

Comparable Call

Note: This lecture is based on the author's proposal to the WBF LC and the content might be changed when incorporated in the upcoming commentary to the 2017 Laws.

The penalties for infractions related to insufficient bids and calls out of turn have been quite severe. A regular consequence was that after such infraction partner was barred from the bidding by the obligation to pass throughout the remainder of the auction. This quite often resulted in gambling contracts, not being the result of normal bridge.

The LC introduced in 2007 in Law 27 (Insufficient Bid) a more lenient approach, saying that if the partnership understanding of the legal call is included in that of the insufficient call the auction may continue without any restriction and Law 26 does not apply.

In the new laws introduced in 2017 the LC has extended this idea by the introduction of the comparable call for which the definition is given in Law 23.

A call is comparable if:

- 1) it has the same or a similar meaning as the withdrawn call; or
- 2) it defines a subset of the hands described by the withdrawn call; or
- 3) it has the same purpose as the withdrawn call (examples given are an asking bid and a relay, but there may be more).

Only 2) is a description without flexibility in the interpretation of it. A subset is well defined. The words 'similar' (in 1) and 'purpose' (in 3) ask for interpretations and could lead to different decisions by different TDs. That is not an ideal situation and therefore the LC wants to provide a more precise interpretation and suggests to follow this unless the RA describes a different approach.

Let us start with 'similar' in 1). We take a bid that describes one or more suits, the strength of the hand and the length of a suit. A 1♠ opening bid shows five or more spades and has an agreed strength (11+ hcp). If this call is withdrawn and replaced by a bid showing at least 6 spades and/or at least 14 hcp that is a subset. But if the legal call can be weaker than 11 or could contain less than five spades we need to interpret 'similar' to decide whether it may be deemed to be a comparable call.

Suits

If the legal call shows less suits than the withdrawn call it is not comparable. A bid that just shows spades that replaces an out of turn opening 2♠-bid showing spades and a minor is not a comparable call.

Strength

To be considered comparable the two calls need to have a common strength (overlap each other). If the difference in strength can be a king or more the calls are not comparable and if the difference in strength can be bigger than the overlap in strength, the calls are not comparable either. A 15–18 NT replacing a 13–15 NT OOT is not comparable. A 1♠ overcall of a 1♥ opening replacing a 1♠ opening in first or second seat OOT is not comparable. Let us look at the first example in more detail. The difference in strength is 2 points (13-14), the overlap is one point (15). Had a 13–15 NT replaced a 15–18 NT the difference in strength would have been 3 points (16–18).

Length

If the withdrawn call shows the same suit as the legal call the promised length of the suit in the legal call may be one less to consider it comparable. Partner opens 1♥ and you bid 3♦ OOT promising at least a 4 card heart support and 10–12 points. This bid is not accepted and RHO bids 2♣. If 3♣ now shows three or more cards in hearts in the same range it is considered comparable.

Assume a 1♥ opening (5+) OOT at partner's turn to open the auction. Not accepted and partner opens 1♥ now (we will later (dealing with Law 31) see this to be possible). RHO overcalls with 2♣. If 3♣ now shows three or more hearts it is not a comparable call. But any call showing at least invitational values with four or more hearts is comparable.

Same purpose

The idea here is that a call is made without giving a further description of the hand. If done legally later it carries exactly the same information, so there is no UI given. This means that 'the same purpose' is restricted by that condition. Example: West dealer opens 1♦ and South now doubles OOT, not accepted. North passes and East bids 1♥. South doubles again. Just looking at the purpose to get information from partner North, the two doubles could be considered similar, but they also carry information about the hand itself, which is not the same for both doubles. They are not comparable.

Possible damage Law 23C

The introduction of the comparable call is made to allow play to continue normally as often as possible. That being the purpose, it is not surprising that the LC advocates this lenient approach. With an important 'but'. If information from the withdrawn call is not given in the legal call being deemed comparable, which helps to reach a favourable contract, damaging the other side, the TD awards an adjusted score compensating the damage/taking away the advantage.

Let us see what might happen in the case above where a player opens 1♥ OOT and later bids 3♦ showing 4 or more hearts. Partner opened 1♥ and takes the lead in reaching 7♥ after having

found out that they have A, K in hearts. Knowing that they have at least 10 hearts he does not need the Queen. But without the BOOT he probably does not know that there are ten trumps at least and then bidding 7♥ without the Queen is by far not automatic. This leads to an adjusted score.

Law 23C

The question arises under which conditions the TD needs to consider adjusting the score. It is important to understand that Law 23C only is relevant if a comparable call is made. If the offenders reach a favourable score after being restricted in the auction normally no adjusted score is given.

