



## ***Issue 6: BridgeHands Newsletter***

**Do you feel a psychic connection?**

**July 2006**

**Dear *BridgeHand* Friends,**

This month we will complete our journey into the dark side of the force – the return of the psych. The psychers creed might go, “for better or worse, ‘til death do us part!” This reminds us of the story of the long wed couple who were asked, “Have you ever contemplated divorce?” The wise response was, “Divorce, NEVER! Murder, OFTEN!” Last month we discussed many of the different types of psyches and now we are ready to explore some of the results.

Our friends at “[Fireside Chat](#)” offer an interesting perspective on psychic bidding ([June 2005 Newsletter](#))

In the “good old days” – Edgar Kaplan quipped on a player’s psychic bid.

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## Caveat Emptor, or “Let the Buyer Beware of the Psychic Bidder”

This month we conclude our two-part series on psychic bidding. On the conservative side of what constitutes a psych, last month we mentioned the “Don Oakie” opinion. In the February 1978 ACBL Bulletin, Don offered his opinion of what constitutes an excessive deviation to [Law 40, Partnership Understandings](#). Don defined a normal deviation as, “A bid in which the strength of the hand is within a queen of the agreed or announced strength, and the bid is of a suit of ample length or of notrump; the length of a suit varies by no more than one card from the agreed or announced length.”

In today’s environment, many players have a more creative approach to hand evaluation. According to the *Official Encyclopedia of Bridge*, a psych is “A bid that bears little resemblance to a logical choice for the hand in either a natural sense or as a conventional or systemic partnership agreement.”

Yet this is not to say psychic bidding grows over time. The matriarch of the psychic bidding dates back to 1931 by Dorothy Rice Sims. Bridge was in its heyday during this era, as psychic bidding swept the Bridge tournament circuit. All this was followed by millions of avid Bridge readers who followed the psychic pros in newspaper columns. To fuel the fire, in 1932 Dorothy published her works, titled “Psychic Bidding.” Even the legendary Ely Culbertson, who professed to be opposed to the psych, occasionally found its strategic use in tournament play. Yet aside from Ely’s Bridge prowess, he was arguably the most successful Bridge marketer the game has ever seen. Thus, in Ely’s official “Culbertson System” that made him millions of dollars during the Great Depression, Ely stressed the importance of partnership harmony. Good advice Ely, and with that let’s examine psyches in the wild.

Even before Dorothy’s movement caught fire, the great Sidney Lenz wrote about the evils of the “Shift Bid.” The opener tried a bizarre 1 Notrump opener holding:

A K Q 9 3 2  
A Q 6  
A Q 7  
5

Sitting to the left of the opener with a solid 7 card Club suit, Lenz passed as did the table. The result was down one instead of a cold Spade slam! Surprisingly, the declarer tried to chide Sidney for not bidding his long suit! Ah, how times have changed.

Returning to Dorothy Sims, in the famous Culbertson- Sims match, she held:

A 9 7  
J 10 5 4  
A K J 4 2  
J

Back in those days, players opened a four card major, so Dorothy had a tough decision choosing between the weak Heart suit and the honor bound Diamond minor. Certainly the hand is not suitable for a Diamond-Heart [reverse](#) call. Instead, Dorothy got creative, opening **1 Club** - Dorothy was noted for bidding in such a way to ensure her husband Hal's strong declarer play would prevail. We've previously spoken here about the "[Rule of Anticipation](#)" and, sure enough, Hal jumps to **7 Clubs**. This time the luck was with Dorothy as Hal presented a beautiful dummy:

5  
A Q 6 2  
--  
A K Q 9 8 6 5 3

With the **Heart King** onside, Dorothy pulled trump and easily made the grand slam.

Let's jump forward to the 1966 Bermuda Bowl. In third seat with favorable vulnerability sat Eric Murray, who ventured a mini-psych holding:

9 3  
Q 8 7 6 5 4 2  
9 6  
10 6

Certainly the stars were in ideal position for the mini- psych. Eric had to know his Left Hand Opponent held a proverbial rock crusher, and Eric's seat and vulnerability provided an irresistible temptation to do something. And although one might argue the Heart suit does not conform to the standard definition of "self sustaining," many would agree the hand is 7- 8 [Losing Trick Count](#). At any rate, sitting to his left was the Italian's Walter Avarelli who jumped to **3 Notrump** holding:

A K 7  
A J  
K Q 10 7  
A K Q 8

Unfortunately, Walter's partner did not realize he was a "card rack," missing the slam bonus found at the other table where the auction was not impeded; Bob Hamman began **3 Notrump**, bidding **4 Diamonds** after Lew Mathe's Stayman bid, who subsequently signed off in **6 Notrump** (making 7). Today many bidders overcall using the following step sequence with stoppers:

