

CHANGES TO THE LAWS OF DUPLICATE BRIDGE

As Members may be aware from the Bridge Bulletin, the ACBL has approved a new edition of the Laws and there are some significant changes. The new Laws will be implemented in our Club from 4 December in order that Members can become used to them before the Regional. The new Laws are available online at <http://cdn.acbl.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Laws-of-Duplicate-Bridge.pdf>

USE OF THE STOP CARD (OR ANNOUNCING “SKIP BID”)

The intended purpose of the Stop Card or an announcement when making a jump bid was to alert your LH opponent to the fact that you had jumped, and he or she was then entitled to think a little before playing. The problem was that it also woke your partner up to the fact that you had jumped – effectively a transmission of unauthorized information

The new rule is that you do **NOTHING** to alert anyone to the fact that you jump – **you play your jump bid EVENLY and IN TEMPO! NOTHING means NOTHING. Say NOTHING extra. Do NOTHING extra.** The Stop cards will disappear.

Your LH opponent, the next player, should be awake **and not bid too quickly; he or she should consciously pause** before bidding or passing while absorbing the implications of your skip bid, but again **no-one should say or do anything extra.** (If the LHO bids too quickly after a skip bid, the speed of their bid inevitably gives unauthorised information to their partner).

Behind this change is a very important principle – you should communicate with your partner ONLY by the meaning of the bidding cards placed smoothly on the table – **NOT** by the way you select or place them, **NOT** by body language as you bid, **NOT** by hesitating before you bid, **NOT** by bidding too quickly, etc. We are almost all guilty of offending in this respect from time to time – sighing as we pass, etc – my suggestion for a new year resolution is to commit to copying the best poker players – impassive to a fault. Not a twitch of an eyebrow should give a clue to our inner feelings as we struggle to comprehend the eccentricities of our partners, and our bidding habits must not send inadvertent signals across the table.

In our friendly club environment we know each other very well and recognise and often tolerate bad habits which (unintentionally) transmit information.... but it's not good bridge, and at the Regional these habits may get us into trouble as visitors and the Directors challenge us, so I encourage everyone to try and do better.

COMPARABLE CALLS (Law 23 and other Laws)

An illegal call – e.g. an insufficient bid, a bid or pass or double out of turn, etc – may now (subject to the Director's ruling) be corrected when it is the offender's proper turn by **a call with a comparable meaning, known as a comparable call**, provided the combination of the illegal call and the comparable (correcting) call do not appear to give the offending side an advantage. **The Director MUST be called to assess the situation.** If it appears to the Director that no advantage is being gained by the offending side, the Director will allow the offender to make a comparable call without penalty, after which bidding and play continue normally and no lead restrictions apply. If however it appears that an advantage may have in fact been gained after the first ruling, the Director should be called back again to review the bidding and play and may award an adjusted score.

OPENING BID OUT OF TURN (Law 31) – THE DIRECTOR MUST BE CALLED.

The penalty for this crime of a premature opening bid (not a pass) at your LH Opponent's or Partner's turn to bid was very severe – unless the bid was accepted, the offender's partner was barred from bidding in the auction – and if opponents ended up playing the hand the innocent declarer could also demand lead restrictions be placed on the offender's partner. The new rule gives the Director the discretion to allow the offender's partner to bid normally, and the offender must then make a comparable call after which bidding continues normally. If the offender does not make a comparable call, further restrictions apply. If the Director concludes after the board has been played that the infraction unfairly benefited the offender, an adjusted score will be awarded. In any event, the Director will normally look closely at the result at the end of the game to ensure the outcome is fair.

Behind all these changes is the consideration of the unauthorised information being given to the offender's partner. In applying the Laws, the Director will be endeavouring to assess whether the information has influenced the offender's partner (even subconsciously) and ensure that the non-offending side is not disadvantaged.

It remains the case that, whatever the Director's ruling, players who accidentally receive unauthorised information from their partner should make every effort to disregard it in making their subsequent bidding and playing decisions. In contrast, opponents of an offender who transmits unauthorized information are entitled to make full use of it.

DUMMY MAY NOT LOOK AT OPPONENTS' HANDS (Law 43)

It is now strictly prohibited for Dummy to look at Opponent's hands before the game is over – although the look was often by invitation or out of idle curiosity, the rule has been tightened up. Likewise, defenders should not show Dummy their hands during the play, even if they wish to make Dummy suffer through knowing what is about to overwhelm declarer.

LEGAL CHANGES OF CALL (Law 25)

This law has been tightened up, but its basis remains the same. If a player through mechanical error places an incorrect bidding card on the table, it can be corrected when the mistake is noticed provided the offender's partner has not yet bid. The mistake must, however, be “mechanical” and **not due to a loss of concentration as to what was intended or momentary confusion**. The Director should be called to rule on the situation if there is any doubt.

There are a number of other changes to the Rules which are less likely to be noticed; I have put a link on the website with a link to a summary of all the changes based on the articles recently published in the Bridge Bulletin.

The Directors will also have to get used to applying the new rules, and this may take a little time. Please be patient when they are dealing with an issue at your table as they get to grips with the changes over the next few months.

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