



EUROPEAN BRIDGE LEAGUE

10th EBL Main Tournament Directors Course
3rd to 7th February 2016
Prague – Czech Republic

UI
playing with Screens

by **Maurizio Di Sacco**

Whenever we play with screens, there are in place a few different mechanisms (clearly listed in the WBF Code of Practice) that alleviate, and often cancel, many obligations that are in place when there are no screens.

At the same time, there are restrictions that are peculiar to the play with screens, and the players should be educated to know them. Let's have a look at the Code of Practice:

[...]

Action behind screens

The intention of screens is to reduce to the minimum circumstances in which the members of a partnership are mutually aware of any matter not part of the legal auction. Players on the other side of a screen are not to be made aware of an irregularity if it is rectified before the tray is passed under the screen. All consequences of an irregularity so rectified are null save in relation to the possibility that the screenmate of an offender may be misled by a conclusion drawn from the occurrence. The offender may avert this consequence by a helpful and adequate explanation to the screenmate.

The WBF considers it desirable that players should vary the tempo randomly when returning the tray under the screen. Where North and South are the players with next turn to call after the tray is received, these are the players who are to be responsible for the movement of the tray. It is considered there can be no implications if a tray returns after 15 seconds or less. This period may be extended in the later stages of a complicated or competitive auction without necessarily creating implications. Attention is drawn to the distinction to be made in the tempo expected when players encounter highly unusual situations generated by unfamiliar conventions or treatments. Directors and appeal committees should be sympathetic to the player who has to contend with such a situation.

[...]

The first thing to be said, is that in case of high competitive auction those fifteen seconds can be extended up to thirty, and the second is that recently, in 2014, the WBF has issued a new regulation (eventually adopted by EBL) that says that even in case of a delay fifteen seconds long or less, whenever is possible to clearly identify a break in tempo (BIT).

The consequences of the above is that the players, in general, should not be worried about small hesitations during the auction, because normally delays up to 15/20 seconds are considered normal. However, they should still be aware that there is the need to avoid, at any moment, to pass potential UI through the screen.

Possible sources of UI

Even though a BIT is the most common source of UI, there are many others, including for example:

1. To make noise pulling out a bidding card and /or placing it on the tray. The players should be careful to do it silently, restraining from uncontrolled gestures, or violent and noisy actions, as holding the bidding cards furiously, or smashing them onto the tray.
2. Variations in tempo. Take note that looking at one side of the screen, North calls first, then East calls, then North pushes the tray through the aperture (similarly, South calls first, then West calls, then South pushes the tray). As a consequence, the members of both sides have the chance to control the tempo of the tray: North (South) could hold the tray for a while whenever East (West) calls too quickly, and East (West) can delay his/her own bid whenever North (South) is too fast.

Substantially, it is entirely appropriate manipulating the tempo of the tray in order to make it look random. The correct procedure is thus for East (West), in order to avoid deceiving his/her screenmate with what might look as an

- hesitation, to expose his/her bidding card placing it onto the table and not onto the tray. From there, it will eventually be placed into the right spot of the tray.
3. To make any noise asking questions or answering to an opponent's inquiry. Unfortunately, the players only rarely ask and answer in writing, as they should. Whenever they don't comply with the regulations, they should at least be careful not to be heard from the other side of the screen.
 4. Alerting in a noisy way, such as - quite commonly - knocking on the table, or tapping, or waiving noisily the alert card, or even smashing the bidding cards onto the tray.
 5. Calling the TD. We'll get back later to this argument, but just keep in mind that whenever there is a TD call, that call is usually perceived on the other side of the screen, and can easily represent a source of UI.

Current Interpretation

If a side of the screen has various opportunities to avoid passing UI to the other side, if up to twenty seconds are generally considered normal for a tray to come back from the other side, if the players are recommended to randomize the tempo of the tray, is thus logic to instruct the players to simply ignore the tray's tempo upon calling.

Just to better understand the above statement, let's have a look at the different reasons for a tray to be delayed: a pause for thought of one of both players, asking questions and replying, writing, looking for a piece of paper, asking a coffee, calling the TD for reasons that are totally irrelevant for the other side, agreeing on the number of tricks of a previous board, randomizing the tray's tempo etc.

The factors involved in a tray's delay are so many, that most of the times they hardly send any useful information to the other side. Thus, the players should just focus on bidding in the most normal possible way, ignoring the tempo variations. If there was a UI, the TD will be eventually called, and will deal with the problem.

