

Alert

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Alert Procedures – January 2012

The ACBL Board of Directors has approved a couple of changes to the Alert Chart/Procedures and to the General Convention Chart. These changes are effective on January 1, 2012.

A “Remove the requirement to Alert a cheapest club bid response over a NT opener or overcall, regardless of response structure. Rebids by notrump bidder which are different from standard (such as “Puppet Stayman”) would still be Alertable.”
Alerting the 2C (or 3C) response has always had a potential to provide partner with Unauthorized Information about what our rebid will mean. So, you should no longer alert those club responses.

B. “Amend the definitions of natural openers to include a 1C opener on specifically 4432 with 2 clubs and 4-4 in the majors.”

This means that if your agreement has you open a 2-card (or shorter) club suit with any distribution other than 4432 then your 1C opening bid is artificial and the opponents are allowed to use any defense against your 1C. This would include such defenses as Suction which are usually not allowed under the General Convention Chart. Specifics on how this will affect Alerts/Announcements have not yet been provided by the ACBL. Hopefully we will hear more before January 1

Could be Short – February 2012

There continue to be questions about the changes to "short club" openings. I'm going to try explaining this from a different direction.

If you open a natural 1 of a suit there are restrictions as to what artificial defenses your opponents may use. The most common of those that are allowed are takeout doubles, cue bids (such as Michaels), and the Unusual Notrump. Natural overcalls are of course always allowed. On the other hand if your opening is artificial then there are no restrictions on the defenses that your opponents can use. For example, some players use variations of the defenses that they use against 1 NT openings (Capelletti, DON'T, Suction, etc.) against artificial 1 Club openings.

For specifics as to what defenses are allowed against natural openings you can consult the "General Convention Chart" on the ACBL website at www.acbl.org or look for copies of it posted on our bulletin boards. Part of it is reproduced to the right. →

In the past, to be considered natural a 1 Club (or 1 Diamond) opening had to promise at least three cards in the suit. If it promised fewer than three cards and was non-forcing

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you were required to announce "Could be short" and the bid was considered artificial. If it was a forcing bid (*i.e.* a "strong club system" such as Precision) you would Alert it and it was also artificial.

Now if the only distribution in your non-forcing 1 Club agreement that contains only 2 clubs is 4=4=3=2 (specifically 4 spades, 4 hearts, 3 diamonds and 2 clubs) it is considered natural. You still must announce it as "could be short". If your agreement allows for opening 1 club on any "short" distribution other than 4=4=3=2 then it continues to be artificial and you announce "could be short". Forcing 1-club openings are also still artificial and must be alerted. All "could be short" 1 Diamond openings are artificial.

If your opponents announce their 1 club bid as "could be short" and you need to know if it is natural or artificial you must ask if the "short" distribution is limited to 4=4=3=2. To avoid giving your partner Unauthorized Information you should do this every time the bid is announced, not just when you might be interested in taking some action.

Psychs at the IBC – March 2012

Once again Psychs have become an item for discussion at the Indianapolis Bridge Center. It seems like a good time to explain our policy on Psychs.

Psychs are permitted by Law 40C1 as follows "A player may deviate from his side's announced understandings always, provided that his partner has no more reason to be aware of the deviation than have the opponents." If, in fact, the partner does have more reason to be aware of the deviation than the opponents then that deviation (psych) becomes illegal under the obligation to disclose ones understandings to the opponents.

So, just when does a bid become a psych. The standard definition is that "A psych is an intentional gross misrepresentation of either the strength or distribution of the hand." Such a clear definition! A more useful definition was published in the ACBL Bridge Bulletin a few years back: In short a psych is a bid that is more than a queen from the high-card strength and/or more than one card from the suit length of the announced/expected partnership understanding. This is the definition that we will use in determining if a bid is a psych.

What about a "Tactical" bid. In "Duplicate Decisions" the ACBL says "A tactical bid is a psych that is made to paint a picture in an opponent's mind and partner's mind that will cause them to play you for a holding that you do not have, enabling you to succeed at the contract to which you were inevitably headed."

The IBC requires that all psychs be reported to the director by the psyching player by the end of the round. It also requires that the psyching player file a written report of the psych at the end of the game. If there is any question about whether a bid is a psych and

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therefore must be reported the decision of the Director is final. (These requirements are based on an article by Mike Flader in the summer 2005 NABC Daily Bulletin.)

This requirement to report a psych is needed to allow the directors to identify patterns of psyching that become undisclosed agreements. They have nothing to do with whether a particular psych was successful or unsuccessful, good Bridge or bad Bridge, legal or not legal, or anything else. Every psych must be reported.

