

## A Question of Ethics

I played with Gail Greenberg in Lancaster Regional Open Pairs on November 3 in the Open Pairs. Nobody was vulnerable when she picked up this hand:

♠Q843 Nobody Vulnerable.	RHO	Gail	LHO	Jeff
♥J6	1♣	Pass	1♥	2♦
♦108743	Pass	3♦	Pass	3NT
♣86	Pass	?		

It is easy to disagree with the 3♦ bid, as partner has the right to think that you have some values and are looking for game. But you do have 5-card support and two doubletons, which would make your bid lawful, and it rates to make it tougher for the opponents to compete in their suits.

Regardless of whether or not you approve of the 3♦ bid, your partner has now made the bid that you did not want. Do you pass before the doubling begins? Do you run to 4♦? Would partner think your 4♦ bid is forcing?

Partner has been known to overcall with more than 17HCP, even though you generally disapprove of such strong overcalls. If partner has 6 diamonds to the ace-jack and 3 side-suit tricks, 3NT may well make. But that is very unlikely. It is much more likely that partner needs a trick or two from you to make 3NT, and 4♦ might actually make. Partner is limited in strength to an overcall (presumably something around 17 points). If partner doesn't have game in his own hand, can your dummy possibly produce what he needs to make 3NT? I think the chance is so remote that running to 4♦ if it is not forcing, is a clear-cut action.

Would partner take a 4♦ bid by you as forcing? There certainly are power auctions where removing a freely bid 3NT to 4-of-a-minor would be forcing. But this is not a power auction.

I remember hands like this from my days of playing college bridge when buddies might raise to 3♦ with this rag of a hand, and then run back to the safety of the trump fit when partner actually thought they might help produce 9 tricks. Back in college there never was any question on how to bid in this situation - you always ran to the safety of the trump suit.

Now, suppose that partner hesitated about 20 or 25 seconds before bidding 3NT. That is not an unusual hesitation for partner, but it is enough to have

the opponents call the director if you seemingly take any action not obvious. That is the real question in this month's hand-of-the-month.

Wherever I turn, there seems to be vast confusion about what happens after one partner hesitates in the bidding. Should you just crawl into a shell and always pass, so that nobody ever calls the director on you? How much logic are you allowed to apply in such situations? And what if the logic is very apparent to you, but if it goes to committee, it is not so apparent to them? Then the committee will rule against you, and might begin to consider you to not be such an ethical player.

I mean, that with Gail's hand I would never consider passing 3NT. I don't care if partner bids 3NT in normal tempo, or delays some or takes a long time. If partner can only overcall, then this dummy has no right to allow him to play in 3NT.

But, Gail, bless her heart for wanting to be completely ethical, passed my 3NT bid because she considered that to be the ethical thing to do. Gail takes pride in her ethics. This is the entire hand:

	<b>Dummy(Gail)</b>	
	♠Q843	
	♥J6	
	♦108743	
<b>West</b>	♣86	<b>East</b>
♠AK76		♠J1052
♥97		♥A10532
♦6		♦J5
♣KJ7432	<b>Declarer(Jeff)</b>	♣Q5
	♠9	
	♥KQ84	
	♦AKQ92	
	♣A109	

I was not even aware that I had hesitated before bidding 3NT. I remember wanting to reach for the 3NT bid, and then I stopped to think if somehow I was overlooking some reason that we prefer to play in 5♦. After deciding that there was nothing that I was overlooking, I proceeded to make the obvious 3NT bid. Note that since neither opponent could have more than 4 spades on this auction, I never feared getting beaten in the spade suit.

I went down 3 tricks, undoubled, in 3NT, while we were cold for 4♦.

I remember when I began playing international bridge back in the 1970s. In those days, you could hesitate and as long as you convinced the director that you did not take advantage of the hesitation, that you were allowed to make your bids. I was very comfortable doing what I personally felt was very ethical.

But in the years that I got busy working and played very little bridge, Edgar Kaplan set new standards for hesitations. Apparently many tournament players had been abusing the personal-ethic-standard of the 1970s, and took advantage of partner's hesitations and then lied about their partnership agreements. This was obviously unfair to the ethical majority. So, I believe in order to create a fairer game for all, a much stricter standard of responding to partner's hesitations was created. Now it had to be completely obvious to just about all peers that your action was not at all affected by your partner's hesitations.

I want to examine other rulings in ethical situations. Apparently I was wrong in making sure that I wasn't overlooking something, because it caused my partner ethical problems. Would she have converted to 4 ♦ if I had bid in faster tempo? Should she have bid anyway with my delay? I don't agree with my partner's decision, but I respect her desire to stay ethical. I too want to stay ethical. What is accurate here regarding ethics? As I locate hands from different tournaments that suggest a solution to this type of situation, I will post them. Please feel free to send me your thoughts on this situation.

Thank you,

Jeff Hand [hand\\_jeff@hotmail.com](mailto:hand_jeff@hotmail.com)