



EUROPEAN BRIDGE LEAGUE

4th EBL TOURNAMENT DIRECTORS COURSE

31st August – 5th September 2001

Tabiano di Salsomaggiore Terme, Italy

An article out The Bridge World (1973)

TO THE EDITOR:

I run a weekly duplicate club it is small, and has few very good players. Back in the good old days, until a few weeks ago, I was considered by my players to be a very fair-minded director. My rulings were considered unimpeachable. Then something happened.

To set the stage, let me give you an example from the last game I directed prior to my tale of woe. (Case 1) I was called to the table and confronted with an auction that had gone: North: two hearts; East: pass; South: four hearts; West 90-second huddle, then pass; North: pass; East: five clubs . . . Director! I ordered that the play continue; South bid five hearts, played there, and went down one, for -100. It was quite clear that East did not have a reasonable five-club bid without his partner's hesitation. I ruled that the score should be adjusted to +620 for N-S. Everyone was satisfied with the ruling.

During the following week, I received my June issue of BRIDGE WORLD, and being a conscientious director I turned immediately to "How Would You Rule?" and read it with great care. I was intrigued by the guiding principle of the entire article, which was stated quite clearly on page 22, to wit: 'The innocent side always bears the primary responsibility for protecting themselves - we will not protect them against their own error. We must be able to say: 'any player of comparable ability. . . might reasonably have done what he did.' Several examples were given of BW's position that adjustments should not be made where the offended side was hurt by its own error. I determined that I would apply this new-found principle in future club games. That week, at the game, I was called to a table where I was confronted with (Case 2) an auction and result identical to that of the previous week. Once again, there was no question but that East's five-club bid had been based solely on partner's hesitation. This time, though, I did something I hadn't done the previous week: I opened up the traveling score and looked at the results. Every pair in the room had made 11 tricks on the N-S cards; only half had reached game, and the scores were evenly divided between +650 and +200 for N-S. It turned out that five hearts was in fact cold on a finesse; the North player had simply neglected to take it (he explained that his hay fever made his eyes water, and he had thought that the diamond queen was the jack). I ruled that -100 should stand. North argued that E-W had quite clearly committed an infraction, and that N-S had equally clearly been damaged, receiving 0 matchpoints instead of 5 as a result of the five-club bid. I explained patiently (quoting BW) - that N-S had not been damaged by East's five-club bid but rather by their own error in play, and hence were entitled to no

redress. But, persisted North, without the opponent's clear infraction his error would have legitimately cost him 2½ matchpoints; why should the cost of the error be multiplied by 3 as a result of the opponent's illegality? I told him that if he didn't understand he should buy a subscription to THE BRIDGE WORLD, but I must admit I was a little puzzled myself.

The next week, the same auction took place again, under identical circumstances (Case 3). This time luckily, when I looked at the results, all five pairs who had played the board previously had got +620. I breathed a sigh of relief, adjusted the N-S score -100 to +620, and got no argument from anybody

My relief was short-lived, however. Two rounds later I was called to a table where that same board had just been played with the identical auction and result I remembered so well. This time, however, (Case 4), the East player, anticipating that I might be tempted to rule that N-S were entitled to +620, quickly pointed out that North could have made five- on a double squeeze. North, as East adamantly pointed out, was the club's only LM, and quite capable of executing a double squeeze- which nobody else in the club could even understand. North, under careful questioning, revealed that he had indeed executed double squeezes in the past and did know how to do it; he had simply overlooked this one. I was forced to rule that "any player of comparable ability" would be reasonably expected to make the hand; hence N-S had been damaged not by the opponent's infraction but rather by their own error, and that the result of -100 should stand.

Of course, none of the mere players in the club could understand my rationale; it certainly appeared that I had been called twice, on the same hand, under identical circumstances, and had made exactly opposite rulings in the two cases. Bridge players being the open-hearted and fair-minded souls that they are, it never occurred to anyone that my rulings might have anything to do with the people involved and my feelings towards them, but maybe I was just lucky. At any rate, my players were getting awfully confused about when they were entitled to an adjustment for an irregularity and when they were not. But the worst was yet to come.