The complete text of the IBC Conditions of Contest, including the regulation requiring reporting of psychs, can be found in binders at the Bridge Center and on the website at www.indianapolisbridge.com.

Spectators – April 2012

The Laws of Bridge and the ACBL's regulations permit spectators. However, anyone watching the play at a table is not permitted to make any comments about the hands, the score, or any other part of the game. They must remain quiet throughout the round. There are two exceptions to this:

1. It is polite to ask permission to watch before you sit down.
2. If you are watching at a table you may give information to the director about what has happened at the table, but only at the request of the director.

The Laws and Regulations permit a player to exclude one spectator from watching at their table without stating a reason. However, a player who is sitting out is not a spectator. Technically they are not permitted to watch at a table even if they have already played those boards. The IBC is rather lax about this ☺. However, anyone playing at a table may exclude all other players in that game from watching at their table.

You may not exclude a teacher who is monitoring a player/pair from watching. However, the teacher is required to keep silent throughout the round.

Likewise you may not exclude a director who is watching as part of their duties.

Conditions of Contest - Club Regulations – April 2013

We have gathered together the various regulations that have been instituted at the Indianapolis Bridge Center over the years. They can be found in red binders at the Bridge Center (one in each room) and on our website. We will be highlighting some of them here each month.

Know Your Partnership Understandings – May 2012

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Experienced players are expected to have understandings with their partners for most common bidding situations. The newest version of the Laws talk about understandings rather than agreements. This emphasizes that the understanding can be a formal agreement, or based on partnership experience, or just based on common experience.

It is expected that each member of the partnership will be able to explain your understandings when asked and that your understandings be correctly marked on your convention card. If you do not meet this requirement and it damages your opponents you will most likely find your score being adjusted. A serious violation or repeated failures could result in an additional penalty. If your convention card is out of date then updated it. The opponents have a right to rely on your card being correct.

Cell Phones – May 2012

We are hearing cell phones ringing during games quite a lot lately. Our policy is that all cell phones must be turned off during a game. Leaving a cell phone turned on in a coat pocket in the closet or in a purse muffles it, but if it can be heard at all it is still a violation. If you absolutely must have your cell phone turned on because of a work requirement or a sick relative please let the director know before the game and ask them how they want you to handle it. Under no circumstances is it acceptable to answer or talk on your phone in any room where there is a game or a class in progress. Go outside or in a restroom before you talk on your phone

Failure to Alert – June 2012

When we make a bid that we are expecting our partner to alert but they fail to there are a couple of possible reasons for that failure. They may have understood our bid and forgotten to alert. Or they may have misunderstood and therefore not alerted. The failure to alert suggests that the latter is the more likely. So what are we to do?

The failure to alert provides us with what is called Unauthorized Information (UI). We may not base our actions on our partner's failure to alert. The Laws require us to carefully avoid taking any advantage of UI. If our partner makes an unusual bid after failing to alert we must interpret it as though they had alerted. We may not interpret it based on their failure to alert.

Let's take an example: We hold 4 spades, 5 hearts, 2 diamonds, and 2 clubs with 14 points. We open 2D (Flannery) showing just such a hand and our partner does not alert. Our partner then bids 3D. What are we to do? We might be thinking "Partner thought we were opening a weak-2 and was raising our pre-empt." But this would be taking advantage of the failure to alert. What we must do is determine what that 3D bid would mean if our partner had recognized our Flannery – 3D would show at least 6 diamonds, no support for our majors, and 11-13 points. We MUST base our continued bidding on that interpretation of partner's hand. We MUST NOT try to correct back to one of our majors hoping partner will catch on.

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I looked up the meaning of the 3D bid on the internet. Your version of Flannery may differ. However, “I forgot!” is not a permitted meaning on the ACBL’s General Convention Chart (or any of the other ACBL convention charts).

And a related topic - When do you tell the opponents that your partner has failed to alert. If you are the declaring side you tell them after the final pass in the auction and before the opening lead is made face down. On the other hand, if you are defending you tell them at the end of the play of the hand.

Hands Off! – July 2012

Recently there have been a couple of times when a player wanted to look at an opponent’s hand after the round had ended. They didn’t realize that the boards had been moved, so they ended up seeing their opponents cards on a board they were about to play. Depending on the movement this can be difficult for the director to fix. ‘

Law 7 states that “No player shall touch any cards other than his own (but declarer may play dummy’s cards in accordance with Law 45) during or after play except by permission of the Director.” This prohibition lasts until the end of the game. If you want to look at another player’s hand you should ask them to show it to you. If they decline but you need to see it because you suspect a revoke or some other infraction you should call the director.

