

# Ruling Our Game



**By Bill Michael**  
Florissant, Colorado

I received the following letter:

Dear Bill,  
Since the incident I describe here bridge has lost a bit of its fun for me. I start each game now with sadness instead of with hope and determination.

I picked up ♠--♥AJxxxx♦--♣AQJxxx. I figured that if the suits broke nicely, I had 11 winners as declarer. As a defender the outlook was bleak. We were vul, opponents were not. The auction began with my right hand opponent opening 1♦ and proceeded:

		1♦	
Dbl 3♠	Pass	4♣	
5♥ 5♠	Pass*	Pass	
??			

\*Before passing the second time, my partner went into a drawn out, anguished thought.

If partner did anything but bid 6♥, I was going to bid 6♣. I had plenty of time to think about dinner, the effect Obamacare would have on the nation, and to wonder if it wasn't time for me to start composting my eggshells. I bid 6♣, as planned, and the opponents called the director.

After I played out 6♣ doubled the director was called back to the table. I displayed my hand gladly. I had my bid. The director ruled that the opponents should have a score of 5♠ making.

I feel that I am now forever labeled unethical. A cheater. Shamed. I am sad. I would really like your opinion, Bill.

[This player's name is omitted by request. The director in this case was not named.]

### The Ruling

Let's not discuss the specifics of the ruling itself, and focus on the plaintive cry for help drifting across the wilderness. It is easy, and gets easier as time marches on, for directors and players alike to forget how things look to the up-and-coming player. This dovetails nicely with last month's article – it is another duty of

directors to help players learn all the mechanics of the game and the ways in which the laws are applied. This can, at times, seem a daunting task when the director considers how much information needs to be imparted to the player who is still learning the rules.

### Law 16b.1a

This is one of the cases where it is incumbent on a director to bend over backwards to explain the ruling – both the rationale behind it and the law(s) applied to arrive at the decision. The director in this case needed to take time to quote (or read from the lawbook) Law 16.b.1.a: "After a player makes available to his partner extraneous information that may suggest a call or play, as for example by a remark, a question, a reply to a question, an unexpected alert or failure to alert, or by unmistakable hesitation, unwonted speed, special emphasis, tone, gesture, movement or mannerism, the partner may not choose from among logical alternatives one that could demonstrably have been suggested over another by the extraneous information."

The director in this case should have explained how he felt that Law 16 was violated and, more importantly, that it was a close decision and that there is no suggestion that this player committed an intentional violation of our laws. With the hand described, I cannot imagine it was not a close decision. Please remember that all of the information provided was from one perspective only, and the director involved may very well have had more, or different information available when making his decision. I invite that director to send his perspective of the ruling to me privately.

### Understanding the Ruling

I've been directing for many years now, and have delivered a number of these types of rulings to players of all levels. In cases where players have great experience, I don't "waste my words," or the players' time going into great and gory detail of how Law 16.b was applied unless I'm asked. However, whenever I deliver a ruling and get the impression that a player doesn't understand, I always try to take the time to explain as fully as possible what the ratio-

nale of my ruling is. One of the main things I try to avoid is inducing exactly the feeling this player has – that he tried to do his best, didn't think he was doing anything wrong, and got chopped down, mistakenly reading it as, basically, an allegation of cheating. I would want that player to know that he did nothing wrong, simply that his hand wasn't found to be good enough to overcome the Law 16.b test.

Additionally, I'm never afraid to include as part of my delivery of the ruling words to the effect that "it was a close decision."

### Appealing a Ruling

This ruling would be appealable in all tournaments and in any club game that allows appeals (clubs are not required to allow appeals – but I strongly suggest to all club managers, owners, and directors to allow them; it creates a wonderful safeguard for players, and helps to take personality issues out of the ruling process,

a good thing for customer relations).

In conclusion, I strongly advise all directors to take the time to consider what effects the delivery of a ruling may have, and to remember that your words carry more weight than another player's might. You are the face of the game to your players, and it is important to remember that, in many cases, they don't have as much knowledge about the laws and their applications as you do. Try to think of what you are going to say in advance of the actual delivery, then rotate your perspective and try to decide how the words you are thinking about saying would make you feel. Even with 20 years of experience, I still do this myself. If you have any questions about delivery of rulings, please feel free to email me – let me know if it needs to be private, or if I'm allowed to consider it as fodder for this column.

