

Unauthorized Information: Knowing your responsibilities

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Unfortunately, the misuse of unauthorized information is occurring all too frequently at our clubs. We need to educate our players on how to recognize it, and how to deal with it in an ethical manner. The problem is clearly lack of understanding and not an intent to be unethical.

To reign this in, I am asking all members to not only educate themselves on the subject, but to report incidents to me with names, so repeat offenders can get special attention.

ACBL Law 16: Unauthorized information

If you receive unauthorized information from Partner's (a) hesitation, (b) correction of an insufficient bid, (c) emphasis, (d) gesture, (e) remark, (f) explanation of a call that differs from your intention, (g) presuming partner's conventional call was in error, etc. **you may not** choose amongst logical alternative actions that could be suggested by the unauthorized information.

Note that the rules do not let you ignore the unauthorized information and just do the normal thing you would do!!! You must choose what you believe is the least favorable choice amongst these logical alternatives.

Information provided by your opponents to you is always authorized. For example, if you see cards in your opponent's hand while you are looking straight ahead, this is authorized to you. (But tell them you can see cards, and do not go out of your way to peek).

Here are some real examples that will give you a clear picture.

1. You hold 18 HCP including S-Qxxx. You open 1NT (15-18), partner bids 2H (you play transfers), you bid 2S, your partner takes a long time, frowns, and bids 3S. Can you bid 3NT? Surely, partner's actions suggest she has Hearts and never intended to transfer.

The 3NT call was allowed to stand, but the ACBL Rulings suggested the correct adjusted result was 4S down 1, instead of the actual 3NT+1. This is a case of assuming partner forgot a convention, and that can only happen through table chemistry (unauthorized information).

2. You hold S-Q10x H-AKx D-xxx C-xxxx

The bidding goes as follows: (neither vul)

Left hand opponent	Partner	Right hand opponent	You
3D	1S	Ins bid refused	
	3S	P	?

Clearly, you have unauthorized information from the insufficient bid. Partner either has a non-vulnerable overcall or an opening 1S bid, neither of which is typically as strong as a 3S overcall over 3D. Due to potential penalties, the insufficient bid will always be corrected so nothing can be inferred as to the act of making it sufficient. You have two logical alternatives, Pass or 4S. You have three tricks for partner, so it is a close call. But the unauthorized information suggests pass is more likely to be the right call. Therefore, to avoid being penalized, you must bid 4S, the less favorable looking option. If you pass, your score should be either +170 (3S+1) if you make 4 or -50 (4S-1) if you make 3. It is lose-lose for your side.

3. You hold:

S-AQx H-AQ98xxx D-x C-Qx

With both sides vulnerable, partner opens 3D. Next hand passes. You bid 3H (100% forcing). Alas, partner announces that this is a transfer to Spades, but bids 4D. This was an incorrect explanation, as such transfers only apply if the next hand had doubled 3D. Clearly, you are in possession of unauthorized information. The only two logical options for you are Pass or 4H. Partner hates S, and must have a void or a singleton S. A 4H contract is likely ice cold. So you are obligated to pass 4D, the less favorable option. The actual player did pass, and thereby lost a top board (+170 instead of +680) for his proper handling of the unauthorized information.

4. You hold S-10x H-KQJxxx D-xxx C-Kx (Both Vul)

The bidding goes as follows:

Right hand opponent	You	Left hand opponent	Partner
1NT	Pass	Pass	2S
Pass	Pass	3D	Pass
3NT	All Pass		

Before the opening lead is made, your partner remarks: "Make the killing lead". This was in jest, but it puts you in an awkward position. In fact, I am checking with the ACBL if lead out of turn penalties should have been applied to this situation. If so, declarer can call or forbid a S lead from either side.

In any case, you are in possession of unauthorized information, and have two logical alternatives HK and S10. Leading partner's suit is almost always a logical alternative. The less favorable, as suggested by the UI is the S10.

Please send me cases where you or your opponents have apparently used unauthorized information. Give the names of the 4 players and the board number. This request applies to Gainesville Club Games only (Mon, Tues, or Thurs). My E-mail is sshsuter1@bellsouth.net.