OK, let’s admit that at the club we are pretty lax in enforcing this. However, if you look at another player’s hand and it results in the director needing to adjust the movement or the score you should expect a penalty. If it makes a board unplayable you should expect to get an average-minus along with the penalty.

When is a bid made? – July 2012

A bid (or more correctly a “call”) is made when the complete call is spoken or (since we are using bidding boxes) when the bidding card is placed face up on the table or held touching or nearly touching the table, or maintained in such a position to indicate that the bid has been made. (The old standard was when the bid was removed from the box, but that no longer applies.)

A call can be corrected when all of the following are true: 1. The call was inadvertent. This generally means a mechanical error such as stuck bidding cards or your thumb got a card you did not intend. A “change of mind” is not permitted. 2. The player must attempt to correct the call as soon as they realize the wrong bidding card is on the table. The Laws say “without pause for thought.” 3. The player’s partner has not taken any action. The ACBL’s advice to directors is that they be generous in allowing calls to be corrected.

When is a card played? – July 2012

A card from a hand is played by placing it face-up on the table (if it is an opening lead it is played when it is placed face-down). A card from dummy is played by declarer naming the card. Seems simple doesn’t it – but wait, there’s more. A defender “must play a card” if it is held so that it is possible for the defender’s partner to see its face. A declarer “must play a card” if it is held

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touching or nearly touching the table or maintained in such a position to indicate that it has been played.

Until his partner has played a card, a player may change an unintended designation if he does so without pause for thought. "Designation" means naming a card as played so this is almost always the Declarer.. Placing a card on the table is not included. The ACBL's advice to directors here is that the "burden of proof" is on the player who made the designation and the standard of proof is "overwhelming."

Handicaps– July 2012

I have been asked to explain how handicaps are calculated. My favorite answer is "The computer does it!." But perhaps you would like a bit more detail.

The ACBL permits clubs to handicap their games in just about any way the club chooses. They do suggest some options, but clubs are not restricted to just those options.

The method we use at the Indianapolis Bridge Center is quite similar to the way a bowling or golf handicap is computed. A player's ten most recent percentage scores for the session are averaged and that number is subtracted from a "par" of 65%. The result for the two players in a partnership are then averaged to give a percentage handicap. Each pair is then given extra matchpoints for the game equal to that handicap percentage times the maximum matchpoints possible for that game. The computer does all the calculating for us (thank goodness). A pair is awarded masterpoints based on the higher of the raw score award or the handicapped score award.

We have added the following modification to the above: In open games if a pair is two life masters and one (or both) have over 1000 masterpoints then their handicap is set to zero. If both are under 1000, or if one is not a life master then they keep their handicap. Also, in limited games (no life masters) any pair whose handicap score doesn't get them more masterpoints than their raw score does have their handicap set to zero (This means we can award more masterpoints!)

Table Talk – August 2012

Please avoid talking about a hand until play is completed. This can be bad in several ways:

- You might give your partner unauthorized information and your partner isn't allowed to use it. It could result in a score adjustment.
- You might give your opponents a hint as to how to play the hand. They are allowed to use that information and your result may be worse as a result.
- You might deceive your opponents. Deceiving your opponents by an extraneous comment, even if accidentally, is both illegal and unethical. Again, it could result in a score adjustment.
- Dummy must be particularly careful. They are not allowed to participate in the play of the hand in any way. They are limited to attempting to prevent declarer

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from committing an irregularity, such as by asking “no spades, partner?” or telling them they are starting to lead from the wrong hand.

Changing a Bid – August 2012

Last month I talked about when a bid is made and when a card is played. This month let’s take a look at when a bid may be changed. Next month I’ll write about changing plays

An insufficient bid can be changed, but sometimes with a penalty such as barring partner from further bidding. Call the director before attempting to correct an insufficient bid. The rules are not simple. The director will tell you your options.

Your inadvertent bid may be corrected if all of the following are true:

1. Your partner has not taken any action after your bid. (Note: what your left-hand opponent may or may have done is not relevant.)
2. You attempt in some fashion to correct your bid as soon as you realize that the bidding card on the table was not the one you intended.
3. Your bid is truly inadvertent. Your fingers got the wrong card from the box. The bid was never one you intended to make.

The ACBL advises directors to be generous in allowing changes to inadvertent bids. It is common practice for the opponents to allow a change if they are sure that the bid was inadvertent. However, if there is any question, please call the director.

