

ABOUT TIME - By McBruce

(from the Special Regional Issue 2014).

Rate your level of agreement with the following statements from zero to ten, zero meaning "this is completely wrong" and ten meaning "couldn't agree more." .

1. Players must take as long as they need to bid and play a hand, because the laws demand that we all do our best.
2. There can be no situation where a player is forced to risk a good result because time is short.
3. A pair must wait for another pair as a round begins and is under no obligation to help catch up.
4. When the round is called, there is no need to move as E - W if the N - S pair ahead of us is still playing or not seated. As N - S, it is OK to get up if the next E - W pair is still playing or has finished and gone somewhere for a break.
5. If scoring machines are set to show percentages, or results from other tables, all players have the right to look at them for as long as necessary.

Sum up your ratings for each statement. If your result is higher than.. zero, you have some learning to do about duplicate bridge and time. All five statements are completely wrong. There is no wiggle room in any of them. If you believe any part, you are a potential problem. And, judging from my experience and others, there are not many locals who will be recording a shutout.

Vancouver area tournaments get a fair number of tournament directors from outside the area, who direct in a ll kinds of places. As the local guy, I often hear that our sectionals are difficult because too many of our players are -- let's say, "slow;" let's instead say "shockingly unaware of their obligations with respect to keeping the game moving." Even that is not completely accurate. We also seem to have players who play extremely quickly, bothering neighbours for boards well before the round is called, finishing quickly and then complaining about how slow everyone else is. Both types ignore the clocks I set up at tournaments to indicate how much time remains in a round, and both types are equally at fault for this problem.

Let's go back to the statements and discuss each, for those non - believers who have finished the rest of this issue and have reluctantly come back to this article: .

1. *Players must take as long as they need to bid and play a hand, because the Laws demand that we all do our best* If you accept this, you must be willing to accept games that go for five hours or more or stop with eight or more originally scheduled boards left to play, because any one player could suddenly declare that this hand is exceptionally difficult and take forever -- delaying everyone else. Nobody would willingly enter such a game. It is equally expected by the Laws and regulations that players will give their best effort, both in achieving results and in keeping the game moving.

2. *There can be no situation where a player is forced to risk a good result because time is*

short Of course there can be. All of us have looked at a hand record after a game and discovered a better line that we did not see during the game. Players who claim to believe statement #2 feel that they should have been given enough time, however long, to find this line, even if it causes several pairs to be backed up like planes at a busy airport. Obviously we cannot let this happen. When you are still playing after a round is called, what gives you the right to deprive others of the time they may need for the next one? I am constantly amazed to go to a table where play has ground to a halt, several minutes after the round has been called, and find players playing at a pace which would be considered slow in a game of centenarians, often with nine or ten tricks already played. Sometimes you just have to abandon the extensive analysis which may find that elusive squeeze or endplay or other coup.

3. A pair that must wait for another pair as a round begins is under no obligation to help catch up Not so. ACBL regulations clearly state that all pairs who start a round late, regardless of fault, must do their best to make up for lost time. From time to time I get to tell a pair that does not believe this and wants to argue about it that they are now as at fault as their late - arriving opponents.

4. When the round is called, there is no need to move as E - W if the N - S pair ahead of us is still playing or not seated. As N - S, it is OK to get up if the next E - W pair is still playing or has finished and gone somewhere for a break From my position as Director, this is a prime cause of lost time. If everyone believed this, some rounds would never get started, since both pairs would be waiting for the other to sit down. The key is awareness: if you are still playing when the round is called, you finish as soon as reasonably possible, then proceed to the next table -- whether your next opponents are there or not. The Director calling a round does not mean to E - W pairs, "move if you can, but it's OK to stay where you are and prevent the next E - W pair from starting if the pair ahead is still playing." The Director calling a round does not mean to N - S pairs "pass the boards and go somewhere if the next E - W pair does not immediately arrive." When the round is called, tea, coffee, smoke breaks, newspapers and biscuits have to wait (as do the subject of the next statement).

5. If scoring machines are set to show percentages, or results from other tables, all players have the right to look at them for as long as necessary Too many of us are addicted to "rights" and most things we think of as rights are actually privileges. The "right" to look at results from other tables is in fact a privilege (not given in tournaments) that expires when the time for a round does.

A quick look is all you get if we are waiting for you to move. Similarly, if you spend a lot of time looking at the results on the machines in the middle of the round, you may find yourself in trouble at the end of a round. Be aware of this.

Many club directors have given up and turned the percentages and results off. I feel strongly that in club games we should give the players the option of seeing results. Many club players are not interested in looking at scores or hand records after the game or online, but are interested to know if their result matches others.

And that is fine, as long as the boards get played on time. We're concerned here with the time it takes to see the results on the screen, but another more serious problem is people who loudly read off the result, for a board which is about to be played at the next table. This simply has to stop. Such players should know better.

New players are the future of our game and the pace of an open game can be quite difficult for them to keep. The best advice to new players for adapting to the speed of an open game is this: establish a bridge "routine" that works for you for everything outside of actual bidding and play. When I play against courageous new players the thing I most often find is that they lose time because they don't have their routine set. Distractions like "was that board 19 we just played?" cause the routine to be disrupted as the scoresheet is corrected and another minute is lost while everyone else waits. If you do simple things: pulling cards from the board, sorting, counting points, noting dealer and vulnerability, scoring, putting cards back into the board -- quickly and efficiently without being distracted by chatter, you will be amazed how much more time you will have to think. Or talk, when the round is over and there are several minutes left on the clock.

