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## **INTRODUCTION**

For some time I have felt the need to bring to our players some simple information on issues about which I and my fellow club players have had many concerns. And so, during the spring of 2000, and with the knowledge and encouragement of the Board of Directors of Dana Harbor Bridge Center, Unit 538, I wrote this series of ten papers on a variety of subjects of interest to duplicate bridge players at all levels.

It was my purpose to make them short, simple and informative with a limit of one page each and, with one exception, each deals with a single topic.

Please note that this series is not sanctioned or approved by the ACBL or any other official body. They are intended as simple guides to making your bridge experience more joyful and rewarding and less stressful. I have tried my best to verify rules and related matters with authoritative sources. If you have doubts about the accuracy or correctness of anything you find here, I suggest you refer to experts on the subject of which there are many within and without the ACBL.

We have attempted to keep the discussions in a light vein and yet cover the fundamentals of each subject. In order to avoid making them overly complicated we have perhaps sacrificed some rigor but that is a small price to pay if we get the desired result, which is to inform our players about these important concepts and to clarify some common misunderstandings about the rules and procedures.

This series of papers, ten in all, were originally distributed weekly at our club, the Dana Harbor Bridge Center, Unit 538 of the American Contract Bridge League. Copies are available upon request.

Finally, let me express my gratitude to all of those who have provided help and encouragement throughout this endeavor. Your many fine compliments are much appreciated. It has truly been a rewarding and enlightening experience for me and I am thankful to have had the opportunity to contribute what I can to the world of bridge.

Marshall Pearlman  
Dana Harbor Bridge Center

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## NO. 1: CALLING THE DIRECTOR

# 1

When it comes to calling the director, most of us have similar feelings about it. We think we know the rules and don't really need him or her. If we made the error, we are somewhat embarrassed. If the opponent made it, we don't want to feel tacky or nit-picky. In any case, calls are made far less often than they should be and frequently with more emotional consequences than one would like.

The fact is that even the simple rules are often more involved than we think and that they are changing regularly. We need the director to make rulings immediately since many situations cannot be corrected retroactively. The best time to call is "now".

Now we come to the real crux. Calling the director is a routine activity. It does not imply a lack of character or moral rightness, it does not impugn your family background, and it does not label anyone as criminal or accuser.

It is simply a request for information and/or action by the director when there has been an irregularity. Just that and no more. And it will remain so as long as each of us takes it in that spirit and detaches it from any moral implications. Those of us who play sports know that for example, in soccer the referee makes rulings constantly. The players accept these as a matter of course and play on. That's what we must do.

It is every player's right (some would say obligation) to call the director whenever he chooses. To react negatively when someone does this shows a lack of courtesy. It is that reaction, not the call itself that causes so much upset.

Sometimes it is hard to accept the ruling. And sometimes there is disagreement on the facts. But we must learn to accept the decision of the director graciously and play on.

Lastly, how we call the director makes a big difference. Yelling "Director!" in a loud, mean voice while glaring at the offender is not recommended. Try saying to the opponent, "I think I would like the director" or "We need the director" and saying "Director, please." will set a much better tone to what happens next.

So starting now, why not try to change your attitude about director calls. Accept them as part of the game whichever side you are on. Courtesy and respect for our fellow players will make our sessions just that much more enjoyable.

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## NO. 2: BASIC BRIDGE ETIQUETTE

# 2

Remember, bridge is a social game. At our club, we play for enjoyment. Winning, although important, should not be achieved at the expense of good manners and conviviality. We learned the basic rules of etiquette at the bridge table a while back but some of us may be a bit rusty and it doesn't hurt to have a refresher now and then. So here are a few of the more common and troublesome issues we all face.

1. Remember to greet the next pair arriving at your table. If you don't know them, introduce yourselves and make them welcome.
2. During the auction, always use the pass card even if you think the auction is over. It may not be. Partner or opponents may bid or double. Actually, tapping the table as a sign of passing could be giving unauthorized information. Tapping may say: "I don't want any more bidding, at least by us". It may take an extra moment to place the pass card on the table but that's the correct thing to do.
3. If you are on lead, make your lead first, and then write the contract on your score. This gives the other players time to consider their plan before play commences.
4. Stay away from the bidding box until you know for sure what call you want to make. Avoid fondling the cards or pulling them partly in and out. Yes, occasionally you will want to change your mind and that is legal. The key word here is "occasionally". And it should be rare.
5. Congratulate partner and opponents alike on their good play.
6. Save the post-mortems until later, at least until all the hands for that round are complete. The next hand may be extra long and difficult and the time will be needed then to keep pace with the game. (Some players keep a notepad for items to bring up later).
7. If you are North, be sure to place the traveling score in the center of the table and turn it around so that everyone can see it.
8. Try to arrive at the next table promptly. Be considerate and reserve your restroom visits or food trips for rounds where you finish early.