Changing a Played Card – September 2012

Last month I talked about when you can change a bid. This month I will discuss when you can change a played card.

Other than the correction of an irregularity such as a revoke (when instructed by the director) the Laws of Bridge are quite restrictive on changing a played card. If a card is played legally from the declarer’s hand or from a defender’s hand there are no circumstances in which the player may change that play.

However, the Laws do permit the correction of an “inadvertent designation” of a play. A card is “designated” when declarer names that card to be played from the dummy. There are two requirements that must both be met:

1. The designation must be “inadvertent”. The card named must not have been one the declarer was considering to play. The call must be clearly a “slip of the tongue”. There must be absolutely no possibility that the change was a “change of mind”.
2. The correction must be made without “pause for thought”.

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These are very difficult criteria to meet. The ACBL Laws Commission has stated that “The burden of proof is on the declarer” and “The standard of proof is ‘overwhelming’”.

A couple of examples:

- The declarer leads from her hand towards the AQxx in dummy. If LHO plays the king and declarer calls for the queen there is never a way for declarer to change the call. The call is clearly the result of a mental error and/or confusion on declarer’s part, not a slip of the tongue.
- Declarer calls for a ruff from dummy not noticing that LHO has already trumped with a trump higher than any in dummy. Again, the error was in declarer not paying attention to the card played by LHO. It was not an inadvertent call.

As you may be able to tell from this the times that you can change a legal play are very rare. In the fifteen years that I have been playing and directing Duplicate Bridge I have seen just one instance in which I would have allowed a change – But the ACBL director called to my table would not allow me to make the change.

Cell Phone Policy – October 2012

A number of players have complained to the Board of Directors about the frequency that cell phones are ringing during our games. For many years the Indianapolis Bridge Center has had a policy that cell phones must be turned off during a game. The official policy has been that you would receive a full board penalty if your cell phone rang. But this has been rarely, if ever, enforced.

The Board discussed this at length and has updated the policy to be as follows. Directors are being instructed to announce at each game that cell phones are to be turned off and that the penalties described below are mandatory.

Use of cell and smart phones in any room where a game or a class is in progress is prohibited at the Indianapolis Bridge Center.

Cell phones must be turned off unless you have explicit instructions otherwise from the director. This means that they do not ring and they do not vibrate. If you are expecting an urgent call or are on-call for work, you must check with the director before each game to see how he/she wants to handle the situation.

You must not talk on the phone in a room where a game or class is in progress. If the director has given you permission to have your phone on vibrate, you must leave the room before answering it. The hallways are part of the rooms.

Sending and/or reading texts or email during a game or class are also prohibited. This includes between rounds or between hands.

The following penalties will apply:

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- If your phone rings or vibrates – ¼ of a board
- If you answer or talk on your phone – one full board
- Texting or emailing during the game – one full board.

Light Opening Bids of One of a Suit – November 2012

Every Bridge player opens 1 of a suit on hands that contain 13 High Card Points (HCP). We also open somewhat weaker hands if we have a long suit to give us some distribution points. A commonly used guideline is the “Rule of 20” – if the total of your HCP and the length of your two longest suits is 20 or more then open 1 of a suit. In his book “To Open, or Not to Open” Marty Bergan describes the Rule of 20 as a “light opening.” On that basis opening a hand that is “Rule of 19” or “Rule of 18” is “Very Light”.

ACBL Regulations Regarding “Very Light” Openings at the 1 level

The ACBL has several regulations that touch on the subject of very light 1-bids. First of all, if you commonly open 1 of a suit with a hand that is very light then you must “pre-alert.” This means that you must tell both of your opponents at the beginning of every round that you sometimes open 1 of a suit with a very light hand. (It must also be marked on your convention card.)

The ACBL’s General Convention Chart disallows “Opening one bids which by partnership agreement could show fewer than 8 HCP.” When this says HCP it means High Card Points – points for distribution are not included in this regulation. Also, it does not specify which seat it applies to. This means it applies in ALL seats. No exception is made for 3rd or 4th seats!

The Convention Chart does state that this prohibition does not apply to a psych. However, if you commonly make very light openings on 8 or 9 HCP then opening a hand with 7 HCP is a deviation, not a psych. Therefore it is prohibited since such an opening would be a part of your agreement and would make your agreement illegal.

Limited Games

How does this apply to limited games? Just as we prohibit psychs in our limited games we also prohibit highly aggressive methods like very light opening bids of 1 of a suit.

