



May 2006 BridgeHands Newsletter

Do you feel a psychic connection?

May 2006

Dear Michael,

This month we will take a look at the dark side of the force - enter the psych. Regardless of our feelings about these nasty critters, they've been around a long time and with charismatic pranksters like Zia to perpetrate some rather "creative bidding", it's clear the psych is alive (if not always well) even at the top levels of Bridge play.

While fit showing jumps come in many flavors, the vanilla flavored "FSJ" after a passed hand is popular with many advanced partner. If you haven't tried it yet, perhaps now is a good time to give it a taste test.

You're in the passout seat in an uncontested auction where the opponents have bid game or slam, perhaps with an alert or another systemic call. Is it within your right to inquire about a specific bid before making the final pass? Let's argue the merits of Law 20F versus Law 16A and see who wins. . .

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How would you gauge your psychic status?

This month we will throw caution into the wind, marching where angels fear to tread. Enter the psychic bid. Many players have bitter-sweet experiences with psyches, be it by an unscrupulous opponent, cunning partner, or self-inflicted from within. But before discussing the details, let's define the psych bid itself. Most would agree a psych is a bid that is a gross misstatement of a player's honor strength or suit length. The *Official Encyclopedia of Bridge* goes on, saying, "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."

Interestingly, when it comes to a player's strength and suit length, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Back in February 1978, the ACBL Bulletin published the famous "Don Oakie" opinion of what constitutes an excessive deviation to [Law 40, Partnership Understandings](#). In essence, 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." (See the [ACBL Duplicate Decisions, Law 40](#)" for details). While Don's guideline was helpful for players and Bridge Directors, over the years many creative bidders have pushed the envelope with some success on Don's restrictive ruling. For instance, most seasoned players would relate to significant player "deviations" on what constitutes the proper strength for a strong 2 Club opener.

Consider these hands (the first featured on our graphic heading):

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A K Q J 10 9 7 6 5   7 5 4   2   --  
A K Q 10 9 8   J 10 9 8 7 6   4   --
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[According to the ACBL](#), opening 2 Clubs with either of these hands is acceptable if, "in the view of the bidder, there is a reasonable chance for game in hand with little or no help from partner." Hmm, so indeed the classic cliché has an element of truth, "beauty is in the eye of the beholder!"

At any rate, for the purposes of our discussion, let's simplify the issue by agreeing that a player has psyched when their strength falls under 50 percent of partnership strength agreements, or the suit length is several cards less than expected.

Next, let's explore the motivation of the psych. Certainly the most common reason folks psych is to obstruct the opponents from finding their best contract. Some psyches are used as defensive countermeasures, such as pre-escapes, dump Ogust, and the like

(see below). Or perhaps a player might stretch a bid for its merit on lead direction. The classic example is the overcall; over the years, the strength (and length) for the overcall seem to get lighter and lighter. Today many players would happily overcall 1 Spade holding **A Q J 3 2** with little else, especially considering favorable vulnerability. In fact, those who do not see anything special about overcalling based on no more than these values in total, might then contemplate overcalling with nothing more than **A Q 3 2**.

True, these days players expect overcalls could be light – duplicate players make this clear on the back of their convention card. But what about opening 1 Diamond holding only **K Q J 3 2** in honor strength with favorable vulnerability? Definitely a psych! Now then, again with favorable vulnerability, what might you open the same hand in third seat? Those who like “action” might go anywhere from 1 to 3 Diamonds, with some creative bidders testing the water with a 1 Notrump call (hopefully with a sixth Diamond). Let’s rate these bids:

1D = clearly a psych, albeit nice lead direction

2D = definitely fits within Don Oakie’s normal deviation

3D = at best a semi-psych (deceptive tactical bid), even with an outside Queen or four card side suit and using the [“Rule of 2-3-4”](#)

In their book, [“The Art of Psychic Bidding,”](#) Julian Pottage and Peter Burrows identified two general categories of psychic bids:

Blunderbuss – as we witnessed with the 3 Diamond bid above, the Blunderbuss blasts a high-level bid, typically preemptive with the intent to consume bidding space. As its name suggest, the blunderbuss fires lethal projectiles over a wide path, at best reaching the opponent but perhaps inflicting mortal damage to friendly forces.