See you at the bridge table.

## Improve Your Play



**By Larry Matheny**  
Fort Collins, Colorado

### Develop Your Plan

Frequently the play to trick one can make or break a contract. Too often not enough thought is given at this very important moment, and the contract is therefore doomed to failure.

♠AQJ9	♥---
♥10865	♥QJ743
♦10874	♦QJ95
♣72	♣A1054
	♠K1086543
	♥A92
	♦---
	♣Q93

South	West	North	East
	Pass	1♦	1♥
1♠	Pass	4♥	Pass
6♣	Pass	Pass	Pass

### Opening lead: ♥5

**Bidding:** I was sitting South, and after my partner's splinter bid of 4♥ (heart shortness, big hand), I bid the slam.

**Play:** West led the five of hearts to dummy's king. I saw that the slam was cold unless the missing spades were 3-0. Next, I addressed two questions: 1. What if the spades were 3-0? And 2. Is there any play for an overtrick? I saw that the answer was the same to both questions: I needed the outstanding diamonds to be 4-4. With this in mind, at trick two I ruffed a diamond in my hand. Next, I cashed the ♠K and received the bad news.

Continuing with my plan, I led another spade to dummy's ace. Then I cashed the ace-king of diamonds pitching two clubs. I next ruffed a diamond to my hand and was delighted to see the 4-4 break. I now had simply to ruff my small heart in dummy and play the last diamond. I discarded my last club as West ruffed with the ♠Q.

Note the contract cannot be made without the early diamond ruff. Of course I was extremely fortunate West's opening lead was not a club.

## Aces & Spaces or Back on the Couch



**By Dave Caprera**  
Denver, Colorado

You pick up ♠Axx♥Axxx♦Axx♣xxx and open 1♦ (Precision). Partner bids 1♠, you bid 1NT showing 11-13 HCP, and partner makes a quantitative raise to 4NT. Do you accept?

The first question is "what is this hand worth?" Aces are undervalued. Eric Kokish has often written that the partner holding three aces has to be aggressive in slam bidding. The Kaplan-Rubens hand evaluator treats this hand as being worth 12.5 points. On the other hand, this is a sterile 4-3-3-3 hand with no intermediates. Subtract one point for 4-3-3-3? Your hand is assured of taking three tricks, but unlikely to be worth more.

The second and perhaps harder question is, "what do you need to accept?" If one wishes to maximize the expected positive outcome of a decision, information theory suggests that if a question asks for a simple "yes or no," then the "yes" answer should be chosen 50% of the time.

A first guess might be to say, for the auction in question, that opener should accept with all of the 13 counts and half of the 12 counts. But a more accurate decision needs to take into account the distribution of 11, 12, and 13 point hands. Without regard to responder's 20 count, the average hand has 10 HCPs. Hands with 11 points are more common than hands with 12, which in turn are more common than hands with 13 (more precisely, 37% of hands which are in the 11-13 HCP range are 11 counts, 34% are 12 counts, and 29% are 13 counts.)

This means that the midpoint of the 13-15 range is accepting with all of the 13 counts and approximately 5/8th of the 12 counts. Taking into account the fact that responder is known to have a 20 count will skew the distribution even more to favor the 11 point hands. Of course, this all assumes that you can differentiate on some basis the difference between "really good," "pretty good," "average," "below average," and "terrible" 12 point hands, a separate topic that will likely lead to another night on the couch.

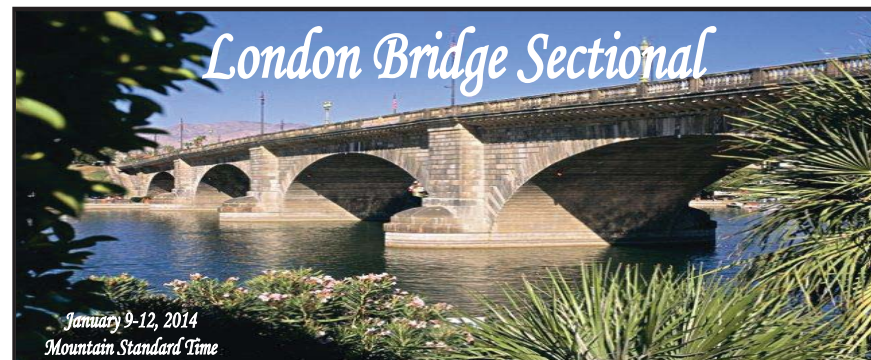
The foregoing assumes that opener's range for the 1NT rebid is really 11-13. I believe that in our partnership, it is really more like 10.8 to 13.8. We tend to upgrade and rarely downgrade.