Masterpoint Limited Games – December 2012

Five or six years ago the Indianapolis Bridge Center formalized what had been an informal policy regarding what conventions and playing styles are permitted in masterpoint limited games. That policy is (and was) as follows:

Our masterpoint-limited games are a part of our teaching program. For these games we follow the ACBL General Convention Chart but with the following additional restrictions:

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1. Only systems and conventions based on Standard American as taught at our club are permitted. For example: 2 over 1 is permitted – it is a style of Standard American.
2. Strong One-Club systems such as Precision are not permitted.
3. Psychs are not permitted.
4. Opening 1NT with a singleton or void is not permitted.
5. Highly aggressive methods are not permitted (e.g. very light openings or overcalls, frequent preempts on 5-card suits)

Players wishing to use any of these restricted methods should play in our open games.

A few weeks ago we asked the directors of the NLM games to remind our players of this policy. Based on the questions I have received there has been some confusion as a result, especially about #5 above. Please note that it says “Highly aggressive” and “very light”.

Some examples may help clarify the situation:

- Opening a hand that meets the “rule of 20” is “light” in any seat, but it is not “very light”. A hand that meets the “rule of 19” is pushing it.
- Opening one of a suit with a hand that meets the “rule of 15” is OK in fourth seat.
- An overcall with a hand that doesn’t meet the “rule of 20” is very light unless the bid is “lead directing” with a good suit. *E.G.* KQTxx at a minimum.
- Preempting with a 5-card suit is very aggressive. The exception would be in third seat with a good suit (two of the top three or three of the top five).
- Preempting 3-clubs with a good six card suit (two of the top three or three of the top five) is aggressive but OK. After all, you can’t open it two clubs.

Played Card – January 2013

I have been asked a couple of times recently “My opponent took a card from their hand and then put it back and played another card. Don’t they have to play the first one?” The answer to that question is no, unless the card was in fact “played”. I wrote about when a card is “played” or “must be played” a few months back.

However, even when that first card is not played we can still have a problem. The player has given some information to everyone else at the table. They had a choice about what to play and changed their mind. That information is authorized to their opponents, but is unauthorized to their partner. The opponents can try to take advantage of the information, but their partner must “Carefully avoid taking any advantage.”

Most everyone is aware of the major things that result in unauthorized information, like hesitations during the auction or comments about the hand. But there are lots of little things that we do that can create extra information:

- Starting to play one card and then changing it for another. I’m not talking about a mechanical error – I frequently take a quick look at the card that came out of my

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hand to be sure it is the one I intended. But looking at the card for a second or two and then changing it is an entirely different matter.

- Taking a card from our hand before it is our turn to play. It suggests that what cards the others play doesn't matter. This is especially a problem if we then change the card.
- Playing a card when it is our partner's turn. This is an even bigger problem.
- Taking our cards from the board, spreading them, putting out a pass card, and then sorting our hand. "Partner—don't expect anything from me."

Be careful about these things. They mostly go unnoticed and usually no one reminds us when we do them. But if they cause damage to the opponents and the director is called you could find your score being adjusted.

- Preempting two of a suit with a bad seven card suit and in the HCP range for two-bids on your card is OK. This is not "highly aggressive".

An accidental violation of this policy will result in a warning and an explanation. Frequent repeated violations will result in the player or partnership being requested to play in the open games.

The Mini McKenney – February 2013

In 1937 William McKenney, then the ACBL Executive Secretary, put into play a permanent trophy for the ACBL member who won the most masterpoints in a year. Not surprisingly, it was named the McKenney Trophy. In 1982 this was expanded to include the top 500 masterpoint winners and was known as the "Top 500."

In 1985 Barry Crane was acknowledged by his peers to be unrivaled as a masterpoint winner and a matchpoint (pairs) player. The top 500 list was renamed the "Barry Crane Top 500."

In 1974 the ACBL Board of Directors voted to recognize masterpoint achievements among us mere mortals who will most likely never see the top 500. Players are grouped into categories based on their masterpoint holdings at the beginning of each year. ACBL-wide the top performers in each category are recognized in the Bridge Bulletin. Winners at the district and unit levels are listed on the ACBL website. Winners in our unit receive awards at one of our tournaments.

The Ace of Clubs – February 2013

The Ace of Clubs was begun in 1984 to recognize players for masterpoints won at club games. Recently this award was renamed to honor Helen Shanbrom. District and Unit awards are made for the same categories as the Mini McKenney. The Indianapolis Bridge Center honors its members who won their category in our unit at a special game each year.