These are a few of the more common points of bridge etiquette which, if observed by all, will make our time together even more enjoyable. Let's all give them a try.

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## 3

### NO. 3: ALERTS - THE BASICS

Duplicate bridge has a basic rule about the auction. Partners may not make bids only they understand without alerting the opponents. Calls are assumed to be standard in meaning and when they are not, opponents must be warned. The bidder's partner says, "ALERT". And that is all he or she can say unless the opponent asks the meaning of the call. If he doesn't ask, no further comment is allowed. The complete story on alerts is long but here are the basic things to know and practice:

- You are responsible for ensuring that your opponents hear the "ALERT".
- When asked, the bidder's partner must give a full explanation of the agreement including private understandings. Stating the common or popular name of the convention is not sufficient.
- The opponents need not ask exactly the "right" question. Any request for information should be answered automatically in a friendly and helpful way with all relevant information. It is unsportsmanlike to give cryptic, evasive or misleading answers in the hope that the opponents will err.
- Either opponent, at his turn, may ask questions if he is not clear on some points. Note that a player may ask only when it is his turn to bid.
- The standard ACBL Convention card that we use at our club has bids in black and in red. **Those in red must be "alerted"**. Not to do this could risk a director call and perhaps a score adjustment or other penalty.
- There are several alerts in which another word is used instead of "ALERT". These are "FORCING" (1NT forcing), "TRANSFER" (transfer to the next higher suit), and "14 TO 17" (1NT opener with a 14-17 point. range). Again, say the word and no more unless asked.
- Volunteering information not asked for is a common error made by so many of us at our friendly, local club. When you "ALERT", do NOT automatically follow with any further explanation. Do not say for example, "ALERT. HE'S SHOWING MAJORS" or "ALERT. INVERTED MINORS." This gives unauthorized information to your partner who may have meant something else and now knows what you took his bid to mean. Some may say, "I was just trying to be helpful and to speed up the auction". This is the wrong way to do it and is a definite "no-no". It puts partner and opponents in an awkward position and once it happens, there is no good remedy since the damage has been done. Again, just say "ALERT" and nothing more unless asked.

Finally, Bridge is not a game of secret messages; the auction belongs to everyone at the table. Remember that the opponents are entitled to know the agreed meaning of all calls.

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## NO. 4: THE “STOP” CARD. WHY DO WE HAVE IT?

# 4

There is probably no rule in duplicate bridge more commonly abused than that of ignoring the **STOP** card. This simple procedure is there to protect players from giving unauthorized information. Yet so many of us pay little or no attention to its use. Here is the exact wording from the Official Encyclopedia of Bridge, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition:

*SKIP BID WARNING. “A notice given to the opponent by a player who is about to skip at least one level of the bidding. The next player is expected to wait approximately 10 seconds before making a call.”*

After a “skip” bid, immediate action by the player on the left of the skip bidder can give his partner unauthorized information. A quick pass could show weakness, a quick double great strength. A long pause followed by pass or minimum bid relays to partner that one has values but not enough for more aggressive action. These actions by the bidder could be completely honest and innocent. However, each puts a heavy ethical burden on partner who is expected to bid solely on his own hand and not to base his call on his partner’s quick pass, quick double or slow bid. In practice, this is very difficult to do. Remember how we all chuckle when jurors are told to pretend that they did not hear certain stricken testimony.

The skip bid warning, saying, “SKIP BID. PLEASE WAIT”, or using the red STOP card, mandates that the opponent left of the skip bidder wait 10 seconds after the bid before making any call. *“The 10 second period starts from the time the bid is made (verbal or bid card). A player should wait 10 seconds after any skip bid with or without a warning.”* ( Butch Campbell, National ACBL)

Note carefully; the 10-second period starts when the bid is made, not when the warning is made and not when the STOP card is picked up. This delay reduces the possibility of “reading” partners hand from the manner of his action. Use of the skip bid warning is not required but we highly recommend that you use it as a courtesy to your opponents and to avoid problems for your partner. Note that, If you use it, you must use it all the time for all skip bids, not just for certain kinds, e.g. pre-empts.