The TD only has to look at the calls made by partner, as that is the one that possibly has extra information. He is allowed to use it, but, as we saw in the example, that could lead to an advantage.

Condition 1: it is quite possible that partner has used that extra information.

There is another question to be considered. If the outcome of the board without the infraction would have been the same there is no need to adjust the score: the offenders did not gain through the infraction.

Condition 2: Without the infraction the outcome of the board could well have been different.

When in the example given partner has the possibility to ask for the ♥Q and partner has it he will find out anyway and 7♥ stands.

Let us look at some more examples:

N / all

♠	K 7 6 3	N W E S	♠	A Q 5
♥	Q 6		♥	J 10 7 4 2
♦	A 8		♦	7 4
♣	Q J 9 6 3		♣	A K 8

W	N	E	S
		1♥	
	3♦	3♥	pass
?			

Not accepted

If West now bids 3NT it is worth to ask why not 4♥? He may assume a better holding than J10xxx, while 1♥ certainly can be done with that holding. The TD needs a poll to draw the right conclusion. Remember that this is not a case of UI. If the pollees choose 4♥ once in a while, this West is not offending the laws by not making that call. But the outcome of the poll may lead to a weighted score.

W / none

W	N	E	S
		pass	
1♣	pass	1NT	pass
3NT	All pass		

OOT, not accepted

It appears that most pairs are in 4♠ (4 - 4 fit) and that both, 4♠ and 3NT, make 10 tricks. NS are not happy with this outcome after the infraction and call the TD once more.

West did not use any information other than given by the 1NT bid (condition 1). No adjustment.

It starts the same but now West bids 2♠ instead of 3NT. Partner raises to 4 and declarer makes 10 tricks while 3NT would have resulted in 9 tricks. NS call the TD.

Since East denied a 4 card spade by the bid of 1NT (a 1♠ bid would not have been comparable: could be stronger than shown with a pass) bidding 2♠ now looks as anticipating on the POOT. Condition 1 is fulfilled. But what about condition 2? Without the infraction East would have bid 1♠ and then the contract would have been 4♠, so condition 2 is not fulfilled. No adjustment.

Let us take a more subtle case:

W / none

	N	
W		E
	S	
♠	Q 10 6 3	
♥	J 9	
♦	K 10 8 6	
♣	J 10 5	

W	N	E	S
	pass		
1♣	pass	1♥	pass
2♥	pass	pass	?

OOT, not accepted

Remember that the TD deems the legal first pass to be comparable with the POOT, so South is not restricted in his bidding. He could have done something different than pass at his first turn. North's first pass in itself does not deny opening values, what to do with ♠A863 ♥J ♦KJ84 ♣KJ72. But the POOT tells South that his partner does not have an opening. This makes balancing less attractive. If South chooses to pass, the TD needs a poll to find out what South players will do. And the result may lead to a (weighted) adjusted score.

Law 26

The application of this law has become rather easy. If the legal call substituting an illegal one is comparable there are no lead penalties. If not comparable, look at the legal auction. Declarer may forbid the lead of any suit not shown.

There are some special cases where lead penalties do not apply, of which one is described in Law 27B1a: When the legal call replacing the IB is the lowest bid that shows the same denomination. It does not have to be a comparable call. For the others look at Law 36 up to Law 39. If an opponent has called after an inadmissible call has been made, the lead penalty disappears.

Examples: (find the answers on the last page of this document)

1)

W	N	E	S
	1♣ OOT		
		1NT	pass
2♣	pass	2♠	pass
4♠	All pass		

2)

W	N	E	S
	2♦ OOT		
		1NT	pass
pass	2♠	3♣	All pass

Multi

3)

W	N	E	S
	1♣ OOT		
		1♥	pass
1♠	X	2♠	All pass

4)

W	N	E	S
	pass OOT		
		1♥	X
pass	1NT	2♣	pass
2♥	All pass		

Law 27

The wording in B1a is changed. In the 2007 laws it reads ‘lowest sufficient bid in the same denomination’, now it reads ‘lowest sufficient bid which specifies the same denomination’, which is just an improvement in what was meant.

If the legal call replacing the IB fulfils the conditions of B1 there is no further rectification, but as in Law 23 the TD may adjust the score if he draws the conclusion that the opponents are damaged by the infraction.

If B1 applies the level of bidding after the replacement will probably be at least one level higher, which creates a specific problem.