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The Categories for both awards are 0-5, 5-20, 20-50, 50-100, 100-200, 200-300, 300-500, 500-1000, 1000-2500, 2500-5000, 5000-10000, and over 10000. Current standings can be found on the ACBL website. The standings in our unit are posted on the bulletin board in the front room.

Tournament Terms – March 2013

Knockouts (KO) are games for teams of 4 to 6 players. (Most teams are 4 players) Only four players from a team are playing at any given time, the others are substitutes. Knockouts are almost always bracketed (think NCAA tournament). The brackets are set up so that there will be four rounds at a regional or three rounds at a sectional. Generally a round consists of about 24 boards and lasts for an entire session. If you win, you play again. If you lose you find some other game to play in.

Compact Knockouts are four round knockouts, but they only last two sessions. You play two 12-board matches each session. If you win both matches in the first session you play in the second session. If you don't, you're out. If you lose the first match in a session you play a consolation match – there aren't any new games starting mid-session. In **Swiss Team** games you play a number of matches that are usually 6 to 8 boards long. You continue to play regardless of whether you win or lose. Each round you're matched against other teams with scores close to yours. Swiss Team games are usually either one or two sessions long.

Board-a-Match is a team game, but you move and are scored like a pairs game. However, you are not scored on a board against all the other pairs. When the movement is complete you and your teammates will have played each board against the same team. You are only scored on how well you did on the board against that team. Any game that is not one of the team games listed above is a **pairs** game. That's what we play most of the time at the club, so you should already be used to them. They can be one or more sessions in length.

A **Side Series** is a set of connected pairs games. There are usually 4 games in each series, but that can vary. You can play in just one of the games, but to win in the overalls you must play at least two sessions. Your two best sessions are combined to determine the overalls. Surprisingly, at least to me, is that you need not play with the same partner in the two games.

In a **Stratified** game players of all level play together and are scored together. When it comes time to award masterpoints the pairs or teams are divided into groups based on their current masterpoints. Usually the points of the highest player are used, but occasionally the average is used. The division points (strats) are announced on the tournament flyer. Masterpoints are awarded to the best pairs in each strat.

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In a **Flighted** game the pairs/teams are divided into flights based on current masterpoints. The divisions for the flights are announced in advance. A pair or team plays against only other pairs/teams within their flight. Masterpoints are awarded to the winners in each flight.

Stratflighted games combine the two ideas. The competitors are divided into flights based on current masterpoints and play only against others in their flight. Each flight can be further divided into strats. Masterpoints are awarded to winners in each strat

In a **Bracketed** game competitors are divided based on current masterpoints but the divisions are not determined in advanced. Instead they are determined based on the players who actually entered the game. The top 8 or 16 (or perhaps some other number) are Bracket A, the next so many are Bracket B, etc. The number of brackets and their sizes are determined just before the game starts. Brackets are only used for Knockout or Swiss Team games

How do I get GOLD? – March 2013

The most important question!

You must play in at least two sessions of the same event and the upper masterpoint limit of the event must be at least 750. If you win (or do well) some, or maybe all, of your points will be GOLD!

You are looking for Open games or the Gold Rush games.

Extraneous Information – May 2013

I have written previously that if you have extraneous information from your partner, such as a comment or hesitation or the like, you must “carefully avoid taking advantage.”

But what if that information comes from a different source? New opponents come to your table and one of them asks “Did you bid that slam on 17?” Or just “Have you played 17?” Even that tells us that there is something interesting about 17. Or we overhear a discussion at another table about how they “could have made 3NT.” All of these are extraneous information. And guess what – we are not allowed to use that information. That can put us in a bind that is totally not our fault.

So what should you do when you have such extraneous information? Report to the director what information you have received and what the source is. The director has several options if they consider that the information could interfere with your normal play of the hand. Most likely they will ask you to play the hand as best you can without using

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the extraneous information. The director will then adjust your score if they believe you have been damaged. They are responsible to protect you.

When you are the one who provided the extraneous information, whether by a comment to another player, or simply a loud discussion that is overheard at another table, the director may penalize you. Law 90B specifically lists as “Offenses Subject to Procedural Penalties” the “Discussion of the bidding, play, or result of a board which may be overheard at another table” and also “Unauthorized comparison of results with another contestant”.

SSSHHHHH!

It is legal to discuss a hand at the table with the opponents you played it against. But please do it quietly. If you are overheard you may be penalized. As directors we don't want to do that. But if you spoil the hand for other players we may be forced to.