Rapier – typically a low-level bid intended to deliberately mislead opponents regarding the bidder’s suit shape. Recall the psych bidder who opens 1 Notrump in third seat holding something like:

3 2 3 2 K Q J 4 3 2 4 3 2

If the bidder’s intention was to ultimately flee to Diamonds when doubled, the tactic would be considered a rapier – thrust and retreat. An initial bid of **1S** with the above holding would be a more classic form of the rapier. Note: if the rapier was not already dangerous enough, doing so with extreme shortness can be especially disastrous since partner is more likely to have length in the suit and make a monstrous jump in the short suit! Some of those who say psyches are akin to the boomerang (likely to come back and whack the perpetrator), are probably in this category. Assuming a partnership does not have the [Gambling 3 Notrump](#) bid

in their conventional arsenal, a player might also try the ravier **1S** third seat opening bid holding:

3 2 4 3 2 2 A K Q J 4 3 2

If necessary, the ravier bidder hopes to stall the opponents' bidding. If the auction gets lively, the ravier will repeatedly rebid Clubs, hoping partner will eventually figure out the psych based on the *opponents'* bidding. This illustrates the psycher's dilemma, requiring one's partner to believe the opponents instead of the supposed trustworthy partner. Perhaps this is the origin of the tongue-in-cheek term "Center Hand Opponent!"

Yet the psych aficionado will go so far as to provide gradations of the notorious psych.

Baby Psych – This category is less obnoxious, yet still creating an element of confusion. Perhaps partner opens **1H**, with right hand opponent doubling and you bid **1S** holding:

2 5 4 3 2 5 4 3 2 5 4 3 2

Most of us are familiar with the ([Garbage Stayman](#)). After opener's 1 Notrump, responder makes a supposed Stayman call with a bust hand and short Club suit. This practice is well accepted and not perceived as a Baby Psych. Certainly responder's true motive was clear after responder passes opener's **2D**, **2H**, or **2S** rebid. Yet on the next two scenarios, we will see responder's charade may have a more nefarious intent. . .

Imagine you and partner are playing "mini-Notrump", opening on 10-12 HCP. As responder, you hold a near-bust hand and are obviously concerned the advancer will double, setting your side for a big number. Many mini-Notrump responders feign invitational values, again bidding 2C Stayman. This facade is known as a "[Pre-escape](#)", attempting to confuse the advancer to avoid a penalty double.

The "[dump Ogust](#)" follows a similar theme. After a preemptive weak two bid, bust responder queries 2 Notrump, providing opponents the illusion responder has game interest. Of course, regardless of opener's rebid, the responder always retreats back to trump. A word to the wise - this parlor trick works best when opener's suit is Spades, allowing responder to elegantly signoff in 3 Spades. Don't try this when partner opens **2D** unless you are prepared to rebid **4D** after partner's rebid in 3 of a major suit.

Mini Psych – As we discussed above, our third hand opener with a short 2-3 card suit falls in the category of a mini psych, as does the 3 level third seat opener holding a 5 card minor (especially bidding 3 Clubs). Another classic mini psych eluded to earlier was the **1D** opener holding:

Q 3 2 3 2 K Q J 3 2 4 3 2

Another favorite rapier mini psych is the 1 Notrump response holding a bust hand with a great fit in partner's suit. The mini psycker plans belated support of partner's suit when opponents jump into the auction. To illustrate this tactic, let's say partner opened **1H**, where responder bids **1N** holding:

3 2 J 5 4 3 2 4 3 2 4 3 2

Maxi Psych – While the maxi has enough strength to justify a bid, the shape constitutes a distortion of the call. Perhaps you have an 18 count and envision a jump rebid of **2 Notrump** holding:

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

A normal opening bid would be **1C**, rebidding **2N**. Yet an opening bid of **1D** might inhibit the left hand opponent from leading Diamonds when the partnership winds up in a 3 Notrump contract. However, be careful doing this with a doubleton, as the auction could result in a passout around the table (a suicide psych?)

Incidentally, "walking the dog" technically does not constitute a psych but is merely a bidding strategy. Perhaps you overcall **1S** with an 8 card major that's a two-suiter with a 4 [Losing Trick Count](#) hand; you intend to slowly bid up to **4S**, hoping to draw a double and make game when the bidding reaches a level perceived unmakeable by the opponents. Walking the dog falls in the realm of everyday bidding.

