

Psych Bids: What They Are and What They're Not 12/02/2019

What is a psych bid?

A psych (or psychic) bid is a bid that **grossly** and **deliberately** misstates the strength and/or suit length of one's hand. It is used to deceive the opponents, hopefully preventing them from reaching their best contract or defending your contract correctly. Normally, a psych bid is made with a weak hand, overstating its overall strength, the length of a particular suit, or both. On rare occasion, though, a player will purposely underbid his hand hoping the opponents will overestimate their values or double him in a later round of bidding.

What does it mean to “grossly” misstate your hand? Most agree that it is when you deviate from your agreed hand strength by 3+ points, or from your agreed suit length by 2+ cards. So playing standard methods, if you open One Spade with a 10-point hand and four spades, this is considered a deviation but not a psych. If you open One Spade with nine or fewer points and/or three spades, this would probably be a psych.

What is NOT a psych bid?

Psychs are bids that **deliberately** misstate your hand. In other words, there must be intent to deceive in order for it to be a psych. Many times bids can be misleading, but not intentionally so. These are errors or just plain bad bids – not psychs! So it is NOT a psych if you miscount or missort your hand, or if you pull the wrong bid card, or if you forget your partnership agreements. Here are two real-life examples of misleading bids that weren't psychs.

1. South opened One Heart, West passed, and North bid Two Spades. South was about to alert her partner's weak jump shift when she noticed that she (South) had actually bid One Spade, not One Heart! And it was too late to correct the error, since her partner had already bid. South had one spade and did not want to play in a 4-1 fit. What followed was an auction that confused everyone at the table, with South trying to convince her partner that they'd be better off in hearts and North, with one heart, saying that they wouldn't. They ended up in Five No Trump – not a successful contract. Midway through the hand, it became obvious that South didn't have spades. Would East – West have defended better had they known that South didn't have spades? Probably. Was the One Spade bid a psych? Of course not!

2. West opened One No Trump and North overcalled Two Hearts. West glanced at her hand, which was sorted into suits black-red-black-red, and discovered that both of her red suits were diamonds! So instead of 4-2-3-4 distribution, her hand was actually 4-0-5-4! Yes, West had opened No Trump with a void in hearts. Fortunately, West became declarer in Four Spades. It became clear that something was amiss when West ruffed the opening heart lead. West's One No Trump bid was definitely misleading, but it wasn't a psych.

What is the policy regarding psychs?

Psych bids are expressly allowed by the ACBL – with restrictions. In addition, clubs are allowed to regulate psychs as they see fit. The club policy on psychs is on our website and is reproduced below. In general, if the policy is violated then the offending pair will be assessed a penalty equal to the top on a board (typically 8 to 12 matchpoints). To summarize:

- Psychs are expressly forbidden against weaker players. This is considered bullying and poor sportsmanship and it is NOT acceptable.
- Psychs should be RARE. More than one psych per session would be considered excessive.
- Upon completion of the hand, the psyching player MUST call the director to report the psych.

Please note that excessive psyching or repeated violations of the policy can result – and has resulted – in the offender being suspended from the club.

What should you do if someone psychs against you?

If the psych bidder calls the director to the table in your presence, so you know for a fact that the psych has been reported, then you don't have to do anything.

Otherwise, you should absolutely report the psych bid to the director yourself. Do it quickly, as soon as the round is over. The director will confirm that the bid was actually a psych and not just an error or a bad bid. If the bid was truly a psych, and if it wasn't self-reported, then the offending pair will be assessed a penalty as specified above.

And finally...

Please note that a psych bid, which is intended to be misleading to the opponents, must be equally misleading to the psycher's partner. Players CANNOT use conventional psych bids as part of their bidding system. Furthermore, if you know that your partner tends to psych in a particular situation, then it ceases to be a psych and becomes partnership understanding. Such understandings between you and your partner are unethical – unless you disclose them to your opponents.

Club Policy on Psych Bids:

A psych bid is one that purposefully and grossly misrepresents either distribution or point count:

- The psyching player must call the game director upon completion of the hand and report the psych. Failure to do so will result in a procedural penalty equal to the top on a board.
- All players are encouraged to report psych bids.
- If a psych is committed against a player of lesser ability or experience, it will be considered bad sportsmanship and a procedural penalty equal to the top on a board will be assessed.
- If a player psychs more than twice in one event, there will be a procedural penalty equal to the top on a board. This does not mean that it is acceptable to psych twice in every game. Psychs should be rare.
- Excessive psyching can result in being barred from the HBC for a period of time determined by the HBC BOD.