- 15-17 = 1 Notrump
- 18-20 = Double followed by Notrump
- 21-23 = Double followed by jump in Notrump

Speaking of Notrump overcalls, recall last month we covered the "rapier," a low-level bid intended to deliberately mislead opponents regarding the bidder's suit shape.

```

      10 9 7 6
      K 8 2
      7
      K Q 10 6 4
J 8 4
J 10 3
Q 9 8
A J 8 7

      A K Q 2
      A 9 7 6 5
      2
      9 5 2

      5 3
      Q 4
      A K J 10 6 5 4 3
      3
  
```

West	North	East	South
		1H	1N
2H	X	P	3D
P	3N	P	P
X	XX	AP	

Here our psycher was Pamela Granovetter, not known to attempt a rapier. Unfortunately, hubby Matthew didn't recognize the psych after Pamela pulled his **Double to 3 Diamonds**. After the smoke cleared, Pamela was down six for a whopping 3600!

While Matthew was not a stranger to an occasional psych (having earlier opened **1H** with zero points), pointed out it only makes sense to psych in the first seat before the opponents get in the bidding. But as the saying goes, imitation is the most sincere form of flattery. From Pamela's perspective, Matthew ignored the aggregate bidding. But as often happens, the psychic bidder mistakenly assumed partner is at least as creative as the psycher – a fateful conclusion. Pamela felt Matthew mistakenly deduced she had the requisite points to overcall Notrump but not the requisite shape (perhaps a 3=1=5=4 hand). Thus, hubby Redoubled **3 Notrump** to show a Heart stopper and, never having seen his bride psych, figured their contract was secure (ignoring West's freebid). We close with Matthew's immortal words, "I'm beginning to think

that for partnership bridge, psyching is self destructive."

Perhaps Matthew would relate to this psych, taken from "[Psychological Strategy in Contract Bridge](#)" . (pg 107)

```

                A Q 2
                8 2
                K 6 5 3
                Q 7 6 4
K J 9 5 4 3      10 6
A 7              K 4
A Q 7           9 8 4 2
J 9             A K 10 8 2

                8 7
                Q J 10 9 6 5 3
                J 10
                5 3

```

West	North	East	South
			1H
1S	1N	2C	P
2S	AP		

Despite the offside **SA-SQ** and **HK**, East-West missed their Spade game. Chalk one up for the psycher. Earlier we saw how Matt couldn't believe Pam's psych. Next, we will see how the converse is doubly (sic) true. We have all heard the story about the little boy who cried wolf one too many times. Sure enough, Bridge players may suffer the same epitaph:

```

                A K Q
                7 6 2
                A K 10 6 5 3
                5
J 9 7 5          10 6 4
K J 9 8 5       A 4
9 8             7 2
3 2             10 9 8 7 6 4

                8 3 2
                Q 10 3
                Q J 4
                A K Q J

```

This hand comes from the 1997 McCallan Pairs held in London. Most players bid **6D**, going down. Michael Rosenberg and Seymon Deutsch were among the lucky few that made slam, even though Zia Mahmood sitting East, doubled Hearts for lead direction. So why didn't Michael go down, you ask? Well, a few boards earlier Zia made a psychic lead directing **Double** with three inconsequential cards when the opponents cuebid a suit. That time it worked well, seducing the opponents to misplay the hand. So Zia's partner, Gabriel Chagas, figured his partner was up to his old tricks. Thus,

Gabriel led a **Spade** instead of his **HA** to set the contract after Zia's **HK**. As the saying goes, "*the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away!*" Most advanced Bridge players are aware of the mantra, "anything goes in third seat." (especially with favorable vulnerability) Witness the Blunderbuss in action – akin to the shotgun spewing projectiles in every direction (heads down, partner):

```

                10 8 7 6 4 3
                A 10 6
                K Q 6
                7

A                K Q 2
K J 9 8 7 5 2   Q 3
A J             10 8 7 5 4 3 2
A K 4           2

                J 9 5
                4
                9
                Q J 10 9 8 6 5 3

```

Playing in the 1967 Vanderbilt Team Championship, Martin Cohn opened **3H** sitting in third seat, definitely earning the "Gross Misstatement" award! West hoped his **Pass** would be converted to **Penalty Pass** but East passed out the auction. At the other table South proved not to be a shrinking violet and opened **5C**, overcalled **5H** by West. North could not resist **doubling** the contract, but alas, the contract made with an overtrick. And who said Bridge can't be as risky as poker?

