

Polling Techniques

Polling other directors, experienced players, and players of the peer group involved is a very common and frequently required activity when dealing with the judgment rulings of UI and Claims. One hand alone may require multiple polls relative to the auction, the defensive strategies, and the declarer's work. As you finish one poll, you frequently realize that you'll have to develop the follow-up poll.

Before polling, you must determine that there was an irregularity and that there may have been damage. The purpose of polling is to help determine whether actions other than the one taken at the table would have been logical. You are finding out what action the player being polled would take and any others they would seriously consider. The poll can be extremely useful because of the wording of Law 16B1(b):

A logical alternative (LA) action is one that, among the class of players in question and using the methods of the partnership, would be given serious consideration by a significant proportion of such players, of whom it is judged some might select it.

Knowing that a less successful LA was available is not enough to adjust the score. You must also determine that it could demonstrably have been suggested, per Law 16B1(a). Here, the players are being asked to resolve the question directly. Never argue with the consultant. You may (should) ask him for his reasoning. A lucid reason from one player polled may outweigh less well thought out reasons from several others.

Do not merely give the auction as it occurred and ask the expert what he would do at the key point. This telegraphs the problem and may skew the answer. Instead, ask the consultant what he would do at each round of the auction. Sometimes the consultant will try to guess the problem. Respond, 'Maybe, maybe not' and continue.

Think about the question before you ask it. When UI from partner may be the issue, you will usually present the auction step by step as it occurred. However when a player has from the opponents and his partner's next action may have been different, it may be better to poll for an opinion of the auction that didn't happen, but likely would have. It may be necessary to conduct two separate polls. Similarly, when polling for opening lead choice you need to decide whether to give the consultant the actual auction or the most likely alternative sequence.

Be wary of a player's answer when his early call(s) are different from the actual ones. Ask if he can accept XXX (the actual call) instead. If he cannot get his mind set in an

appropriate mode, you will probably want to discard his response; but his reasoning may still be helpful.

Make sure a less experienced player understands that you are trying to find out what he would do in real life; this is not a trick question or a test and there are no right or wrong answers.

When polling multiple people at the same time, ask that they not offer their answer until are ready to answer. Too often the first reply will sway others who have yet to answer.

Sometimes during polling you realize you are focusing on the wrong hand or problem. Stop over.

Sample Poll

- Do you have time for a consultation?
- You and your partner play 2/1 with the regular bells and whistles. You are South, dealer; E/W vul; MPs, what your call?
- After that it goes P, xx, yy, what is your call?
- After that it goes P, 2xx, 2yy, what is your call?

When the auction is complete, ask:

- Did you consider other calls besides the one you made after 2yy?
- Does a slow 2xx by partner demonstrably suggest one call over another to you?
- Is that call likely to be more or less successful than the one you chose?
- Please explain your reasoning.
- Thank you for your time and advice.