

## From the Director's Desk – HESITATIONS

In this feature, I will be commenting from time to time on issues relating to the Laws of Bridge and how they may affect every-day play. I have chosen "Hesitations" for my first topic because it is one of the most contentious areas in Bridge Law. Many players genuinely do not understand what counts as a "hesitation" and what the problem is anyway.

**What is "hesitation"?** Any obvious "pause for thought, where the player is clearly trying to decide what to bid or what card to play.

**What's the problem?** The hesitation gives "unauthorised information" to your partner.

The first thing I want to emphasise is that there is nothing wrong with pausing to think about what to bid (or what to play); after all, we are not machines, and we do have to ponder problematic situations. However, it is important to recognise that pausing to think indicates that there is something to think about. So the pause gives your partner information not directly based on your bidding system

Where the Law comes in to play is in relation to your partner's actions. There is nothing wrong with a hesitation, BUT it gives unauthorised information, and there is something wrong with your partner taking advantage of that information.

A clear example would be the following bidding:

EAST	SOUTH	WEST	NORTH
	2D*	3D	Pass (after pause for thought)
Pass	3S	All Pass	

South's 2D was alerted and explained as a weak 6-card major. It turns out that South holds:

♠KT9863  
♥63  
♦KQ  
♣972

In general, a player who pre-empt is not expected to bid again unless his partner comes into the bidding. The pre-emptive bidder has 'said his all' in his first bid. So why did South bid again in this auction? A reasonable conclusion would be that he was encouraged to believe that his partner held some values – had some reason to think about what to bid – and therefore it was worth pushing a level higher. But this is exactly what the Law forbids. And the Law is actually tougher than that. It does not allow South to argue that "I was always going to bid again", or some such argument. If South's bid could have been suggested by his partner's hesitation, the Director is likely to disallow it.

Remember, hesitation is not in itself a violation of the Law. BUT partner must not draw any inferences from that hesitation. If the Director is called, it is to protect the rights of the opponents. It is not a criticism of the player who has paused for thought, and it is not necessarily a problem for partner if his bid is clearly justifiable. It is simply the way that the Law is written to keep the game of Bridge fair and enjoyable for all. Next time I will discuss just how the Director may get involved, and how the Law may be applied.

### Some tips

1. If you have thought for a while about what to bid, try not to pass; a pass may put your partner in a difficult position.
2. If your partner has hesitated before passing, it is usually safer to pass than bid.

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## He who hesitates... Part 2.

Peter Peterson — NBC Tournament Director

In my previous column, I wrote about the much-discussed issue of “Hesitations”. The potential problem lies in the fact that hesitating could send a message to your partner that you have something to think about, maybe undisclosed values or potential support for partner’s suit. The hesitation is therefore potentially giving “unauthorised information” to your partner. The Laws of Bridge make it clear that there is no problem with pausing to think about what to bid. However, that hesitation is a source of unauthorised information and there **is** a problem if your partner makes a bid that could be based on that information.

### **How does the Law operate?**

If your opponent comes back into the bidding after his/her partner has hesitated and passed, you are entitled to protection under the Law. You should announce that you believe there has been a hesitation and may wish to call the Director. If the opponents agree that there has been a hesitation, there is no need to call the Director until the end of play of the hand. If the opponents don’t accept that there has been a hesitation, then you must call the Director immediately, so that it can be established whether a hesitation has actually occurred. If the Director determines that a hesitation has occurred, nothing further happens until the hand has been played. Note in particular that the Director cannot “undo” the opponent’s bid. Bidding and play continue as normal. At the end of the hand, the Director will return and at that point decide whether the non-offending pair have been disadvantaged. If so, the Director will award an adjusted score to restore equity. Let’s see this in an actual example:

### **ESWN**

**1H 2S pass (after pause)**

**Pass 3H All Pass**

Why did South bid again in this auction? A reasonable conclusion would be that he was encouraged to believe that his partner held some values – had some reason to think about what to bid – and therefore it was worth pushing a level higher. But this is exactly what the Law forbids. And the Law is actually tougher than that. It does not allow South to argue that “We never let the opponents play at the 2 level”, or some such argument. If South’s bid could have been suggested by his partner’s hesitation, it is an “infraction” of the Law. The Director is called after South’s bid of 3H, and it is agreed that North had “paused for thought”. The bid of 3H stands, the hand is played and the Director comes back to the table. What happens next depends partly on the result of the play. The Director will need to check what the probable outcomes were for West’s 2S bid. If playing 2S would have given East-West a better score than letting South play 3H, then the Director will give East-West that score. On the other hand, if South goes several tricks off in 3H, giving East-West a good score, that score will stand.

**In short, South can not benefit from bidding after North has hesitated.**