

Psych, Psyche, or Psychic Bidding

(Taken from Duplicate Decisions)

Psychic Calls – While psychic bids are an integral part of bridge, a player does not have the right to psych as frequently as he wishes simply because he enjoys doing so. A series of tops and bottoms so earned by one pair can unfairly affect the final results of a tournament.

ACBL's Policy on Psychs:

Psychs are regulated by taking disciplinary action against a player who disrupts a game with frequent, random psychs. The ACBL Board of Directors has defined types of disruptive bidding that make the offenders subject to penalty.

The following definitions and explanations should prove helpful to all Directors trying to enforce this regulation.

Excessive Psychic Bidding — When three or more psychic initial actions by members of a partnership have been reported in any one session and are called to the attention of the Director, the Director should investigate the possibility that excessive psyching is taking place. A presumption of inappropriate behavior exists, and it is up to the players to demonstrate that they were not just horsing around. It is up to them to show that they happened, this once, to pick up a string of hands unusually appropriate for psychs. The continued use of undisciplined psychic bids tends to create partnership understandings that are implied from partnership experience. Example: If a player opens 1♦ three times in one session with two or fewer diamonds, partner finds it hard to take any 1♦ opening bid seriously. When the psychic bidder's partner, because of prior usages, has a better chance of catching a psych than either opponent, there is presumptive evidence that an undisclosed partnership understanding exists, and the result of the board may be adjusted.

Frivolous Psychic Bidding — Any psychic action inspired by a spirit of malicious mischief or lack of will to win may be interpreted as frivolous.

Unsportsmanlike Psychic Bidding — Action apparently designed to give the opponents an abnormal opportunity to get a good score, psychs against pairs or teams in contention, psychs against inexperienced players and psychs used merely to create action at the table are examples of unsportsmanlike psychic bidding.

NOTE TO CLUB MANAGERS: Clubs should regulate the use of uncontrolled psychs by saying that the burden of proof will be on the player, if he makes more than two psychic calls per session, to prove that he is not using excessive, frivolous or unsportsmanlike psychic bidding. Disciplinary action should be taken against a player whose bidding does not conform to these regulations. Score adjustments should be made only when the result was affected because the partner, due to previous experience, may have allowed for the psychic call.

Psychs which require no regulation or director attention: Any call that deliberately and grossly misstates either honor strength or suit length is by definition a psych. However, some psychs are disruptive to the game while others involve bridge tactics.

These definitions should help to distinguish a psych that warrants disciplinary action or, at the least, attention by the Director, from those that are an integral part of the game.

A tactical bid is a psych that is made to paint a picture in an opponent's mind and partner's mind that will cause them to play you for a holding that you do not have, enabling you to succeed at the contract to which you were inevitably headed.

Example: After partner opens with 1♠, responder bids 2♦ to try to ward off a diamond lead on the way to 4♠ holding:

♠Q J x x x ♥A x ♦x x x ♣K Q x.

Or, you might cuebid an ace you don't have on your way to six of a suit.

NOTE: Frequent use of tactics similar to this will develop an implicit partnership agreement which requires an Alert, possibly delayed.

A waiting bid is generally a forcing bid made by responder to allow him time to learn more about partner's opening hand. This type of call is only rarely a psych, since in most cases the suit length is not grossly misstated.

Example: Over a 1♠ opening, responder bids 2♣ on:

♠A x x x x ♥x x x x ♦x x ♣A Q.

The hand is too good for 2♣ and not good enough to force to game. The 2♣ bid is a waiting bid. If opener rebids 2♠, responder can now bid 3♠ - invitational.

A deviation was defined by Don Oakie (Feb., 1978, ACBL Bridge Bulletin) as a bid in which the strength of the hand is within a queen of the agreed or announced strength, and the bid is of a suit of ample length or of notrump. He also defined a deviation as a bid of a suit in which the length of the suit varies by no more than one card from the agreed or announced length and the hand contains ample high-card values for the bid in the system being played. If either of these situations occurs, it is easy to see by repeating the definition of a psych (a deliberate and gross misstatement of honor strength or suit length) that a deviation is NOT a PSYCH.

However, frequent deviations may indicate that the pair has an undisclosed implied agreement acquired through experience. This situation should be dealt with firmly.

The following appears in the ACBLscore Techfiles and is also relevant to psych bidding:

RISK-FREE PSYCHES

Psychic controls are not permitted. If a pair is using methods that enable them to make risk-free psyches, they are in essence playing psychic controls. For example, in playing a 10-12 NT, many pairs have the understanding or the agreement that the NT opener may not bid again (except in forcing or invitational situations). If the pair were to psyche a non-forcing or invitational response, the agreement would be a psychic control. For example,

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1NT-Pass-2♥-3♣,

if the opener is prohibited from bidding 3♥ with a maximum and a fit, then a risk-free environment is created. To pass without the interference would not be a problem as there is still risk involved (your partner could have a maximum real 2♥ bid), but to pass in competition gives your partner room to maneuver with the knowledge that you will not interfere.

Since psychic controls are illegal, when a player does psyche one of these responses, the pair is playing an illegal agreement. WE should lean heavily toward issuing a procedural penalty or adjustment for the pair's illegal use of this agreement as a psychic control.

Another example is a 2♠ response to a weak 2♥ or 2♦ bid that opener is not permitted to raise. This becomes a psychic control when the 2♠ bid is a psychic. While it would be legal to have the agreement that a 2NT rebid shows spade support, the agreement would be illegal (a psychic control) if responder were to psyche the 2♠ response.

Therefore, a legal agreement that creates a risk-free psychic environment (that is an environment where the psycher knows his partner is under control - this does not include hands where we know because of our particular hand that we have an answer to most things that our partner can do to us) becomes illegal if the pair psyches.

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