

BRIDGE YESTERDAY

Ethics, shmethics!

Nowadays ethical play at bridge is so much a part of the game that it's only we oldtimers who recall the rough and ready "anything goes" days of yesteryear. I really have to credit Edgar Kaplan for being the moving force behind the ethical epiphany in bridge, not only because of his own personal high standards which set an example for all the other players but also because of his many *Bridge World* editorials preaching ethics.

Here are a couple of examples of bridge from the early days, and I would imagine that after seeing them most readers will be inclined to give fervent thanks to Edgar and his cohort for their ethical crusade. Both hands come from weekly duplicate games. The first was in Raleigh, NC, in 1951, and the perp was a very find player named, I believe, Charlie Lombard. Charlie had anticipated Roth-Stone by inventing the negative double, although he didn't call it that. He explained it to me and my partner, Billy Woodson, when we sat down to play against him as "Doubles of overcalls are for takeouts."

Charley was partnered, as always, by his wife, a mousy little woman who was forbidden to bid notrump or to bid a major suit unless it was (at least) a strong five-carder (another anticipation of Roth-Stone, based on Charley's distrust of his wife's dummy play). Mrs. L. was sitting to my right, and opened the bidding with one spade, not vulnerable. Holding xx AKJxx xxx xxx and anticipating a notrump bid by Charley, I decided to venture a lead-directing bid of two hearts, despite the fact that I was vulnerable. After all, I reasoned, Charley can't double me.

How wrong I was! In stentorian tones Charlie announced to us, and the world; "I DOUBLE TWO HEARTS!!!" Needless to say, Mrs. L. didn't even think about bidding, and I proceeded to go down 1100. (My bid should have paid big dividends, incidentally, since if Charlie had bid three notrump, as he usually did, my partner's heart lead through dummy's Qxx would have been the only defense set the contract, otherwise there are 12 tricks off the top.) Of course, we had no recourse. It would have been fruitless to complain to the director, and so we just had to grin and bear it. Billy, one of the world's most ethical players, was as disgusted as I was, but we were helpless. And although Charlie hadn't made it clear when he announced the convention, it

should have been obvious to me that *his* doubles of overcalls couldn't possibly be for takeout, since that would most likely lead to his wife's becoming declarer. Only *her* doubles could possibly be for takeout! So the fiasco was a result of my own stupidity.

The complete hand, as nearly as I can remember:

North (Billy): 532 43 987 J10543
East (Mrs. L.): AQJ87 Q87 A104 K9
South (Paul): 64 AKJ62 632 876
West (Charlie): K109 1095 KQJ5 AQ2

Note that Mrs. L. had a classic notrump opening which, however, was forbidden to her. Also, Charlie didn't want to bid 3NT without a heart stopper, and certainly didn't want his wife to play the hand in spades, hence his DOUBLE.

The second incident took place in Schenectady, NY in 1955. I was playing with a novice named Ernie Otto. Ernie opened three diamonds in first position, not vul vs. vul. The next hand hesitated for several seconds, showing conventionally a hand just shy of a takeout double (which required in those days and at that vulnerability about 16 points. He actually did have 16 points, but three of them were the QJ of diamonds, which he devalued.) I held xxxx xxxx Axx xx and made the obvious bid of three notrump, planning to run to four diamonds if doubled; undoubled, I would have been happy to go down nine against the opponent's probable slam.

Lefty passed pretty promptly, showing a bad hand, but he had made a misbid based on the assumption that I had strength. (He probably thought that his partner was psyching his slow pass.) So I was left to play three no, against the rather unbrilliant lead of a low club from AK fifth. Ernie tabled Jx x K9876543 Qx and when the club queen held the first trick I ran eight diamonds tricks to make three notrump, with the opponents cold for a grand slam. With 31 high-card points neither opponent found a bid, other than the slow pass! The hands

North (Ernie): J3 6 K9876543 Q6
East (Slow bidder): AK7 AJ32 QJ J874
South (Paul): 9862 8743 A102 109
West: Q1054 KQ109 void AK542

If West had only trusted his partner's bidding instead of mine, he would have cue bid four diamonds, and pressed on to a slam. But then, I suppose he reasoned that he only had 14 points, not enough to bid at the three level!

Well, isn't it nice we don't have to put up with that sort of nonsense today? All we have to worry about are endless accusations, myriad committee meetings and boring articles in the *ACBL Bulletin* advising us how the author would have ruled in some ethical contretemps.