An example of this approach:

		♠ A 10 5	Board 12 W / NS
		♥ A K Q 9 4 3	
		♦ 7 4	
		♣ 10 8	
♠ 6		N	♠ Q 9 7 3 2
♥ J 10 8 7		W	♥ 6 5 2
♦ A Q 9 6 5		E	♦ 10 3 2
♣ J 7 5		S	♣ 9 6
		♠ K J 8 4	
		♥ ---	
		♦ K J 8	
		♣ A K Q 4 3 2	

W	N	E	S
pass	1♥	pass	1♠
pass	2♦ ¹⁾	pass	4♣ ²⁾
pass	4♥ ³⁾	pass ⁴⁾	4♠
pass	5♣ ⁵⁾	pass ⁶⁾	All pass

- 1) very slow
- 2) very slow
- 3) very fast
- 4) deliberately slow
- 5) quite fast
- 6) deliberately slow

East, reckoning that both 4♥ and 5♣ had been too fast, pulled out his pass immediately, but held it just above the tray for a while before placing it in its spot. South, upon deciding what to do over 5♣ (whether to bid 6♣ or not), felt he should not bid the slam after his partner alleged BIT. In those times (1995, Estoril), in lack of a specific regulation, East's behavior was deemed to be deceiving, and the result was adjusted to 6♣ bid and made, but nowadays East's action is just what the regulations call for him to do, thus no adjustment would be possible (actually, a NS call would be deemed preposterous).

The principle is that South should just focus on bidding what he thinks to be technically right, being ready to eventually see the TD adjusting the score in case his partner was found guilty of the transmission of a UI. In other words, it remains possible to apply Law 16, but the players should just keep it in the background, and bid according only to their beliefs.

Conclusions

We cannot hide that a world where all the players follow the above principle, on one hand taking care of randomly adjusting the tray's tempo following the correct procedure, and on the other ignoring any variation, is a kind of wonderland, inhabited by Nymphs, Fauns and a few Unicorns.

Reality is very, very different, all over Europe (and the World). Saved few virtuous players who know the rules, the ignorance on the matter is close to absolute.

What we can try to do, is to raise these subjects whenever possible, publishing the regulation on the bulletins, and mentioning it at all captains' meetings. Slowly, we may be able to make a break into the wall, and progressively widen it. Who knows!

Whether the right procedure is followed or not, there will always be situations where a player claims that an opponent's actions has been suggested by an ascertained delay of the tray. How should we deal with them?

This kind of problem is in fact rather more complicate than it may look at first glance, and there are a few different points we should focus on:

1. approaching the table
2. collecting the facts
3. making a ruling

Approaching the table and collecting facts

Preamble

The way the TD approaches the table is often the most important part of the job, even when there are no screens, and even when the argument is not a UI, thus we should know well what to do, and how, in every specific situation.

A correct procedure may solve, or at least minimize many cases. A slightly less correct, and there will be cases that will become much more complicate than they would have been.

Since in our specific case the argument is the play with screens, what the TD should primarily try to do is to avoid for the other side to understand what is happening on the side of the call.

Obviously, it would be generally impossible to avoid that the other side remain ignorant at all about the call - however, I'm sure that many of you have experimented situations where the two players on the other side remain unaware, because busy in an amiable conversation - no effort should be spared in order to avoid any communication, until it becomes necessary.

This leads to the first problem. Whenever it is the player who sits on the same side of hesitation who calls the TD, he puts himself in a rather uncomfortable position. He does not lose his rights, but they are in jeopardy. In facts, he just became the vehicle of a UI!

When the problem was raised for the first time, in European and World Championships a great care was paid at the Captains' meetings in urging the captains themselves to tell their players to not call the TD from the side where there had been a hesitation, because that is the wrong one to do it.

Following those times, quite soon that prescription appeared first in the Conditions of Contest of WBF (in 2005, Bermuda Bowl in Estoril), and then even in the EBL's ones (Warsaw 2006).

Finally, to end the long walk - a truly slow one, just to confirm how difficult it was for players and administrators to digest the principle - this interpretation was put into the Screen Regulations (Beijing 2008, World Games).

The TD should then be called from the side where the delay was perceived, and not from where it originated. Whenever a player calls the TD to tell him that his screen mate hesitated, he is also telling the other side that something worth of interest just happened.

It is noteworthy what happened in Montreal (2002), during the Rosenblum Cup. A TD was called in such a situation, from the wrong side of the screen, and once the player on the other side was asked whether he had noticed anything, he replied: "well, yes, I heard that my partner is complaining about a hesitation"!

However, his opponent denied that there had been anything extraneous about the tempo of the tray, as eventually agreed.

The current approach, is that calling the TD from the wrong side highly prejudices the non offending side's rights. However, it does not cancel them automatically.

