

Continuing Failure at the Appeals Committee

I have almost always been on the losing side of appeals since I returned to serious bridge several years ago. Back in the 1970s the appeals situation was logical and made sense to me. Back then I rarely lost an appeal. But in this century it seems that the appeals committee has constantly ruled against me. I don't know if I am not eloquent enough to present my case in front of an appeals committee, or if there is some logic to their rulings that evades me. Maybe by writing this article I will better understand the procedure.

The latest situation occurred in this years summer Nationals. I was playing with Gail Greenberg in the National Mixed BAM Team Championship in Chicago on July 20 when the following bidding situation occurred:

Jeff	Marjorie Gwozdzinsky	Gail	Richard Schwartz
1♣	2♥	3♠	Asking for Explanation

Gail and I play that over my opening, without interference, a jump to 2♠ is preemptive, and a jump to 3♠ is a splinter raise. I would expect that the 2♠ weak jump shift would be a hand with a 6-card suit headed by the QJ10 and nothing else, but I know that she is used to playing it a bit stronger. We had never discussed what a jump to 3♠ over a preemptive jump overcall was. After the 3♠ bid, I thought for a while and did not alert the bid. Then Richie Schwartz asked me for an explanation, and I said that I thought it was a splinter bid. I then cue bid 4♦ showing slam interest and 1st or 2nd round control in diamonds, and Gail then rebid 4♠.

I now thought for a long time now. I considered systemically that she was cue-bidding spades in support of our club fit, but that it was possible that she had intended her first bid as a weak jump shift, and that she was trying to stop in 4♠. Let me clarify those two options clearly now.

1) If Gail had indeed made a splinter bid, then her 4♠ bid was promising 1st or 2nd round control in spades. She could have held a hand such as:
♠x ♥Qx ♦AJ10x ♣AKxxxx. We could be cold for grand slam in clubs.

2) If Gail had meant her bid as a weak jump shift, then her 4♠ bid denied a heart control and denied a hand good enough to cue bid 5 of a minor. She also could have a hand so bad that even with a heart control, she decided to not cooperate with my slam try.

Anyway, I had a decision. Should I bid over 4♠, or should I pass it? This was my hand:

♠AQ97 ♥ AJ10 ♦ KQ3 ♣Q94

I must have thought close to 3 minutes before deciding. I decided that if she had a weak jump shift, 95% of the time she would reject the slam invitation, and thereby would bid 4♠. On the contrary, if she had a splinter bid, she would have a hand that cue bids in spades around 30% of the time. Therefore, it was mathematically much more likely that she had made a weak jump shift, and I decided to pass.

When I put my dummy down I apologized to my partner, explaining that I made have created a disaster. But it wasn't so. I was right. She had indeed made a weak jump shift, and our table reached the same 4♠ contract that was reached at the other table, and we pushed the board, both tables winning 9 tricks.

But Richie Schwartz appealed the result. He claimed that we had taken advantage of unauthorized information. I did not understand his claim then, and I do not understand it now.

The director was never called when we were at the table. In fact, I did not learn about the ruling until after the session, after I read that we had a section top scoring 18 points out of 26 possible. Just after reading that recap, I saw a printout of the leaders in the event (we were second at the time) and there we were only credited with 17 1/2 points for the session. I went and found the director, and learned that the director had been called belatedly, and that the director had adjusted the contract to 5♣ down 2 tricks, losing the board. That ruling made no sense, so we appealed it.

The "unauthorized information" was that I had told the table that I had interpreted my partner's bid as a splinter bid. It turns out that my partner had misheard my comment, and thought I had told the opponents that her 3♠ bid was strong. (We had gone to the next table and she asked me why I said her bid was strong). But her hearing problem was irrelevant to the ruling.

Let me clarify why neither of us used unauthorized information at the table.

First of all, I was the source of the "unauthorized information" and therefore did not use any information that I was not authorized to have. In fact, my decision to pass 4♠ was a calculated gamble, and a decision that earned us the right to 1/2 point on the board.

Now, as I understand it, Gail had to assume that I knew her bid was a weak jump shift. If I knew that, then what type of hand did she show, and what are her bidding options?

Well, if a weak jump shift to the 2-level shows something like QJ10xxx and nothing outside, then I assume a weak jump shift to the 3-level shows something like QJ10xxxx and nothing outside. In fact, Gail held: ♠K108643 ♥5 ♦J10 ♣8753. I think her decision to preempt to the 3-level was aggressive, the lack of a seventh spade and the lack of internal solidity in the spade suit being partially mitigated by the potential side-suit fit in clubs.