For example, we would open ♠Axx♥10x♦AQ109x♣xxx with 1♦ (again, this is in the context of playing Precision, where opening bids are limited). We would also open a 14-16 notrump with: ♠A10x♥Kx♦AQ109x♣xxx.

So, when we look at three aces, it would appear to be well within the top half of hands that fit into the 11-13 box.

But is this really a "yes or no" question? Surely there are other bids between 4NT and 6NT that opener can make. Putting aside those who answer aces if they "accept" (which would eliminate the ability to grade one's response, a practice I don't subscribe to), it is possible to break down the rebids by opener to suggest alternative contracts – if opener accepts the game try he bids four card suits up the line; if a fit isn't found either partner may try to sign off in 5NT. If you view this as a "yes-maybe-no" question, information theory again suggests that each be chosen 33% of the time. That makes all the 13 counts and a small sliver of the 12 counts clear "yes" answers, all of the remaining 12 counts and some of the 11s as "maybes," and the rest of the 11s as "no."

Suffice it to say, I accepted with the three aces, the hand had no play for 12 tricks (it made 11 with a good guess in the spade suit), and the post mortem revolved around whether I had to sleep on the couch.



**The Nautical Inn Beachfront Resort**  
Over the London Bridge to the Island  
1000 McCulloch Blvd. N., Lake Havasu City, AZ 86403



THANK YOU FOR NOT WEARING FRAGRANCE		
<b>MOUNTAIN STANDARD TIME</b>		<b>KNOCKOUTS:</b> Top Bracket may be handicapped
<b>Thursday, January 9</b>	1:30 pm	<b>MARIAN WARNKE KO's</b> (1st Round) Stratified Open Pairs and 99er Stratified Pairs
	7:00 pm	<b>MARIAN WARNKE KO's</b> (2nd Round) Stratified Open Pairs
<b>Friday, January 10</b>	10:00 am	<b>MARIAN WARNKE KO's</b> (Final) Single Session Swiss Stratified Open Pairs
	3:00 pm	<b>JUANITA STALKUP KO's</b> (1st Round) Stratified Open Pairs and 99er Stratified Pairs
<b>Saturday, January 11</b>	10:00 am	<b>JUANITA STALKUP KO's</b> (2nd Round) Stratified Open Pairs
	3:00 pm	<b>JUANITA STALKUP KO's</b> (Final) Single Session Swiss Stratified Open Pairs
<b>Sunday, January 12</b>	10:00 am playthrough	Stratified Swiss Teams (Stratification by Team Average)

**STRATS** All Pair Games Stratified by Pair Average  
Strat A 1500-unlimited Strat B 300-1500 Strat C 0-300  
99er Events 0-20/50/100

**ENTRY FEES** \$10 per person for ACBL Members  
\$13 for non or unpaid ACBL Members  
\$9 per person for 99er Sessions

\$10 Box Lunch playthrough on Sunday  
**DIC** Arleen Harvey Sanction S1401092 ACBL Unit 355  
Tournament Chair—Darlene Anderson [darlery@yahoo.com](mailto:darlery@yahoo.com)  
928-453-784 Partnerships Helen Klinger 928-846-9644  
[trumper@npgcable.com](mailto:trumper@npgcable.com) Web [www.bridgeinnorthernarizona.com](http://www.bridgeinnorthernarizona.com)  
and [www.lakehavasuduplicatebridge.com](http://www.lakehavasuduplicatebridge.com)  
**NAUTICAL INN WATERFRONT SUITES** [www.thenautical.net](http://www.thenautical.net)  
Reservation Code 267497 By Nov 11 1-800-892-2141 928-855-2141  
Resort Fee Waived Bay Rooms \$109-119 Cove Suites \$119-129 Beach Suites \$139