Making a third seat preemptive 2 or 3 level bid when holding full opening values and a 5 card suit might be either a strategic bid or a maxi psych, depending on your point of view. Perhaps you are concerned the opponents will find a Spade fit, so you choose to open **2H** holding something like:

2 A K Q 3 2 K 4 3 2 4 3 2

Okay, now that we've covered enough to get us all into trouble, that's enough on psyches for now. Next month we will take a look at some psych hands found in the wild.

Fit Showing Jump by Passed Hand, or "Let me show you mine, too"

Passed hand bidding is in a world of its own, or as the Romans said it best: Caveat emptor! (let the buyer beware) Still, there is a place for every hand, with a corresponding bid to match. Fit showing jumps and their half-brother, [mixed raises](#), take many forms – a comprehensive topic best saved for another series. For now, we will take on the fit showing jump by a passed hand. Marty Bergen's book "[Marty Sez](#)" includes an entire chapter on passed hand bidding. Marty has generously granted *BridgeHands* permission to excerpt his write-up on fit showing jumps by a passed hand.

A jump shift by a passed hand promises support for partner's suit.

This (alertable) bid shows a good passed hand with at least nine cards in the two suits. It is most often used after a minor-suit opening, is not forcing, and works well in competitive auctions.

Some players use the jump to show 10-11 HCP with no fit – they are proudly announcing that they almost opening the bidding. Big deal. All they have done is crown the auction. It is definitely better to define the passed-hand jump shift as promising a fit. If you do not have a fit, do not jump.

West	North	East	South	
-	-	-	P	
P	1C	P	?	
8 7 3	A K J 8 4	J 8 5 4 2		<i>Bid 2D</i>
9 6	K J 6 5 4	7 2	A Q 9 6	<i>Bid 2H</i>
A J 9 4 2	8 8 3	K 9 5 4 2		<i>Bid 2S</i>

By the way: After responder's jump, opener's retreat to his first suit is a signoff. His bid of a new suit is forcing for one round.

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Law 20F – Yours is not to (*always*) question why

Here's the beat – the bidding goes:

(1D) – (1S);
(1N) – (2C); 2C alerted
(2S) – (3S);
(4S) – P – (P) – ?

Here's a common belief: "At anytime throughout the auction during a player's turn to call, the player may ask an opponent the meaning of a bid."

Question: So in the passout seat, is it proper for a player to ask the meaning of a specific call?

On the one hand, [Law 20F](#) states:

"During the auction and before the final pass, any player, at his own turn to call, may request a full explanation of the opponents' auction (questions may be asked about calls actually made or about relevant calls available but not made); replies should normally be given by the partner of a player who made a call in question.

After the final pass and throughout the play period, either defender at his own turn to play may request an explanation of opposing auction. At his or dummy's turn to play, the declarer may request an explanation of a defender's call or card play convention."

Yet on the other hand, [Law 16A](#) counters: "After a player makes available to his partner extraneous information that may suggest a call or play, as by means of a remark, a question, a reply to a question, . . . the partner may not choose from among logical alternative actions one that could demonstrably have been suggested over another by the extraneous information."

So what gives? Is it okay to ask the meaning of an opponents' bid before passing and partner makes a face down opening lead?

The bottom line is that while L20F is true, asking the meaning of a **specific** opponent call is a *no-no*. At a minimum, a player should ask for an explanation of the entire auction rather than focus on one of many bids in a live auction. Better yet, players should follow the guidance offered by Mike Flader, ACBL Associate National Tournament Director: "It is a good practice to not ask a question about an opponents' bid unless you are considering taking some action at your turn to bid. If you have nothing to say, any questions you may have can wait until the end of the auction." Good point, Mike! So in our above bidding scenario, unless the player in the passout seat reasonably anticipates making a call, the seemingly harmless query could be a breach of Law 16A. So be careful posing

indiscriminate questions which might suggest your partner make a certain lead, plan a specific defense, or infer making a call in a live auction.

For more information, see page 7 of the [Sunday, April 9, 2006 Dallas NABC Daily Bulletin](#).

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Sincerely,

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