Those who follow international competition have seen psyches like this one, albeit usually not with such a devastating result:

```

                K Q 8 3
                A J 3 2
                10
                8 5 3 2

J 10 7           6 3
K 10 8 5        Q 7
A K 7           Q J 8 6 2
A 9 6           K Q J 10

                A 9 5 4
                9 6 4
                9 5 4 3
                7 4

```

West	North	East	South
	P	P	1H
P	3H	P	P
X	AP		

It was 1957, the United States playing Italy. Koychou, sitting South tried a risky **1H** with all vulnerable. Sitting West was Walter Avarelli who smoothly passed, awaiting a positive development. Apparently Koychou and partner Harold Ogust did not play [Drury](#), so Harold's **3H** seemed like the perfect bid. Walter could hardly believe the gift, **Doubling** the contract and was awarded 1100 points for his patience. As we said last month, sometimes the psychic boomerang hits the wrong target. One could easily imagine dinner conversation was strained for the U.S. team that evening!

Now let's view an Appeal of a psych, taken from the [Spring 2003 Philadelphia NABC](#). First the hands:

```

                K Q 3 2
                J 10
                A K Q 5 4 3
                Q
J 10 9 8 7 6 5
A 8 5
--
10 5 2
                4
                K 9 6 4
                9 8 6 2
                K J 8 4

```

```

                A
                Q 7 3 2
                J 10 7
                A 9 7 6 3

```

West	North	East	South
	1C*	X	2C
2D	X	P	P
2S	X	AP	

North's **1C\*** was Precision, showing 16+ points and East's Double ostensibly showed Clubs and Hearts. When the dummy came down, the defenders summoned the Director, claiming East had "fielded" West's **2D** psych. The Director ruled there was not any evidence to support the assertion ([Law 40](#)), letting the score stand. Afterwards, the defenders persisted, filing an Appeal. While the Committee ascertained East/West had played Bridge together in excess of 20 years, North/South's bidding promised game-going values. Thus, West's **2 Spade** bid could not be interpreted to show interest in competing to win the auction. The Committee noted North's Double of East's **2 Diamonds** demonstrated they had a method to expose the psychic bid. Their confusion in follow-up bidding was not the fault of East/West – it was North/South who did not appear to know their best follow-up action. The Appeal team went on to note that given East's poor holding, the pair aggressively competed with favorable vulnerability against the strong Club system.

For a comprehensive book on the psych, we encourage you to read "[The Art of Psychic Bidding](#)," Julian Pottage and Peter Burrows. Fred Karpin's "[Psychological Strategy in Contract Bridge](#)" also has many illustrative hands showing beneficial and detrimental psych hands including some wonderful humor. In the 1950 Master Pairs Championship, South opened **1H** with 6 Hearts and **A-K-Q-J**. No, the honors were not in Hearts, instead one in each suit (a nasty holding, regardless of the fact Matthew Granovetter might understand the semi-psych, since the bid was made in the first seat).

Unfortunately, North made a strong jump shift, inviting slam. Rather than **Pass** (see next article), South rebid Hearts and North bid **4N**, Ace-asking. Sometimes a lie gets out of hand and so South bid **5C**, showing no Aces. This time South figured if North could signoff in **6N** when South held no Aces, certainly South could be a hero by bidding **7N**. Apparently North read the conventional response as showing *two* Aces and jumped to **7N** without assistance! Holding the trump Ace, East found an easy **Double** with South going down 800. Next, our psycher asked partner to fetch a Coke. Returning with a Coke and a beer, psycher South grabbed the beer. Again befuddled, North chortled, "I thought you wanted a Coke." Not missing a beat, South chimed, "Gosh, partner, can't you recognize a psych?"

## **Fireside Chat, June 2005**

**BridgeHands** thanks our friends at [Fireside Chat](#) for sharing their interesting perspective on psychic bidding (June 2005 Newsletter, written by OKBridge "KALTICA," Colin Ward in real life)

What is a Psych?

The Laws of Duplicate Contract Bridge define a psychic call thus: "A deliberate and gross misstatement of honor strength or suit length." The key word is "gross." If you forget the meaning of a call, that is not a psych. If you make a call with 12 points when your partnership agreement calls for a maximum of 11, that is not a psych - it is not a gross misstatement. If you are playing five-card majors and open the bidding with one spade on a four-card holding, that is not a psych. In general your call is a gross misstatement, and therefore is considered a psych, if the call varies by at least two points in strength or two cards in length from your agreement."