It means that the TD should be very careful in collecting all the facts, and specifically in establishing whether it was the call itself who informed the players on the other side about the hesitation. How this should be done? How, operatively, should the TD act?

TD Action

The first thing to be done should be to ask the other side of the screen whether anyone has noticed anything unusual - if the players have not noticed a delay of the tray they may think to a different problem - and only then we should proceed to more explicit questions about the time of the calls, paying great care to ask questions to both sides (you should never focus on just one side, in a way to never patently reveal the reason of your inquiry. You'll be surprised to learn how many times the players

will tell you that they did not notice anything! Other times a different problem will be raised, such as a misinformation, or even a slow call on the other side itself.

It is not at all unknown the case of a player who says that his screen mate hesitated for a minute, whilst his partner, on the other side, will say that he did not notice anything strange.

However, if you ask the wrong question, such as "did you notice a delay of the tray when it came back?", the players will know exactly what is the problem, and nine times out of ten will be ready to back his partner saying "oh yes, there was a long delay", but only because you focused his attention to something that not necessarily he had noticed before.

Whenever you are not able to dismiss the case so acting, make sure you have the testimony of all four players (was there a BIT, who caused it, how long was it, what happened during the delay, etc.).

All this should be done using a low tone of voice, trying to minimize the passing of information through the screen. At the end, you have to decide whether the TD call influenced the perception of the event on the other side or not, and if yes, to what extent.

If you are not fully convinced that hesitation passed through the screen, you should deem that was the "wrong player's action" that informed the other side, thus deciding not to take action.

This means that the players must be educated not to call the TD from the wrong side, explaining them carefully and clearly that doing it would often result in the loss of their right to receive an adjusted score.

Once the TD is otherwise convinced that a UI was passed, there are not further procedural problems, the situation now being the same as without screens.

Now the second problem: the TD is called from the right side (or even if called from the wrong side, he has anyhow established that there was a UI). You should still ask the same kind of questions (what was the players' perception about the different timings, what were the reasons for them, how long they were, etc.), but with a

different style and timing, since you don't have to worry anymore about establishing whether the other side has perceived the hesitation or not, and you should not worry anymore about being yourself the one who rings a bell, or, in other words, the vehicle of the UI.

This activity of collecting information is of the utmost importance to understand what happened at the table (collect all facts). It may well be the case that it is not relevant for the final decision, but it is still a fundamental step in the process of understanding the happenings.

Once the facts are fully established, the procedural problems are finished. The TD asks for the auction and play to continue and to call him back if anyone feels to have been damaged. It is good habit not to stay too far from the table, "just in case", since the likelihood of a call at the end of the hand is high.

A very relevant point, which will be further underlined in the last paragraph before getting to the biggest problem, is that you should never wait the end of the hand before collecting all facts about a variation of tempo (differently than a case of alleged misinformation, where asking questions upon arriving at the table may result in transferring UI). Collect all facts as rapidly as possible, then order the auction and/or the play to be continued.

Reaching a decision

As we said above, we do our best to establish whether there was a hesitation or not, thus whether we are in a normal case of UI or not, as without screens. To do so, one of the most important things to know is who hesitated (if anyone). If the TD finds out that it was the alleged player who did it, there will be in a normal UI situation, as without screens.

If, on the other hand, the TD finds out that there was not any variation of tempo of the player who was supposed to have broken tempo, we'll come to the third problem, to be soon approached and dealt with.

Let's now see a case of normal UI, from a Bermuda Bowl:

	♠ K Q 10 4 2	Board 1 N / none
	♥ J	
	♦ 10 9 8 7 6	
	♣ Q 4	
♠ J 8 6	N	♠ 5
♥ Q 5	W	♥ 10 6 2
♦ K Q 5 2	E	♦ J 4 3
♣ K 10 9 8	S	♣ A 7 6 5 3 2
	♠ A 9 7 3	
	♥ A K 9 8 7 4 3	
	♦ A	
	♣ J	

W	N	E	S
Duboin	Crombie	Bocchi	Cornell
	pass	pass	2♣ ¹⁾
pass	2♥ ²⁾	pass	4NT ³⁾
pass	5♣ ⁴⁾	X	... 5♠ ⁵⁾
pass	6♠	All pass	

- 1) a) strong: 8-9 playing tricks or 22-23 BAL or b) Majors, 8-23 or c) GF with ♥.
- 2) 5+♠; 8+ HCP
- 3) RKCB
- 4) 0/3
- 5) BIT

Lead: ♣10.

Final result: 6♠ making, +980

East called the TD when North raised to 6♠, stating that the tray had remained a long time on the SW side of the screen before returning with 5♠, and North agreed. South also agreed on the variation of tempo before his 5♠ bid.