During the 10 second wait, avoid conveying information. As in other situations, you must sit quietly and impassively, and then make your call. Tapping your fingers, grabbing the pass card and holding it for 10 seconds or looking totally bored or impatient violate the spirit and defeat the intent of this system.

So please comply with this simple but important rule.

- Say, “Skip bid” or use the STOP card whenever you make a skip bid.
- Wait 10 seconds **after the skip bid warning**

It is the ethical and proper thing to do in fairness to your fellow players.

## NO. 5: BRIDGE IS A PARTNERSHIP GAME.

# 5

There is nothing more important to your enjoyment of bridge than having a compatible partner. Notice we said enjoyment. We did not refer to winning although that should certainly follow if your relationship is healthy and congenial. Think about your favorite partner as you read these suggestions on how to improve your partnership.

- **Always conduct yourself in a respectful and courteous manner.** Verbally abusing your partner is a very serious breach of behavior. It gains you nothing, makes everyone at the table uncomfortable and makes you an object of derision.
- **No one purposely makes an error.** Every player tries to do his or her best, and avoid disaster. But we are human and under the pressure of competition, we make mistakes. We judge badly or make a plain bonehead error. Jumping on your partner can only cause deterioration of the partnership and certainly cannot bring about any improvement in the future results. People do not play well when they are more concerned with not making a mistake than doing their best. Your partner knows he or she made a *boo-boo*. Concentrate on his or her good plays, and graciously put his or her miscues behind you. If you can't do that, you need to find another partner. (Hint: look for one that's perfect, like you)
- **Work on your agreements** (and disagreements) away from the table. Bidding styles vary. And specific bids in specific situations vary. This is especially true when not playing with a steady partner. Unless you have gone over every bid and response for every situation, there are bound to be misunderstandings. Make a note to review these items *after* the session and decide on your agreements.
- **Assigning blame doesn't make for positive feelings.** The issue is not who is right and who is wrong, but *what* is right. Or at least, what is right for your partnership and how you agree to play in the future. This makes the partnership stronger both technically and psycho-logically.
- **Bridge is a game and a recreation.** It is not life and death nor is winning worth the unpleasantness that comes from being nasty or offensive to partner or others. Simple motto here: the Golden Rule.
- Remember that **you are playing with a person presumably because you respect his or her skill and enjoy his or her company.** If you don't, neither of you is going to have much fun and you probably won't win very often. If that's so, think about parting company as friends. Failing that, working on your mutual game in a positive way will improve your results and increase your enjoyment.

## NO. 6: THE PARTNER OF HE WHO HESITATES IS LOST – PART I

# 6

Hesitation or “tanking” is one of the most controversial issues in bridge. Officially referred to as a ***break in tempo***, it is vexing to new players and a source of much irritation to experts. In theory, all bidding must be done smoothly, with consistent timing between calls and without any gesture, mannerism or other means of conveying information. Your impression of the meaning of partner’s bid or the values in his hand must come solely from his bid, not the manner of his bid. This is fine, but in practice there are problems:

- We are not computers. At times we need to think. Sometimes quite a bit.
- Partner bids and you know what your response will be but the opponent interjects a call that surprises you and makes you stop to consider.
- Your partner makes a call the meaning of which escapes you. You don’t want to err so you “tank”.
- You were thinking about the last hand and not paying attention.

Some pauses are harmless but many are not. When novice players pause to be sure their response to an ace-asking bid is correct, no harm is done. But a long pause followed by “pass” almost says aloud “Partner, I have values but not quite enough to bid”. Even a long pause followed by a minimum response conveys information especially in response to a forcing call by partner.

What *is* a break in tempo? Recently, at a national tournament one bidder took an extra two seconds to bid and was penalized! This seems extreme to many. Fortunately, at the club level, the rule on hesitation is usually not nearly so rigidly enforced. But when the break is flagrant we call the director to establish “table agreement” that a break has occurred. (We leave the definition of “flagrant” to you. See how difficult this subject is.) The one who calls the director says, “*The pause was very, very long*”. The offender says, “*No, not very long. Just a second or two*”. Who is right? Well, since perception is everything, they are probably both right and both wrong.

