Ask Jerry

Jerry Helms
www.jerryhelms.com

The 99.56% likelihood of a four-card diamond holding discussed in the July column was wrong! Thanks to all of the bridge-playing mathematicians and statisticians who either kindly or caustically pointed out the error of my calculations. Special thanks to those who sent detailed computations and the results of extensive simulations (see related article on page 28). Based on the parameters suggested in my article, the actual probability of holding at least four diamonds seems to be between 95 and 97%. As one reader pointed out, from a math standpoint, the mistake was egregious, but from the point I was trying to make, it was trivial.

My sentiments remain unchanged: I prefer the 100% certainty that partner holds at least three clubs even if it means he holds four or more diamonds only 96% of the time! From a personal standpoint, although the column is published in the section for newer players, I am delighted that a large number of experienced players actually notice and apparently read it! This level of readership helps keep me on my toes.

Dear Jerry,

I am an intermediate-level club player who makes too many careless errors. Playing with a somewhat regular partner who is even less experienced than I am, I held:

♠8 ♥A 7 ♦K Q J 6 5 4 ♣J 9 3.

I opened 1♦, partner responded 3♥, and I began to ponder. Our agreement was to play weak jump shifts, but this bid seemed a little unusual. I finally passed. After a club lead and continuation, partner took 12 tricks. Her hand:

♠9 6 3 ♥K J 9 8 6 5 2 ♦A 7 ♣10.

We were playing two of the local club experts who berated me for passing from the time I tabled dummy and on into the next deal. They said it was obviously a "pro call."

Obviously I made the wrong decision, but were my opponents correct that this was a "pro call?"

Pondering in PA

Dear Pondering,

Great choice of words. Not ones you get to hear very often. Also, I am not familiar with a "pro call" but I do remember Procol Harum as a rock group from my college days. I guess this is getting a little random, so back to your question.

Your dilemma as to the meaning of the double jump shift is understandable. Depending on partnership agreement, it could be a weak hand with a longer heart suit than a 2♥ jump shift, or for some, it could be a "splinter raise" of your 1♦ opening bid. Provided you agree to a convention that I personally invented, you will never have problems like this again!

Simply agree to play ASBAF: All Strange Bids Are Forcing!

You acknowledged pondering the meaning of 3♥ before passing. Obviously you considered the 3♥ call a little strange. Therefore, it was forcing! Truthfully, I cannot imagine how it could be wrong to bid 4♥. If partner held a weak hand with long hearts, you are furthering the preempt when the opponents are probably cold for a spade game (on the actual lay-out, the opponents can make at least 3♠). If partner instead held a game-forcing splinter raise in diamonds, you would be cuebidding your first-round heart control. Bidding seems like a win-win situation.

Your recognition of your problem and desire to learn from it is admirable. The behavior of the two so-called experts, however, was inexcusable and deplorable. Any unsolicited comments and advice, especially when provided in such a rude manner violates your club's Zero Tolerance policy (if they have one!) as well as just basic common courtesy. In the future, call the director at the onset of this behavior. If you are hesitant to do so at the table, at least inform your local director afterwards about the incident.

Since Procol Harum is the only "pro call" that I know, your opponents were violating another of my basic tenets: "It's okay to be wrong, but not okay to be wrong loud." ❐