Some advice from a Director on time that all players may find useful: .

- When a director comes to your table and asks that you play quickly, this is not an angry accusation that you are a slow player, it is simply a warning that your table has used too much time in this round and needs to catch up, something which happens to everyone from time to time, like revoking or leading out of turn or miscounting a suit. If you take it as an insult rather than as simple information you will lose more time, and probably more matchpoints as the steam comes out of your ears, so don't.

- Assuring the Director "I am not a slow player" has proven to be no assurance that the time will be made up with the effort expected. Catching up in the following rounds, whether or not you are at fault, is the only way to assure the Director that your comment was accurate.

- If you don't ever want the reputation of being a slow player, be aware of how much time is left in a round and keep your table moving. In games where there is a clock, watch the clock and listen to announcements of extended round. If the clock says you have less than six minutes per board remaining, you are falling behind. If there is no clock, be aware of hands that take a long time to bid or play, or especially long delays between hands. A simple request to move on will usually work; if the opponents will not move on, call the Director.

- The excuse that you were in a difficult contract and couldn't bear the thought of not doing your best is novel, and it is amusing that the Usual Suspects find their way into so many difficult contracts. But if you think your reputation as a player will diminish because you go down in a bad contract, taking five extra minutes to find a way to make it after the round has been called will really give you a reputation you don't want. We all make mistakes and live them down. Getting tagged as one of the Usual Suspects is a harder one to shake off.

- The most baffling scenario for me, one which happens over and over again, is a late table where one player, usually the declarer but occasionally a defender, is rethinking the entire hand on every play with only three or four or five tricks left.

There may be some rare hands where this is necessary, but to me this is a sign that the delaying player is not following any sort of plan. When a true expert takes time to think out a hand, some sort of decision point has been reached and the result will be clear once he makes his next choice. No doubt some Usual Suspect will show me a deal where several decision points are arrived at late in the play. My questions remain: why do you alone get so many of these; why do so many of them happen after the round is called; and why do you have no concern for the pairs behind who that constantly have to start late and play shorter rounds? ?

You can't win an argument with a Director about time when scoring machines are in use. It used to be that a Director who carefully wanted to monitor which tables or pairs were holding things up needed to walk the room to watch. Now we have everyone's progress on screen in front of us and it is abundantly clear after only a few rounds which pairs or tables are among the last to complete each round. Not that this stops the "Who Me?" players from claiming that I am wrong.

Some members of the "Who Me?" clique seem to have developed a remarkable ability to only hear the round called the third or fourth time I loudly ask players to move.

- By the way, this idea that no scores need to be entered into the scoring machines until the first round is over just has to stop. Players seem to think that because sometimes they are on their second board before the Director announces that the machines are ready, they can play all of the boards of the round, and then start scoring. These tables inevitably find themselves with a huge amount of data to enter after the round has been called. And, if there is a problem with their machine, it will not be discovered until the end of the round, with people and boards all trying to move. Once the announcement is made, finish the hand you are playing and do not start another until the data entry is all caught up. Call immediately if you have a problem starting the machine. We want to know as soon as possible. Tables that have logged on appear on the Director's screen, so you're not fooling anyone by ignoring the machine.

- Everyone needs a bathroom break from time to time, and my impression is that these do not normally cause time problems. What does cause them is a lack of awareness. I have seen players assure me that they won't be long, emerge from the bathroom quickly, but then wander off to stare at the food table or get a cup of coffee, completely oblivious to the three people waiting. That is a problem.

- Starting a round two or three minutes early, if both pairs are ready and the boards are available, is OK. Starting five or eight minutes early, by bothering the next pair for boards and rushing the E - W pair into seats, causes more problems than it ever solves.

- I have found that the Usual Suspects often play one very long round early on and then stay that far behind for the rest of the game. It is almost as though they need a round or two to get warmed up to the pace. Trouble is, the pair behind them (if they are E - W waiting for the Usual Suspects to finish) or the pair ahead of them (if they are a N - S waiting for the Usual Suspects to release the opponents) has a frustrating session where they have less time than everyone else in the room, round after round after round. This is why a pair that plays a long round is obligated to catch up. If the Usual Suspects think I am frustrated when I come to their table and ask that play be completed quickly round after round, you should hear what I get from the pair which has waited for the Usual Suspects all session long! If you are the Usual Suspects, you may be able to avoid problems by simple awareness: make a small effort to avoid getting behind early and you'll settle into a routine which will surprise everyone!.

About 15 years ago I wrote an article on slow play called Hurry Up and Think for the Matchpointer, which was reprinted online with my permission. Since then I have gotten enthusiastic e-mail about this article (even though several of my pieces are online) from bridge players in eastern Europe, North America, even South Africa and Singapore. The main point was this: **To play fast you don't need to play fast; you just need to play slow less often.** This is how that article concluded:

The Golden Rule is that there is only **one** person responsible for slow play: **you**. I don't care what the circumstances are. I don't care if you've never been late getting to a table in your life: if you make no effort to get caught up, you are guilty. If your attitude is "I won't help because it isn't my fault", you are hurting the game more than any slow pair every could. Fast players don't play "fast." They just slow the game down less often. As a result they have more time to think. What we need to do is look for the ways we all slow down the game and get rid of them, filling them with awareness and pauses for thought.

Slow players don't play "slow." They lose the thread and take time doing a whole slew of unnecessary things that slow the game down. It takes only one player to cause delays. Don't let that person be you. Keep your game moving. Hurry up--and think!