The following week I was, not surprisingly, called to a table where exactly the same auction had taken place once again. This time (Case 5) N-S had exactly 10 tricks, no more, no less, on any line of play. But there was a new wrinkle. West claimed that South's five-heart bid was not a reasonable call, and that indeed, if South had chosen to double five clubs E-W would have gone 800 down. Hence, argued West, it was not East's infraction that damaged the N-S side, but rather their own bidding error. East had foolishly put his head on the block for N-S getting+800; N-S, in refusing to take the gift offered them, had committed no less an error than would have been the case had they refused the diamond finesse on the hand of two weeks previous. A committee was chosen (from the best players in the club, of course); they examined all four hands and solemnly announced that they would all have doubled five clubs had it been bid against them. Once again BW's theory was vindicated; N-S had got -100 instead of +800 by their own error, and hence were not entitled to any adjustment. Last night we held our club championship, and once again I was called to the table to confront the identical auction (Case 6). By coincidence, the West player was the same person who had been sitting South at the table where the problem had arisen the week before. Once again, there were exactly 10 tricks in the hand, and N-S had scored -100 vs. everyone else's +620. Once again five clubs doubled would have been three down. The only difference was that on this hand E-W weren't vulnerable! NS argued that East's offense had given him a zero regardless of what he did thereafter, and that he was therefore entitled to redress in the amount of the 5 match points he would have had if the irregularity had not occurred. West pointed out that when he had bid five hearts in that situation

the previous week and gone down, it had been ruled that he had made an error and was therefore not entitled to an adjustment; surely South, who bid an absolutely unworkable contract when he could have doubled the opponents and beaten them several tricks had just made the same mistake and should receive the same ruling. Consider the alternatives:

(1) Award +620. This means that the decision between -100 and +620 can, in theory, depend in otherwise identical circumstances on the vulnerability of the offenders; or

(2) Award the actual result, - 100. This means that an offended pair, by bidding (or playing) in less than the optimum way after an offense has been committed, can forfeit their right to an adjustment even when their error does not affect the march-point result.

It appears to me that the first alternative seems patently absurd, and that the second constitutes an open admission that BW's interpretation of the rules protects only the best players and leaves those of us who do make mistakes sometimes at the mercy of our opponents' illegalities. The ruling in the last case represented the difference between first and second in the event for the two pairs involved. Since I didn't know how to rule, I followed the precedent and took the only reasonable course; I arbitrarily declared the event to be a tie.

Eric Landau
Rochester, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Landau,

Your club must be haunted-what you really need is an exorcist. Still, that string of supernatural coincidences was fortunate, since it presents us with some very interesting cases. The six are identical in that N-S would clearly have scored +620, instead of -100, had there been no EW infraction; and in all six cases the infraction to some extent led to the N-S disaster, although to what extent varied considerably. Under the standards described in June "How Would You Rule?" the offenders, E-W, are scored as -620 in all six cases. However, the ruling for N-S may depend on how directly the infraction led to the damage. The crucial distinction in the N-S rulings is between damage suffered subsequent to the infraction and damage suffered as a direct consequence of the infraction: no redress is given for damage that is merely subsequent, while for damage that is directly consequent there is redress. The differing rulings in your six similar cases create an impression of unfairness, even absurdity. But this - is an illusion, caused by the fuzziness of the distinction between "consequent" and "subsequent"- in some of

your examples. Perhaps it would help to examine an entirely different set of facts, in which this critical distinction is more crisp. -.

Board 7 was played 13 times in a Sectional tournament. Invariably, South opened one notrump; at 12 tables West then had to pass, since he had no convenient vulnerable action available for his rather good hand: x Qxxxx AQJ Axxxx.

At those 12 tables everyone else passed also; one notrump always went down one, -100. However, at table 13 the E-W pair were using "Brozell," so this West was able to overcall two clubs, showing clubs and hearts. East responded two hearts, played there and scored 110, giving NS a zero. But E-W had committed an infraction:

Case A. EW had gone to the wrong table; instead of going to table 13 in Section K where they belonged, they went to 13 in Section J. By the time the proper E-W pair came to the table, the bidding was over and dummy exposed; the director properly ordered that play continue. Afterwards N-S protested: "We were

completely innocent (we even asked E-W their pair number and got the right answer). Why should we get a bottom because of the E-W infraction? The E-W that we were supposed to face don't use "Brozell," and admit that they would have let us play one notrump. Had it not been for the irregularity, we would have been -100 like everyone else."

Now, most directors would penalize the wandering E-W pair for their infraction, but no director in the world would give the luckless N-S anything except heart-felt sympathy. They were damaged after the infraction, but not by it - the damage was "subsequent," not "consequent!" Their claim - that had it not been for the infraction they would have been better off - is entirely true, and quite irrelevant. Just about any subsequent event is, to some degree, consequent as well. If Napoleon had won the battle of Waterloo, the ripples of change would have spread so far that "Brozell" would never have been invented - I have no doubt of that whatever. So, if Blücher had not been allowed to join Wellington, or if the E-W pair from K had not wandered into J, NS wouldn't have suffered their zero. But I am no more inclined to award redress to NS for EW's infraction than for Marechal Crouchy's - in neither case was the damage (-110) a direct and natural consequence of the infraction.

Case B. The right E-W pair came to the table this time, but it was illegal by them to use "Brozell" since this Sectional did not allow Class C conventions. Again, N-S protested: had it not been for the infraction, they would have been better off. Here, their claim is both true and relevant, for the damage (-110) was a direct and natural consequence of the infraction (the illegal convention). So, the score should be adjusted for both pairs.

