

ChRONicles of Cardplay

District 6 TableTALK – April-May 2008

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Ethics and Rules at the Table

Ethics is kind of a touchy subject. This weekend I sat on a committee regarding a protest of a hesitation at the table. Both parties were pretty upset. In one of my classes, someone told me how they were “mortified” when the opponent’s called the director.

Anyway, here’s a few hints and tips about the directors, when to call them and why. Plus some DOs and DON’Ts at the bridge table.

Who is the director?

The director at a bridge game is similar to the umpire or referee at a sporting event. They are there to make sure all the rules of the game are followed and that if an infraction occurs, to make a ruling that attempts to restore equity to the non-offending side based on a public set of published rules. In a football game, if an offensive lineman illegally holds a defender and the fullback completes a big run, the official will call back the run and assess a penalty. When an irregularity occurs at the bridge table, one of the players calls the director who comes to the table, assesses the situation, and makes a ruling that upholds the integrity and fairness of the game.

When should I call the director?

Someone at the table should ALWAYS call the director when a suspected irregularity occurs. If in fact nothing has happened, the director will be happy to tell you so. When there’s a disagreement about an irregularity or anything else, call the director – do **NOT** try to solve it yourself! That’s the director’s job. I often get questions about a particular situation and am asked “What should have happened here?” Well, the first question I ask is “Did you call the director?” Often, the answer is “No, we didn’t want to bother him or embarrass anyone.” Well, no one can help you after the fact. Again using a sports analogy, in football, when the next play starts, any penalties that may have been assessed on the last play can no longer be resolved.

Another common error newer players make is making their own rulings at the table. When was the last time you saw a football player assess a penalty on himself or the opposing team? NEVER! That’s what the referees do. If you don’t call the director IMMEDIATELY, you lose your options to rectify the situation.

What kinds of things should I call the director for?

Call the director for ANY known or SUSPECTED rules violation. You should not be offended when the opponents call the director. In fact, if you make a mistake, YOU can call the director yourself.

First off, there are the obvious rule violations:

- 1) A bid out of turn.
- 2) A lead out of turn.
- 3) A revoke.
- 4) An insufficient bid.
- 5) An illegal bid (for example, doubling your partner’s bid).

Second, there are ethical problems:

- 1) A player takes a long time to bid, then passes or doubles. This conveys “unauthorized information” to partner that may not be used to make bidding decisions.
- 2) The opponent’s say or do something offensive (including arguing with each other). The ACBL has taken a firm stance on abusive behaviors and has established a “Zero Tolerance” policy to deal with boorish behavior.
- 3) Slow play. Everyone is entitled to a reasonable amount of time to play the allotted hands. Of course, some hands are more difficult, but consistent and repeated slow play unfairly penalizes the people following the slow players by shortening the amount of time they have to play the hands.

- 4) Failure to alert. Modern bidding systems have lots of artificial bids that do not have natural meanings. The opponents are entitled to know if you're using these bids and what they mean. If your opponents fail to alert and you would have taken a different action, you may be entitled to redress.

DOs and DON'Ts

- When Alerting, just say the word "ALERT". Do **NOT** say "I'll alert that". Or, "I think that's an alert." Do **NOT** explain **unless** the opponents ask.
- When Alerting, remove the ALERT card from the box and show it to the opponents IN ADDITION to stating the word "ALERT".
- The **PARTNER** of the bidder states "alert" and explains the meaning **ONLY IF ASKED**. You must never explain your own bids during the auction.
- When your partner alerts, you're not "allowed" to EITHER hear the "alert" **or** the explanation. Alerts are for the benefit of opponents – they are NOT so you and your partner can transmit information or remember your bidding system! You're supposed to memorize your bidding system and know what every bid means.
- If asked about a bid and you don't know, don't guess. It's OK to say, "I'm not sure" or "it's never been discussed" (if and only if that's true!).
- You may **not** look at **your** convention card during the auction. You **MAY** look at the **opponent's** convention card anytime you wish. Be careful about pointedly looking at the opponent's card during the auction because you might be transmitting unauthorized information to your partner.
- If partner mis-explains a bid, you MAY NOT take advantage of the mis-explanation. You must assume your partner made his bid according to your agreements as you understand them and as described on your convention card. Your subsequent bidding must adhere to those agreements **EVEN IF THE EXPLANATION GIVEN WAS INCORRECT!**
- If your side **WINS THE AUCTION** and a mis-explanation or failure to alert has occurred, declarer or dummy **MUST** correct the explanation **BEFORE** the opponents make their opening lead.
- If a mis-explanation or failure to alert has occurred and your side is **DEFENDING**, you **MUST NOT** correct the explanation until **AFTER** the hand is played. If the mis-explanation caused a problem in the bidding or the play of the hand, your opponents are entitled to ask for and may receive an adjustment.
- You may ask for the meaning of any of the opponent's bids (even ones several rounds back) **only when it's your turn to bid**.
- You may **NOT** draw any inferences from questions your partner asks the opponents.
- You may ask about any bid made before the opening lead is made. If you're not the opening leader, you must wait until your partner places a card face down before asking your question. This avoids any intimation that you're helping partner select his lead.
- You may ask for a review of the auction if you have not played to the first trick.
- Do **NOT** explain bids you have made yourself (unless you're declarer and are correcting a mis-explanation made by your partner during the auction).
- You **MAY NOT** take advantage of a hesitation by your partner. I.E., "They thought for so long, they must **ALMOST** have a 3 heart bid, so now I can make a bid knowing that."
- You **MAY NOT** **intentionally** hesitate or fumble your cards to "fool" declarer into thinking you have a specific card. That is, if declarer leads toward the AQ, you **MAY NOT** "think" then play low if you do not have the King. You may not "think" when you have a singleton. This comes under the category of "coffee housing".
- If you **unintentionally** fumble when declarer leads towards a tenace, and you **don't** have the honor, you should state "Sorry, no problem". Declarer is entitled to take advantage of your statement.

REMEMBER – IT'S A **GAME!** Cheating, unethical behavior and "coffee housing" have no place. Play hard, but play fair.