

Psychic Bids

Introduced by Dorothy Rice Sims

As related by Mr. Albert A. Ostrow in his publication *The Bridge Player's Bedside Companion*, published 1955, of which the pertinent excerpt is presented below.

When Jacoby and Bumstine formed *The Four Aces* with Howard Schenken and Michael Gottlieb, Sims began to play more of his competitive bridge partnered with his wife, Dorothy Rice Sims, quite as colorful and interesting a personality as Hal, **was credited with having introduced the psychic bid into contract.**

As she told it, she once picked up a hand containing five spades and five hearts in a duplicate at the Knickerbocker Whist Club. Not knowing which to bid she opened a club, and her partner responded with a heart,

It gave them the best score on that board. In writing up her discovery for a magazine she meant to label it "*psychological bidding*" Her spelling failed her, however, and the word came out "**syctic**". And deceitful bids have been known as "*psychics*" or "*sikes*" since.

Dorothy Sims was the first woman, to hold a pilot's license and in her teens tore about on a bicycle with such speed and recklessness that she became known as the "Red Devil", bane of traffic officers.

Years later in discussing psychics she told of having been arrested on one occasion for reckless driving. She explained to a sympathetic judge that with modern conditions of traffic it is sometimes safer to be reckless than careful. Psychics, was her point, are just such paradoxes and cannot be considered reckless if they help redress the injustice of a deal.

They can also be likened to the stiletto thrust and when combined with the bold simplicity of the street fighter and a perfect knowledge of tactics make for a devastating bridge technique, Technically, the Simses made an incongruous bridge duo. Hal was a masterful handler of dummy and a deadly accurate analyst on defense.

Guided by his complete familiarity with percentages he took no unnecessary chances, and a famous dictum of his was: "*Never bid a grand slam unless it is a virtual certainty. Be cautious, conservative, and pessimistic about grand slams -- especially in suit contracts, since there is always the danger of a first round ruff because of distribution. A grand slam that goes down one trick represents a sure slam wasted.*" He used psychics daringly but with logic and when matched against respected opponents resorted to sly mugging to suggest that he was trying to put something over on them.

Dorothy, on the other hand, was passable as declarer and only fairish on defense. She was an inveterate "pusher", with a fine disdain for partials, but she was adept at steering the bidding so that Hal would play the hand.

When told she knew nothing of the finer points of the game, she countered that it was like informing Man-of-War that his winning technique was faulty. She responded with equal good nature to her husband's cheerful chiding of her as the "worst bridge player in the world" and simply pointed to her titles won in women's play.

She was highly effective with her psychics while that mode of bidding was novel. And she was not averse to fixing her rivals in other ways. The story goes that at one tournament she placed all opposition women's hats on a bed to bring them bad luck.

The success of Sims at Asbury Park and the fact that a couple of youngsters named John Rau and William Barret were doing sensationally with the methods advocated by Hal and Dorothy brought the Sims System of bidding into prominence.

Though one authority described it as nothing more than a device to give the stronger player of a partnership a better chance to play as declarer, it aroused great curiosity among the bridge faithful. How, they wanted to know, did it stack up with the much-propagandized Culbertson System?