2♣ Strong Opening – June 2013

The ACBL has chosen to be extremely vague in its regulation of strong forcing 2♣ Opening Bids. While the Indianapolis Bridge Center generally follows the ACBL regulations regarding such things as alerts and allowed conventions we believe it is in our best interest to provide a more specific regulation. Therefore the following:

Any strong forcing 2♣ opening bid must meet at least one of the following criteria:

1. The hand must contain at least 18 High Card Points. Distributional points are not included.
or
2. The hand must meet the “Rule of 28.” The number of High Card Points plus the lengths of the two longest suits must be at least 28.
or
3. The hand must contain at least 8 “Clear-Cut” tricks. Also, the hand must contain at least 1 defensive trick. A defensive trick is one of the following: an Ace, two Kings, or a KQ in a suit outside of trumps. Clear-Cut tricks are tricks that are certain to make opposite a void in partners hand and against the second-best suit break. A trick that relies on a card being in one particular opponents hand is not clear-cut. All finesses lose when counting clear-cut tricks. Some Examples of clear-cut tricks:
 - a. A K Q J x x x x – 8 clear-cut tricks. The best break is 3-2. The second best is 4-1. That allows us to pick up the Ten
 - b. A K Q x x x x x – 7 clear-cut tricks. The best break is 3-2. The second best is 4-1. That does not allow us to pick up the Jack
 - c. K Q J x x x x – 5 clear-cut tricks. The best break is 3-3. The second best is 4-2. We will lose a trick to the Ace and another to the Ten.

Further examples of clear-cut tricks will be posted at the club and on our website.

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This regulation applies only to strong forcing 2♣ bids. It does not apply to other strong openings such as a Precision 1♣ opening, nor to a Precision 2♣ (which is not strong).

We are NOT recommending opening 2♣ just because you have 18 HCP or meet one of the other criteria. These criteria allow opening 2♣ on some pretty weak hands.

Violations of this policy will be treated as an illegal partnership agreement which will result in you receiving at best an average minus. Note: In the ACBL it is illegal to psych a strong artificial opening.

Call the Director – July 2013

Recently I have heard a couple of incorrect statements about who can or can't call the director and I thought it would be a good idea to set the record straight.

When should you call the director? It's really pretty simple – Any time there is an irregularity. Law 9B1a says that “The director should be summoned at once when attention is drawn to an irregularity.” It used to say “must” but should is almost as strong an instruction. Law 9B1b further says that “Any player, including dummy, may summon the director when attention has been drawn to an irregularity.”

So, what's this about “The dummy can't call the director”? Well, that isn't true, but there are some restrictions on the dummy. Law 9A2 says that only “declarer or either defender may draw attention to an irregularity that occurs during the play period.” So, dummy may not say “That lead is out of turn.” But once someone else points out the irregularity anyone, including the dummy may (and should) call the director. If the dummy notices an irregularity, such as a revoke, during the play they must wait until the last trick is played (and they are no longer dummy) and then they may point out the infraction and call the director.

I have also heard from a couple of people that only the next person to bid can call the director for an infraction during the auction. This too is false. Law 9A1 says that “any player may call attention to an irregularity during the auction period, whether or not it is his turn to call.” And once that happens any player may (and should) call the director.

Please don't make your own rulings at the table. Call the director! A few years back I was directing a Friday Night game and walked past a table with 4 gold life masters. They were talking about a revoke. I stopped and asked if I could help and they told me there had been a revoke that didn't matter in the play. I said, “Sure, that is simple. A one trick adjustment.” All four players took out their score cards and corrected them.

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Asking Questions – August 2013

Review of the Auction

Law 20B gives each player the right to ask during the auction to have all previous calls restated. You can only ask at your turn to call. The review must only be done by an opponent of the questioner. It must include all calls (up to that point) and any alerts or announcements that were given. A player may not ask for a partial review, nor may the review be halted before it is completed. Law 20C gives the declarer and both opponents the right to ask for a review until they have played to the first trick. All players, including a dummy once play has started, are responsible for prompt correction of any errors in the review.

Other Questions

Law 20F gives each player during the auction the right to ask for an explanation of the opponents auction. Likewise, after the final pass and throughout the play the defenders and the declarer can ask for an explanation of the auction and the declarer can ask about the defenders' signaling methods. A player may only ask at their own turn to call or play, or during the “clarification period” between the final pass and the facing of the opening lead. When explaining the auction players explain their partners bids.