Case C. "Brozell" was illegal as in Case B, but the case differed in one respect: whereas two hearts was cold in B, here East made two hearts only because North revoked; on any normal defense N-S would have been +200, getting a top instead of a bottom. Still, NS protested: had it not been for the infraction, they would have been -100, not -110 (and North would have been dummy, so he couldn't revoke). True, but irrelevant. The damage (-110) was a direct consequence not of the infraction "Brozell" but of the revoke. The damage came after the infraction, and it also came after the battle of Waterloo. It was subsequent, not consequent. E-W should be penalized for their infraction, and NS should keep the zero they have earned. OK, now that I have defined my terms, "consequent" and "subsequent," let's get around to your cases.

Case 1 (the unsophisticated, pre BRIDGE WORLD ruling) -You did not ascertain the key fact: was the damage consequent or only subsequent?' So, there is no way to judge whether your ruling was correct. Much of the time it would turn out right to give redress to NS, since on the surface their damage appears to be a direct and natural consequence of the infraction.

Case 2 (North had hay fever, and neglected to finesse. Your ruling was correct. N-S should be scored as -100, since the only "direct and natural consequence" of the infraction, which pushed N to five, would be +650. The damage, -100, came from North's gross error - it was subsequent, not consequent. North's complaint, the usual "had it not been for the infraction ...," gets us back to Waterloo.

Case 3 (everybody made 620 in four hearts. Your ruling, +620, was probably right. The fact that everyone else made 10 tricks at hearts establishes a strong presumption that the damage was "a direct and natural consequence" of the infraction. Still, that is only a presumption. not a certainty. Suppose (see Case 5) that five clubs doubled would go down 800, and the NS decision to bid five hearts was insane. Or suppose that the other Norths had been held to 10 tricks by the normal opening lead, while this North had been given an eleventh

trick by a gambling lead, but had gone down anyway because his hay fever later induced an egregious error. Then the damage would be "a direct and natural consequence" not of the infraction but of a N-S error. It would be "subsequent," not "consequent"- no redress.

Case 4 (same, but an expert North missed a double squeeze). Your ruling here, -100 was wrong. To decide that the damage was "consequent," there is no need to find that it was the sole possible consequence of the infraction, but only that it was one of a number of fairly normal consequences, a result that would follow, say, 25% of the time. To err is human, and many errors, indeed most, fall into that "fairly normal, 25%" category; certainly, missing a double squeeze falls there, even for a Life Master. The type of error that makes damage "subsequent" can be seen in the examples in the June "How Would You Rule?": a player doesn't see one of his cards; a player revokes; a defender on lead against six-notrump-doubled fails to lead one of his two aces; glaring, foolish errors. Abnormal errors of this sort snap the connection between infraction and damage; one can no longer say that the damage is a direct and natural consequence of the infraction.

Mind you, there can be close cases. If declarer fails to execute a clash squeeze, that error is "fairly normal"; and if he pulls the wrong card accidentally, that is "abnormal" - but what if his error is, say, to draw trumps too soon, so that he no longer can ruff a loser? Here you might tailor your ruling to the skill of the declarer. An inexperienced club player might make this error one time in three, so for him to go down in five hearts is a fairly normal consequence of the infraction. In contrast, if Norman Kay were declarer, a revoke would have a higher frequency than this sort of error. The direct link between infraction and damage would be broken by what would be, for him, a bizarre accident. His damage would be "subsequent" not "consequent." In a sense this discriminates against good players, but the principle is sound: the poorer the player, the more protection he needs from the Laws: the better the player, the more he is expected to protect himself.

Case 5 (five clubs doubled would go down 800). My guess is that your ruling, -100, was wrong. While it can often be an error to go on to five hearts instead of doubling five clubs, it is seldom an abnormal error. Still, if either partner bid five hearts on such emaciated values that his decision was irrational, I would leave N-S with their -100.

Case 6 (same, but since E-W are non-vul. five clubs would go down only 500). This is the clearest of all the cases. It is hard to see how the N-S decision to bid five hearts could be anything but "fairly normal on this vulnerability; however, the N-S score should be adjusted to +620 even if their bid was the most monstrous, moronic mistake ever made by man. This time it is the N-S error that is as irrelevant as the battle of Waterloo, since the zero, their damage, was unrelated to that error. Rather, the damage was the direct and natural consequence of the infraction. In fact, it was the inevitable consequence, so how can there be any argument?

That there was an argument is entirely a result of the opposite ruling the week before, under almost the same circumstances. I suggest that you attempt, in future, to avoid having identical hands dealt on successive weeks. It is bound to be unsettling.

Edgar Kaplan