So if we open with 9 points in first seat, this is a psych, right? Not necessarily! If we are playing light openings, such that opening on 10 points would be considered a "legitimate" bid in our methods, opening with 9 points would simply be "shaded". If you do this too often, such that Partner begins to catch on and make allowances, you must tell your opponents that your minimum opening bids are now 9+ points.

A psych is always an OVERstatement of values, right? Again, not necessarily. Look at the example cited: bidding with 12 points when it promises a maximum of 11. If we held 13 points--TWO more than "possible" according to our methods--it WOULD be a "gross misstatement" (i.e. a gross UNDERstatement) and, thus, a psych.

Are all psychs bids? No. Note the careful use of the term "call". Doubles, redoubles and, yes, even PASSES can be psyched. Moogal can regale you with a story of her partner, desperate for a good IMPs result, passing with 14 HCPs, ending in 1NT redoubled, making two!

Has this definition of a psyche changed over the years? Not much. If memory serves, THREE HCPs used to be the standard for defining "gross misstatement" of honour strength. Aside from that, though, this definition has remained intact since the earliest days of the game.

What do we do after psyching?  
Pass.

What if Partner makes a forcing bid in a new suit?  
Pass.

What if Partner Blackwoods?  
Pass.

Are there ANY times when we might bid again?  
There are two:

1. If Partner cuebids an enemy suit you MIGHT bid again.
2. If Partner penalty doubles below slam you MUST pull.

Those are the fundamentals of psyching. There are also a few ethical concerns:

1. Never bid or play frivolously. This includes psyching.
2. Do NOT assume that your partner has psyched until Partner passes a forcing bid. Learn to show your values ONCE and only once.

Most experts psyche occasionally. Some don't. So if a player or pair is inclined to NEVER psyche or psyche more often than others do they have to disclose this tendency to the opponents? Generally, no, they don't HAVE to; it would be like pre-alerting the opponents to our tendency to bid very aggressively or very conservatively.

But what if, in the interest of full disclosure, the pair WANTS to tell the opponents that they either never psyche or that they do so more often than others. Is the pair PERMITTED to tell the opponents this information? Remarkably, this is unclear.

Believe it or not, we once had an opponent object to receiving this information! He called the TD and, to my stark amazement, the TD ruled that we were not ALLOWED to warn our opponents of this style quirk. Later, I went to play on another venue and the TD there insisted that we MUST inform our opponents of such a tendency!

This debate on disclosure continues.

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***BridgeHands*** Comment – Part III of the ACBL Alert procedures discusses Pre-Alerts:

**2) SYSTEMS BASED ON VERY LIGHT OPENINGS OR OTHER HIGHLY AGGRESSIVE METHODS**

**If it is your partnership style to routinely open hands with fewer than 11 HCP, preempt with very weak (frequently worse than Qxxxx) suits, and/or overcalls with fewer than 6 HCP at the one level, the opponents must be pre-Alerted.**

As we noted earlier in this article, Matthew Granovetter certainly was surprised that Pamela psyched, while Gabriel Chagas anticipated Zia Mahmood's psychic bid (as might anyone else, based on his reputation). Most Directors would rule according to the partnership's deviation from typical partnership bidding expectations. To ensure equitable bidding, full disclosure requires the pair Pre- Alert their opponents of possible psychic bidding.

None the less, the ACBL prohibits certain forms of psychic bidding including excessive psyches. The ACBL provides Directors the following guidance:

**When three or more psychic initial actions by members of a partnership, in any one session, have come to the attention of the director, the director should investigate the possibility that excessive psyching is taking place.**

For more information, please refer to the [ACBL Tech Files](#)

## Edgar Kaplan – never at a loss to enlighten the masses with his commentary

In second seat, nobody vulnerable, Goldman opened 1 Spade with this pitiful holding:

Q 7 6 3  
10  
Q J 6  
J 8 7 4 2

Edgar, never at a loss for words, retorted:

*"Goldman-Soloway open light systemically when non-vulnerable, so it is not clear whether this was a super-shaded light opening or a rather heavy psych!"*

Thank you, Edgar - your legacy lives forever.

### ***BridgeHands Archive***

If you missed a back issue of a ***BridgeHands*** Intermediate-Advanced eMag newsletters, here are the links:

[Issue 0 - Finesses](#)

[Issue 1 - Forcing Pass](#)

[Issue 2 - Leads on Notrump Doubled contracts](#)

[Issue 3 - Opener Reverses](#)

[Issue 4 - Reverses, Part II - Responder Rebids](#)

[Issue 5 - Psyches, Part I](#)

We hope you are enjoying the ***BridgeHands*** website and eMag Newsletters. We always enjoy hearing from you regarding your comments or suggestions.

Sincerely,

***BridgeHands***



BridgeHands

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