Beware

While you have the right to ask questions as described above, any question you ask is Unauthorized Information (UI) for your partner. They must carefully avoid taking advantage of that information. While it is legal to ask about a specific call it is usually better to ask “Please explain your auction.” If you ask “What did that 3 diamond bid mean?” and your partner finds the killing lead of a diamond you have a problem. You likely will receive an adjusted score. The generic question is far less likely to create a problem. On the other hand if your left-hand opponent alerts a bid by your right-hand opponent it is usually pretty safe to ask about the alert.

Answering Questions

Last month I wrote about asking questions. This month let's look at the other side, answering those questions.

The Laws of Bridge entitle a player to an explanation of their opponents previous calls and our carding methods. While the Laws previously talked about “agreements” they now refer to “understandings.” This emphasizes that it does not matter how the understanding came about (a formal agreement is not required) we must explain our

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methods when asked. It does not matter if the call was a convention or natural, nor whether it was alertable or not, we still must explain our understanding.

Who should explain? Unless otherwise instructed by the director, it is the partner of the player who made the call who explains it.

ACBL regulations specify that simply naming a convention (e.g. Drury) is not a sufficient explanation. We must describe what it tells us about the bidder's hand (distribution and strength) and what, if anything, it asks us about our hand. Yes, I know we sometimes take shortcuts with our explanations by simply naming the convention without causing problems, but if a problem arises as a result it will be bad for us.

We are not required to disclose what we are actually holding in our hand. Nor should we describe what our subsequent bids will mean (that will give information to our partner). For example our partner bids 4N (some form of Blackwood) and the opponents ask about it. Saying 1430, or plain Blackwood, or the like tells our partner what our response will mean – and that is a very bad thing. A simple “asks me to further describe my hand – partner will explain my response” or “Asks about controls” are good answers.

If we realize later in the hand that we have given an incorrect explanation we must immediately call the director and they will guide us through the correction. If we believe our partner has given an incorrect explanation then, if we are the declaring side we must call the director at the end of the auction and make the correction. If we are the defending side we must call the director at the end of the play and make the correction.

Dummy's Rights & Limitations

Several people have asked me to write about what Dummy is and is not permitted to do. In general, Dummy must keep silent during the play of the hand. After all, the name comes from the word “dumb” meaning “unable to speak.” So, what can they do, and what can they not do. Laws 42 and 43 define those things.

Dummy has certain responsibilities during the play of the hand. She displays her hand and plays the cards as directed by the Declarer. Dummy should keep track of tricks won/lost in the same way as the other players. Dummy also may answer questions from the Director.

Dummy has certain rights. Dummy may draw attention to an irregularity only after the play of the hand is completed. However, he may check with the Declarer (but not the defenders) if Declarer has failed to follow suit. He may also try to prevent any irregularity by the Declarer. Thus if Declarer starts to lead from the wrong hand Dummy may say so. But continuously telling Declarer which hand he is in is not permitted. Dummy can lose these rights if he violates the limitations listed below.

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Dummy also has several limitations. During the play of the hand Dummy must not be the first to point out an irregularity. Dummy may call the director if another player has drawn attention to an irregularity. Once the Director is called Dummy should not speak unless asked a question by the Director. Dummy may not participate in the play nor may he suggest anything about the hand to the Declarer. Dummy does not automatically play a singleton, nor any other card for that matter. Dummy may not look at Declarer's hand, nor may she attempt to look at an opponent's hand.

Convention Cards (aka System Cards)

The ACBL regulations state that "Each player is required to have a Convention Card legibly filled out and on the table throughout the session. Both cards of a partnership must be identical and include the first and last names of each member of the partnership."

As with nearly all ACBL regulations the Indianapolis Bridge Center subscribes to this one. But, wait a minute! When was the last time you saw someone penalized simply for not having a convention card? At the IBC or at a tournament? Not ever that I recall.

So, why do we need a convention card. There are times when there is confusion about the conventions that we are playing with our partner. The opponents asked and were given what they suspect after the hand was misinformation. They have called the director. If it turns out that they were given misinformation and they were damaged the director will adjust the score on the board. The director is instructed to assume misinformation rather than a misbid if there is no evidence of what our agreements are. Our convention card is one source of such evidence.

When can you look at a convention card? You can look at your opponents' card whenever it is your turn to bid or play. You may look at your own card only between hands, or during the clarification period between the final pass and the opening lead. The convention card is information for your opponents. It is not there to jog your memory.

About 10 years ago The Bridge Bulletin ran a series of articles on filling out the convention card. You can find them on their website at www.acbl.org/play/conventionwisdom.html

You can also find PC based convention card editors at www.acbl.org/play/toolsSupplies.html