Some hesitation is almost unavoidable. But you can minimize yours by planning your possible responses while others are bidding. Use the time to think ahead. Note that the burden and the remedy for hesitation fall not upon the offender (i.e. the hesitator) but upon his or her partner. Paraphrasing and simplifying Law 16:

***From among the logical alternatives, the partner of the offender must NOT choose the call reasonably suggested by the hesitation.***

Thus your partner may be deterred from making his intended bid. Further, if the director is called there may be an adjustment to the score if the non-offending side is injured.

In this brief and oversimplified introduction to a very troublesome and controversial subject, we have described the basic concept of hesitation and why it is an important problem. Look for more later in this series.

## 7

### NO. 7 ALERTS: SOME SPECIFICS

In the third of this series we described the basics of alerts. We continue with the specifics of some of the more common and missed alerts. The published “*ACBL Alert Procedure*” runs 17 pages. That’s more information than most club players can remember or observe so we need to concentrate on the main ones.

A. First, summarizing from the previous article:

- Calls are assumed to be standard in meaning and when they are not, opponents must be warned. The bidder’s partner says, “ALERT”. And that is all.
- When you “ALERT”, do NOT follow with any further explanation.
- If asked, the bidder’s partner must explain the agreement fully.

B. Whenever your partner gives a misleading, incomplete or wrong explanation:

- If you are declarer or dummy, explain **before** the opening lead is faced.
- If you are defending, wait until **after** the hand is played; then you **must** explain.

In either case, the director can and should be called prior to the explanation.

C. Here are some of the more common calls that must be alerted and are frequently overlooked. (Some of these may surprise you.)

- **2NT response by an unpassed hand to an opening suit bid** without interference, if only invitational (e.g., 10-12 count). Example: 1♦-Pass-2NT. or 1♥-Pass-2NT. (Without the alert, it is assumed responder has 13-15 points.)
- **Offshape Takeout Double** without 3+ cards in the other 3 suits and less than 17 count. If this is your agreement, you must alert partner’s takeout double. Be sure to discuss this with your partner and agree on your methods ahead of time. This relatively new rule is currently causing many problems.
- **All conventional bids** (except Stayman, Gerber, Blackwood). This alert can bring out a string of further alerts, e.g. using DONT, all bids must be alerted since each call has a special meaning conveying information. Similarly all bids using Puppet Stayman are alertable.
- **Ace-asking bids** (except Gerber and Blackwood) like RKC require “*Delayed Alert*”. Make this **after** the auction and **before** the opening lead is selected.
- **Weak Jump Shifts**. Example: 1♦-Pass-2♥.
- **Negative doubles over overcalls of NT** openers. Example: 1NT-3♦-Dbl
- **Non-forcing 3-level suit response to NT**. Example: 1NT-Pass-3♣ (invitational).

D. Most **cue bids** are NOT alertable. This includes controls, Western Q, Michaels, etc. However, if the cue bid has an unusual or unexpected meaning, it becomes alertable.

Alerts are not simple. Their purpose is to level the playing field and minimize any advantage seasoned partnerships with complex systems can have over the rest of us. The *alert* system tries to do that despite making the auction more involved. Good players will still prevail but at least you have a right to know what they are telling each other.

## NO. 8: ODDS AND ENDS

# 8

At this point in the series it is time to respond to some suggestions from our readers. Here are a few items which deserve a word or two.

### A. Dummy's Rights

Some think dummy has no rights and cannot say anything during the play. Wrong! Dummy does have rights and here the main ones.

Dummy can:

- Call the director if there is an irregularity **AFTER THE PLAY IS OVER.**
- Verify that declarer (not defender) cannot follow suit. "*No clubs, partner*"
- Attempt to prevent an irregularity by declarer e.g. pointing out that declarer has a trick turned wrong or is leading from the wrong hand.

The idea is that dummy must be "dummy"; he or she must remain stone-faced and not assist, coach or influence the declarer in any way during the play.

### B. Claiming

Claiming can be tricky. The most troublesome part is that if you think you have the rest of the tricks and you are wrong or if you do not spell out your line of play, there is no going back and picking up the play. The director must be called to unravel the situation. The proper way to claim is to announce your line of play and face your hand. Half measures e.g., saying, "*I have the rest*" will not do. Yes, you may have the rest with any line but if you don't, you create an awkward situation, or worse, earn a penalty. Your opponent must give away information about his hand in order to challenge the claim and that gives you an unfair advantage. Saying, after your claim is challenged, "*Oh yes, of course, I would pick up the last trump first*" is not adequate and a director call is in order. So get into the habit of including your line of play with ALL claims, however obvious they may be.