So, opposite such a weak hand, I have to have a rare and extremely strong and shapely hand to have slam interest. I would have to have a hand like one of the following:

#1 ♠AJxxx ♥xx ♦-- ♣AKJxxx, Gail
held: ♠K108643 ♥5 ♦J10 ♣8753

#2 ♠AJxxx ♥-- ♦A ♣QJ109xxx. Gail
held: ♠K108643 ♥5 ♦J10 ♣8753

#3 ♠AJ ♥xx ♦A ♣AKQJ98765 Gail
held: ♠K108643 ♥5 ♦J10 ♣8753

With hand #1, we want to play in 6♠. If Gail feels strong enough to cooperate with my slam try, she should cue bid 4♥, and I will drive to slam. If she feels that she already overbid her hand, she can rebid 4♠, and I will pass expecting to lose 2 heart tricks.

With hand #2, if Gail cue bids 4♥ I will sign off in 4♠, expecting to lose 2 club tricks. If she has this hand: ♠K10xxxxx ♥xx ♦xxx ♣x, she should cue bid 5♣ over my 4♦ bid and we will get to 6♠.

In all cases Gail automatically assumes that my 4♦ cue bid is in support of a spade contract. It is illogical and anti-systemic for her to assume that we are not playing with spades as trump. In the one-in-a-million chance that I have hand #3 (and chose to open the bidding with one club) and am cue-bidding in support of playing in my own suit, it is my responsibility to remove any spade signoff bids by her to clubs.

So, on Gail's actual hand, she held a control in hearts and a very weak hand. She chose to deny the ability to cooperate with my slam try, and

signed off in 4♠. Her only alternative bid was 4♥, to show her heart control.

So, the director's choice for her to bid 5♣ was impossible without a club control. I can understand the director making such an illogical ruling, as he is not a quality player. But I was shocked that the appeals committee, headed by Barry Rigal, agreed with the director.

I think the whole situation was improperly handled from the beginning, when the director wasn't called to the table. (We did take a late play, as Marjorie arrived 5 minutes late to the table smelling of a cigarette and the director asked us to take a late play after this hand took so long). And I don't think the appeals committee knew about a lack of a ruling at the table. At the appeal, I explained that I did not understand the ruling. The committee asked me about what had happened at the table, but never asked me what a bid of 5♣ meant in our methods. I guess they think that after a weak jump shift and a cue bid showing slam interest, that there is no implied trump suit. I don't know how they can play bridge that way. And I am not even sure that they understood the problem. I know they did not take very long to deliberate the problem. Certainly Gail had the right to know that she had made a weak jump shift, and that she didn't want to cue bid a control that she didn't have in clubs.

I really don't know why the committee ruled for the 5♣ bid. I hope to get a good explanation from any of them. And I hope that when the committee members read this article, that they will reconsider their procedures in making that ruling. I feel that I deserved to tie the board when I made the winning decision to pass my partner's 4♠ bid.

Because this ruling went against us, we dropped from 4th overall to 5th overall in the event.

ADDENDUM

Just a few days after I posted the August hand of the month on my website, I had a reader write in and tell me that he thought the ruling was good. He commented that he thought I could have a hand like: ♠-- ♥A ♦KQJxx ♣Axxxxxx. He would bid 4♦ on that hand over a weak jump shift in spades, and would be happy to have partner then show club support. I explained to him that my 4♦ bid is strictly a cue-bid. About the only hand that I could want to introduce a natural diamond suit would be: ♠--- ♥A ♦AKQJx ♣KQJxxxx. With that hand I would be willing to open the bidding with 1♣, planning on rebidding 6♦.

So, for me, his offered hand does not fit as possible hand #4.

In the real world, it is extremely unlikely that I would ever have slam interest when I open 1 of a suit and partner makes a weak jump shift, showing a suit like QJ10xxxx and out. About the only time that slam would be good would be on a distributional hand with a spade fit. On those occasions, it is vital that subsequent bids in our auctions in clubs and diamonds are cue bids, with spades as the agreed upon trump suit. While I am willing to have hand #3 above as a possible exception to making the final contract in spades, it is impractical to look at this high level of bidding for an unbid trump fit, have trump agreement and finally have a logical auction that explores for slam. Therefore, it is completely impractical to play diamond bids as natural suit bids. All auctions must proceed upon the assumption that spades is trump. Only I, the opener, can convert the final contract into a different suit. And, those situations can lead to very ambiguous auctions, and it is very reasonable to play that all auctions where I begin cue-bidding must end in spade contract, just to avoid later ambiguity.

But, I found it very interesting to receive a reply from a reader agreeing with the director's and committee's ruling. I still fail to understand the ruling, but I thank Mark Raphaelson for writing me with his opinion. These opinions help me better understand the ruling. I obviously have some very strong opinions about bidding that do not circulate among many bridge players.

I had a reader write in, and make a very worthwhile suggestion. He said, that instead of telling the opponent's that I thought the bid was a splinter bid, that I should have said that it was undiscussed. That was true, and it would have avoided some of the complications. Thanks to Michael Jinks.