



Partner Makes a Slow Pass (Part 2 of 2)

In the [previous article](#), we introduced the confusing concept of acting after partner's slow pass. Here is another example:

West	North	East	South
--	--	1♥	Pass
2♥	Pass*	Pass	??

*Very slow

With both sides vulnerable, South holds:

♠ K873 ♥ K3 ♦ Q10872 ♣ K2

I love to balance on this auction. If my partner had passed 2♥ in normal tempo (5 seconds or so), I would be free to use my best judgment. But, after partner's slow pass, I would feel ethically bound to pass out 2♥. I have extra information (partner thought of bidding) that it is safe to bid here. I know my partner doesn't have a bunch of garbage. I should make the ethical pass. I can't let the knowledge that partner has values influence my decision. I'll sleep better at night with a clear (ethical) conscience if I pass.

What would happen if I did balance?

The opponents have the right to call the director. The director would let the bidding continue and suggest that he be called back after the deal if needed. If the director is called back (my balancing action was "successful") and deems that a panel of my peers (he can actually go away from the table, take a survey and come back to make his ruling) wouldn't balance, then the contract is restored to 2♥. Whatever actually happened at the table is "cancelled" and the director determines the score in 2♥ (leaning in the 2♥ declarer's direction to give him the most favorable outcome). If the director deems my balancing bid was normal ("everyone" would do it), then the table result stands. For example, if my hand were:

♠ K875 ♥ 6 ♦ A765 ♣ K764

I could surely balance with a double. Who wouldn't? This hand is possibly worth a double the first time, but certainly clear cut in balancing seat after the opponents bid and raise to 2♥.

The guideline on what is "allowable" is fuzzy. It reads as if a team of lawyers all got to put their words into the pot, but boils down to something to the effect of "an action taken after partner's slow pass is allowable if a normal percentage of the person's peers would have done the same." But, why go there? I prefer to just pass in close cases and not get involved with a director call and maybe taking advantage of partner's tempo. If I deem it is "close" then I just pass.



Is it wrong for the opponents to call the director if you take action after partner's slow pass? Are they being obnoxious? No! It is fully within their rights. It isn't rude. Yet, many players are offended when the director is called in this situation. Unfortunately, newer players have trouble understanding all the ramifications and they get intimidated by the director call.

Do we want the director called for these "slow pass and then partner acts" situations only in major tournaments? At a local duplicate game? In a newcomers game? This is a thorny issue where you won't get agreement from the cognoscenti. Here are the two extreme sides of the coin (about calling the director after hesitations):

A) "Director calls for tempo violations ruin the atmosphere and turn people off--don't even think of admonishing players for acting after a slow pass and don't dare call the director." "We don't want a cut-throat atmosphere. This is killing bridge. The people who bid after the slow pass don't even realize what they are doing--they don't understand the ethics involved." "Go easy on them!"

Contrasted with...

B) "Active ethics after partner's slow tempo has to be taught to players from the very start. Even in a newcomer's game, this area should be handled firmly (yet politely) with education and director calls upon violation. If we don't enforce the rules, then why call it bridge?"

My preference would be somewhere in between A and B. There have been many debates (one catchy article has been called: "If it Hesitates, Shoot it") and if you wish to read about it, you might consider a bridge blogging site such as Bridgewinners.com (you can even post there and ask for opinions).

I leave you with this true story:

When I was 14 years old and new to duplicate, I was faced with a "huddle/bid" situation. Apparently I passed out of tempo and my 14-year old partner then bid in balancing seat. My opponent screamed (she shouldn't have screamed) for the director. I wanted to cry--I was so embarrassed. I survived (thankfully), but didn't understand what was happening. Ironically, some 30 years later, I was giving a lecture and in the audience was the lady who had screamed for the director.

Next article we discuss other tempo issues.