### C. Conceding

When we know our side has no more tricks, sometimes we concede to speed up the play. The important point to know is that, if one defender concedes, it is not binding on the other defender who has the right to say, "*play on*". (However, dummy does not have that right *vis-à-vis* declarer.)

### D. Bidding Box Etiquette

We have been asked to repeat the proper use of the bidding box. Stated simply, settle on your call without touching the box or making any motion toward it. When you are sure you know what you want to do, reach for the box and make your bid. It's like getting married. When asked the big question by the preacher, you say, "I do". The time for thought, hesitation and changing your mind is over when you're at the altar with your bride. So hands off the box until you are sure you know what you want to do.

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## NO. 9: WE HESITATE TO SAY MORE BUT.....

# 9

The subject of hesitation was introduced in No. 6 of this series. What is not clear to many players is what to do if:

- You hesitate
- Partner hesitates
- An opponent hesitates.

**1. When you hesitate** (and you know it), you may think you must take some forward action or else partner is barred. This is not correct. You may make any legal bid you wish. It is partner whose actions are affected. Certainly, if your action would seem to be a choice between strength showing bids, the problem is minimized. However, if after “tanking”, you pass or make a minimum response to partner’s forcing bid, it is probable that you have conveyed “unauthorized information”. You have told partner: “I have some stuff here but not enough to make a constructive call”. For example, you pass, partner opens 1♥ and rebids 2♠ over his RHO’s 1♠. This is forcing on you. If you tank, then bid 2♥, partner can conclude you have some stuff but not enough to bid anything else. An extreme example of unethical conduct is to tank purposely as means of forcing partner to pass when you really don’t want him to bid again. This should not work, as partner must make his response based only on his hand. (see #2).

**2. When partner hesitates**, your action is controlled by the following rule. (Paraphrasing and simplifying Law 16:)

*From among the logical alternatives, the partner of the offender must NOT choose the call reasonably suggested by the hesitation.*

You are NOT barred, but you must make your call based on your hand and the bids on the table and NOTHING ELSE. For example, if you need a little extra from partner to bid game, and partner’s hesitation suggests he has it, you must not bid the game. Note that this does not mean you cannot make the bid you would have made in any case; it’s just that you must not be influenced in your choice of bids by partner’s hesitation. And if the director is called, be prepared to defend your action,

**3. When opponent hesitates**, you have a decision to make. Technically, you should call the director immediately. This is sometimes called “seeking protection”. The idea is that you must establish your position as early as possible so as to minimize the damage and the complexity of the remedy. This is often very difficult and awkward to do, especially if playing in a club game with friends. Some players will never make the call. Most will do it only if the “tanking” is flagrant and seems likely to significantly affect the outcome. But be warned. If you don’t call the director immediately, you may have no recourse later.

Finally, arguments pro and con about hesitation are rampant. Many want the rules changed, some want to eliminate the issue altogether and “play on”. It is certainly not a perfect world. For now, we players have no choice but to live with the present rules and do the best we can to play fair and bid in an ethical and honest manner.

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## NO. 10: WRAPPING UP

# 10

We have come to the end of this little series of brief articles on some subjects important to players at all levels. We have tried to keep the discussions light but informative. We did this perhaps at the expense of rigor but it is our feeling that lengthy tomes with complex language even if complete and correct are useless if few players read them.

By presenting single topic articles limited to one page, we hoped to get across some main points briefly enough to hold your attention. If you are able to follow and absorb most of the issues we have presented, you will be far ahead of the game and it will be a pleasure to play either way, with you or against you.

Learning the technicalities and fine points of the rules are important. Being sure of the correct procedure goes far in avoiding awkward or embarrassing situations. But arguably more important is your attitude and demeanor at the table.

Playing bridge is a challenge and a joy. However, it can become painful. The points raised in the articles on *Calling the Director*, *Basic Bridge Etiquette*, and *Partnership* are not about skill, or brains or technique. They are about courtesy, respect and friendship. Knowing the rules is important; the way you apply them when you are at the table is equally important. For us, it is far better to lose a board or a match than lose a friend.

During the course of this series we have received many expressions of appreciation and praise about these articles and for this we are most grateful. It has been a pleasure to be able to provide this service to our good friends and fellow bridge enthusiasts.

Perhaps in the future we will resume this series. For now we wish you the best of luck. May all your finesses work for you and all your partners play up to your level.