this tells partner that there was nothing to think about. It is actually a breach of the laws to do this, or to convey the same message through any body language.

In many cases, particularly towards the end of the auction, the need for the full procedure often diminishes, and players may judge that they can shorten proceedings without causing any problem, but bear in mind that the correct procedures are there to help players, and that following them only costs a few seconds, after all. It is also in your own interests to act correctly. If any dispute should arise, the Director is more likely to rule against a player who simply flashed the Stop card for a couple of seconds as if it were an Alert, or who bid (or stared pointedly at the ceiling) while the Stop card was still on the table. Partner will not be pleased.

Finally, it worth noting that pulling out the Stop card does not constitute making a call. You can change your mind by putting it back, then making a non-jump bid, or even passing, but do beware that in doing so you will be making unauthorised information available to your partner. Also, a Stop card played out of turn is not a call out of turn, and may be replaced without penalty, but again be aware of any unauthorised information.

Pulling out the Stop card does not constitute a call.

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