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What annoys bridge players – Part 1

I am becoming a grumpy old man. There are things that really annoy me at the bridge table. However, I know I am not alone – I bet that everyone reading this will share at least one of my pet hates and some may share them all. I've listed them in order most annoying first – your priorities may differ. Or you may agree that I'm just a grumpy old man.

Thanking opponents for doubling or pushing you to game when you make it: No matter how much you mean it in jest, your opponents will feel uncomfortable and maybe annoyed at themselves if they've doubled a making contract or pushed you into a making game when you weren't going there yourself. Making a gratuitous comment at this point will add fuel to the fire. If this happens to you, consider yourself lucky but say nothing.

Making gratuitous comments after seeing you achieved a good result: It is the nature of bridge that a good result by one pair at the table equals a bad result for the other pair. So when you get a top board and announce "top board, partner", it is equivalent to telling the opponents they got a bottom. Say nothing. If you like, just pass the Bridgemate to your partner or opponents if they seem interested.

Fiddling with the Bridgemate or scoring sheet before making the opening lead: After the auction period, the whole table is waiting for the player on opening lead to make that lead. If you have other duties, like entering the details to the Bridgemate or writing on your personal scorer, make your lead first. When you have two tasks to do and people are waiting for one of them, it's just good manners to do that one first. Same applies to dummy if they are on Bridgemate duty – spread dummy before fiddling with the Bridgemate.

Not claiming as declarer when the outcome is obvious: If you are nearing the end of play of a hand and it's quite clear that you have all the remaining tricks, it's bad manners (and in fact contrary to the laws) to continue to play. The opponents are often squirming, wondering what cards they should keep, and it can be a difficult decision. It's very annoying for them when they later find that anything they did made no difference. Of course, don't claim if you're in doubt, and when you do claim, state what you are going to do "e.g. drawing trumps and the table is high". Similarly if you're in dummy and can't get back to hand and there's a potential loser on the table, the opponents won't be silly enough to throw out the winning card when they can see what's on the table, so saying "I'll give you the last trick" saves everyone time.

Asking questions during the auction when you have no intention to bid: The laws allow players to ask questions about the bidding at their turn to call. But when you don't intend to bid regardless of what the meaning might be, then don't ask. It just slows the auction down. You will be entitled to a full explanation of the bidding at the completion of the auction so your rights are protected. In fact, asking questions needlessly can have a downside – firstly, the bidder's partner will hear the answer

and will know whether they're on the same page, and secondly, expressing interest about particular bids, especially alerted ones, suggests to your partner that you have an interest in that suit and under the laws of Unauthorised Information, this may limit their options when they get on lead.

Saying "having none" when you trump an opponent's trick: This happens typically when you are trumping when the opponents aren't expecting it. The opponents won't be happy about this, and saying "having none" is simply unnecessary, and sometimes seems like tightening the thumbscrews. Of course the partner of the player who is trumping can (and should) ask "No spades, partner?", as this serves a purpose.

Saying "thank you" gratuitously: It gets my shackles up when declarer has dropped a singleton king, or extracts a queen they successfully finessed, and says "thank you". Unnecessary, and irksome to the defenders.

Putting pen to the bidding pad without knowing what you want to bid: Bidding often requires thought. While you're thinking, the other players will be looking at their cards and thinking about their next move. When you move your hand to the table, all players instinctively look across to the bidding pad waiting to see what you do, and tend to stay focussed till you make your bid. It can be annoying if you then retract your hand without doing anything, especially if you do it a number of times. It can also result in your left hand opponent thinking you've passed and making their call, which would be an infraction if you didn't actually write anything.

Hmmm... that's quite a list. Maybe I am getting too grumpy. Anyhow, I'm sure everyone agrees with at least some of these. It all comes down to players being aware of how their actions affect others – a good policy at the bridge table, and in life generally.

More next issue.

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