

The New Laws for Players

by MATTHEW MCMANUS



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In August this year, the new Laws of Bridge came into force in Australia. In many cases, the variations are of little practical effect. I have summarised some of the more significant changes that players may notice and need to know about. This summary is not intended as a complete description of the relevant laws.

Unintended calls

The opportunities to change an unintended call have been significantly reduced. An error which arises because of the player's loss of concentration as to the level of the auction can no longer be changed. This is the case even though the call may not be one which the player ever intended to make. For example, with spades agreed as trumps, West bids 4NT, Blackwood. East responds 5♥ (two without the queen). West starts thinking about whether to bid the slam or sign off at the five level. Eventually, he decides that 5♠ is enough, but this decision comes out as Pass. Even though he never intended to pass, he can no longer change the call to the bid of 5♠ he intended. (The same restriction will apply in other similar situations: for example, when a player passes an artificial Bergen-style raise.)

The same principle now also applies in regard to declarer's call of a card from dummy. Effectively, only legitimate slips of the tongue can now be changed. Loss of concentration or changes of mind are not viable excuses to correct. For instance, saying "small, I mean ace" will now mean that no change is allowed. The director can allow a change if he is satisfied that it was just a slip of the tongue. Potential allowable examples:

- 1) "king of hearts, I mean king of diamonds"
- 2) "small spade" while declarer is pointing at dummy's clubs

Calling the Director

It has always been a requirement in the Laws that the director be called whenever there is an irregularity. This has been reinforced in the new laws. It may become particularly relevant if, at the end of the auction, the declaring side reveals that there has been incorrect information given about their bidding. If the players fail to call the director at the time and it turns out that the director could have done something to rectify it had he been called, then both sides are liable to get their worst possible score on the board.

The new law specifically states that ignorance of the law is no excuse.

Calls out of turn

Under the old laws, the penalties arising due to calls out of rotation could be very harsh. Often times, a player's partner was barred from bidding for the whole auction. Under the new laws, the partner can make his normal call. Depending on the action now taken by the player who originally called out of turn, the auction will either continue without penalty or the player's partner will have to pass for one round. The director will make a determination on a case by case basis using the guidelines in the laws regarding "comparable calls".

Claims

Previously when there was a claim, play stopped. If there was any dispute it was decided by the director. Now, play may be continued at the request of the non-claiming side provided all four players at the table agree. The result obtained at the table will stand. ♥