

The NBO's concern with Ethics

by Grattan Endicott

The proposition this paper makes is that an NBO must have a concern for the ethics of its players because players whose ethics are questionable damage the reputation of the NBO to which they belong.

What are the chief problem areas?

TEMPO

About half, at least, of the appeals in tournaments are to do with allegations that a player has broken tempo before calling and his partner has then taken advantage of the unauthorized information gained from the hesitation. Occasionally similar situations arise when a player is slow to play a card to a trick.

MANNERISMS

Being human players have their individual peculiarities in the way they do things. This cannot be avoided. What we must seek to avoid is taking advantage of what we learn from partner's habitual mannerisms.

UNTHINKING REMARKS

Good humour and wit at the table can sometimes cause a player to be 'caught out' at the table by passing a remark that he immediately regrets because it may mislead an opponent.

DISCLOSURE

Players are required by law to disclose their methods fully to opponents. But higher standards of ethics demand a generous attitude to opponents. In particular there should be pressure to help them understand the more esoteric implications and inferences that develop in partnerships as they become more experienced. Behind screens the scope for fulfilling these aims is increased.

If a partnership has a system file opponents are entitled to know of any partnership understanding in the file, for example an inference, that may prove crucial for the opponent's choice of action. See Law 40B6(b).

PREPARATION

It may be argued that the higher the level of competition the greater the onus upon a partnership to prepare its methods with care. It is suggested that there is a 'duty of care' for opponents – a responsibility to have a grasp of one's partnership methods and be able to explain these understandably to opponents.

SUSPICION

Some players are more gifted than others. We should be slow to suspect a highly successful partnership of having some hidden means of 'finding out' that is denied to lesser mortals.

INNOCENCE

These days we have seen the introduction of screens, bidding boxes, symmetrical playing cards, and we may well pine for the innocence of the game as it used to be. A kind of nostalgia develops, but some are bound to feel that 'nostalgia ain't what it used to be' – that the game has outstripped its earlier reliance on the honesty of its players and that these devices are now essential safeguards for its probity. We will wish, of course, that the integrity of its players will do much to relieve the game of such stigma.

OBJECTIVES OF THE NBO

We began by asserting a need for the NBO to take steps to educate its players in the ethics of the game. There is thus a question for each NBO whether it makes appropriate provision for teaching players the more advanced ethics of the game as they emerge from the shadows of social bridge into the searching light of tournament play.

Does your NBO consciously ask itself that question?

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