Example:

		♠ J 10 8		N / none
		♥ 9		
		♦ Q J 10 6		
		♣ A J 8 5 4		
♠	A K	N	♠	9 7 2
♥	10 7 6 5	W	♥	A K Q 3
♦	8 5 3	E	♦	9 7 2
♣	10 9 3 2	S	♣	K Q 7
		♠ Q 6 5 4 3		
		♥ J 8 4 2		
		♦ A K 4		
		♣ 6		

W	N	E	S
	pass	1♣	2♣
1NT	TD!		
2NT	All pass		

2♣ shows 5 / 4 in the majors.

West did not see the 2♣ bid. He makes his bid sufficient with 2NT (B1a) and the auction continues without any restriction.

The TD stays at the table and watches 2NT going two down. Time to act. Without the infraction EW would never have reached 2NT. West passes, North bids 2♠ and that becomes the contract. If this results in a better score for NS the TD needs to adjust (Law 27D).

C OOT Laws 30, 31, 32

We assume that this call is not accepted and then needs to be withdrawn. Such call is UI for partner unless a comparable call is made, which replaces the COOT.

At RHO's turn

If a POOT then a PIT: Though not defined as such the TD deems this PIT to be comparable.

If a BOOT or an R/DOOT and RHO passes, repeat the call. If RHO does not pass, make a call and if it is comparable the auction continues normally. If not partner has to pass once and has UI during the auction and if becoming defender during the play (be aware of Law 26).

At LHO's or Partner's turn

Remember that the withdrawn call is UI for partner when making his first call after the irregularity.

When the infractor now makes a comparable call the auction continues normally, the UI disappears and Law 26 too. When this call is not comparable the UI remains, also during the play, and Law 26 applies (if defenders).

Some examples:

- North dealer has ♠98 ♥K75 ♦KQ10763 ♣84. Partner opens the auction with a pass, not accepted. This pass carries the UI that partner does not have an opening bid. It is tempting to bid 3♦ now, but if a poll shows that some players will pass, North should too.
- North has the same hand and South opens 1♥ OOT, not accepted. Now there is certainly less reason to preempt but if some players will open 3♦, North should too.
- In the last case if NS can prove that they never preempt with a six card holding things become different, then bidding 3♦ is not a LA.

Is it (the green thing) a comparable call? (the answers on the last page)

1)

W	N	E	S
1♠	1♦		
	X		

2)

W	N	E	S
...	...	1♣	
1♣	1♠	2♣	

A good hand with Club support

3)

W	N	E	S
...	...	1♣	
1♣	1♠	2NT	

Natural

4)

W	N	E	S
...	...	1♥	
1♥	1♠	2♣	

Shows fit in hearts and a good hand

5)

W	N	E	S
...	...	1♥	
1♥	1♠	2♣	

Shows fit in hearts and a good hand, but sometimes shows a good hand without an easy bid

6)

W	N	E	S
...	2♠		
1NT	2♣		

One suited ♠ and a minor

7)

W	N	E	S
...	2♠		
1NT	2♣		

♠ and a minor
One suited

8)

W	N	E	S
1NT	...	2♦	
	2♠	2NT	

Transfer, could be weak
Lebensohl

9)

W	N	E	S
1NT	...	2♦	
	2♠	3♥	

Transfer, could be weak
forcing

10)

W	N	E	S
1NT	pass	2♦	...
2♥			
			2♠
pass			

Transfer

11)

W	N	E	S
1NT	pass	2♦	...
2♥			
			2♠
3♥			

Transfer
No transfer breaks

12)

W	N	E	S
1NT	pass	2♦	...
2♥			
			2♠
3♥			

Transfer
Play transfer breaks

13)

W	N	E	S
...	pass		
1♥	pass		

14)

W	N	E	S
...	...	pass	
1♥	pass	1NT	

15)

W	N	E	S
...	...	1♠	
pass	pass	1♣	

16)

W	N	E	S
...	1♠		
1♥	1♣		

17)

W	N	E	S
...	1♠		
2♥	2♣		

Answers:

Law 26 (page 5)

- 1) Forbid any one suit
- 2) 2♠ may be more than a queen stronger than the multi 2♦: forbid a ♣, ♦ or ♥ lead
- 3) X may be a King or more weaker than the 1♣ opening: forbid any one suit
- 4) Comparable call. No lead penalty

Comparable call? (pages 8–10)

- 1) no
- 2) yes
- 3) a reasonable yes
- 4) if 1♥ shows 5 or more and the fit can be a 3card then not comparable
- 5) no
- 6) yes
- 7) no
- 8) no
- 9) yes
- 10) yes
- 11) yes
- 12) yes
- 13) yes
- 14) yes, even when forcing
- 15) yes, but not if 3rd hand 1♠ can be really weak (8 or less hcp)
- 16) no
- 17) yes