North stated that at the time he had answered 5♣ to the RKCB he had thought that the implicitly agreed suit was ♥, thus he had replied showing zero key card despite his ♠K.

When South bid 5♠, he had realized that ♠ was trump, thus that he was holding one key card that had previously denied, and that his trumps were excellent. On that basis only he had raised to 6♠. He insisted on the fact that it had been the 5♠ bid, and not the BIT that had woken him up, and cleared his mind.

He also told the TD that after the double he had thought as fairly possible that the BIT had been caused by West's pause for thought, perhaps thinking about a sacrifice bid (6♣).

The technical problem is indeed quite interesting, but it was solved interviewing players. All the experts deemed the pass to be a logical alternative, and that the BIT could have helped North to raise to 6♠. Even though quite uncomfortably, the TDs had no other option than adjusting to 5♠ making six, +480 for both sides.

The ruling was appealed (they were still those times...), and the AC members were split between the ones who thought that pass was not an alternative, and the ones who agreed with the experts, thus, at the end the decision was upheld. An interesting point was made that the likelihood of the BIT to have been caused by South was much bigger than for West to be responsible of it, thus the UI was readable by North.

As you can see, once the case has been reduced to a normal UI stuff the procedure to be followed is exactly the same, but a further point to be explored, which does not exist without screens, is whether the UI is readable as for coming from the "right" player or not.

A peculiar case

Let's now tackle the last, and biggest problem (or at least so was considered years ago, when it was firstly approached; nowadays, however, there are no problems anymore).

We are talking about the cases where the variation of tempo does not come from the expected source. Something else happened.

In competitive auctions it is rather normal to have a wrong perception of the tray's tempo (the players are much more sensitive to the subject than they normally are). It is often the case of a player who was not taking part in the auction to suddenly find a good reason to get involved, starting to think when nobody expected him to do it.

A common situation is for the time in slam auctions, or, anyhow, competitive ones, to be affected by a sudden request for explanations, and time is spent in answering too. The case may well also be for a totally random event, as for a cup of coffee to be spilled onto the table, or the passing by of a gorgeous girl wearing a miniskirt, or - not rare at all - the two players being absorbed in a deep and totally silly conversation.

We are lucky if we don't see too many of those situations, but in general, when a player finds out that it was his partner who has broken tempo, and not the opponent, he is ready to drop the case (perhaps because he's afraid of his side being involved in a call!) However, from time to time the point is kept, and we have to find a solution.

The problem was discussed many years ago (this lecture was originally written for this specific reason in 2003) and the solution accepted from then onward.

When not the alleged player is the one who caused a UI, no ruling is possible, and regardless whether the delay was caused by his screen mate or by any other source.

I offer you a case that made a great scandal at its time, even because it was followed on BBO by thousands of spectators.

From the final of the Italian Club Championship (the main event of the calendar):

		♠ K Q 7 4	Board 77 N / all
		♥ 10 9	
		♦ K 6 2	
		♣ A J 4 2	
♠ A J	W	N	♠ 10 9 8 5
♥ Q 8 6 5 4			♥ 3 2
♦ A Q 10 8 5 4			♦ J 9 7 3
♣ ---			♣ K 9 8
		♠ 6 3 2	
		♥ A K J 7	
		♦ ---	
		♣ Q 10 7 6 5 3	

W	N	E	S
Versace	Madala	Lauria	Sementa
	1♣	pass	2♣
2NT ¹⁾	pass	3♦ ²⁾	3♥ ³⁾
pass	3NT ⁴⁾	pass	5♣
All pass			

- 1) red suits
- 2) Lauria had originally thought it was a ♠/♦ two suiter, but Madala had not asked
- 3) Values
- 4) Here came the problem: Madala finally asked about 2NT, and Lauria explained it erroneously as ♠/♦. However, he immediately stopped Madala, and after some thought, gave him the right information. Madala then bid 3NT without any further thought.

When the tray came back, Versace called me (I did not have to walk too much: I was standing right behind Lauria!), and reiterated his protest when Sementa bid 5♣.

At the end, despite I immediately explained on that side that there was no UI to deal with, because it had not been Madala the cause of the BIT, the discussion went over for a long time, because the atmosphere was rather heated, and took time for the players to finally realize what I was saying.

The only one who kept calm was Lauria, who knew well to have been the one responsible for the mess.

There was only one further problem: to explain the happening to the BBO spectators, who have already started screaming that not adjusting the score was a scandal, and the TD must have been incompetent and/or corrupted!

I was indeed very lucky to have been present, because if not dealing with that mess would have taken forever. I wish you to be as lucky as myself.