

BRIDGE RULINGS - A BASIC INTRODUCTION

Bridge is a game to enjoy. This enjoyment is enhanced by good organisation, a good venue, and by a good relationship between the Director and the players. Most Directors have played the game, so are somewhat aware of the problems facing players, but the converse is not necessarily so - in general players have only a cursory understanding of the Laws and Regulations.

The Laws of the game exist primarily for two main reasons – to enable the game to flow without incessant interruptions, and also when problems do occur, to provide a basis upon which an equitable solution can be found. They are not there to un-necessarily punish players for infringements (a few exceptions).

Consistent with these aims, when a Director is called to the table, he must take control of the situation, and calm down any agitation. His approach to the problem can broadly be split into five categories (incidents can frequently fall into more than one category) :

1. 'Book Rulings'. When the normal process of bidding or play is not followed, for example a bid out-of-turn, an insufficient bid, a revoke, etc. the Director should use the Law book (or other published Regulations), to determine what prescriptive action to take; for example a player may be forced to be silent for one or more rounds of bidding, or he may be obliged to replace a particular bid, or be penalised a certain number of tricks. Sometimes a player may feel that the Laws are being unjust for the particular infringement, but to allow a speedy resolution, the Laws are designed such that in the majority of similar cases the stated remedial action will give a high probability of equity to both sides (but not necessarily absolute). Players need to accept this approach – the Director must apply the Law as stated and has very little leeway in allowing for different standard of players: the Director is bound by the Laws, as are the players.
2. 'Judgement Rulings'. In these situations, the Laws deem themselves unable to define a precise prescriptive solution, and can only provide a basic (strong) guidance on how the Director should approach the problem, before coming to an equitable decision. These rulings can arise from a book ruling (where the Laws allow), but the most common involve some form of Unauthorised Information (UI), for example a hesitation, a mistaken explanation, incorrect alert, etc. Note that UI in itself is not the problem - we can all be guilty of inadvertent lapses - but the use of UI (by partner) is what causes problems. When the Director is called, and determines that a judgement ruling is required, he should merely ascertain the facts, warn players not to use UI, and then allow play to continue. He should particularly warn the player in receipt of UI that if he is in any doubt as to what to bid or play, he should err on the side of an action which may be to his detriment. He should ask the players to recall him at the end of the hand if necessary. It's surprising how many potential problems disappear when players have had time to reflect.

If recalled to the table, he should try to calm any aggrieved party, and try to assess whether a player has used UI. It is strongly recommended that if the Director is in any doubt, he should then ask a few players of **similar standard, playing similar methods**, what they would bid or play in the same circumstances (not specifically advising them of the cause of any UI). Simplistically, if as few as about 1 in 4 would make a different bid or play, then the actual bid or play made by the offender would probably not now be allowed, and is cancelled. In effect the Director is indirectly allowing for different standards of players (unlike a book ruling). The Director then has to determine what the most likely outcome would have been having dis-allowed the dubious bid. If there are many possibilities, he can 'weight' the results, which when combined give a probable match-point score (pairs) on the board. He instructs the scorer to feed the weightings into the computer – too complicated to do manually. The non-offending pair is entitled to the better of the actual score achieved, and the (weighted) adjusted score. Players often complain that 'all the other tables

reached the same original contract so why adjust', but the point is that the bidding may have been entirely different, and crucially the other tables did not have the influence of UI from partner.

As well as hopefully resolving the situation, the Director should use this type of situation as an education for all players, detailing the reasons for the adjustment, and explaining the relevant processes of the Laws.

3. 'Claims/Concessions'. Normally players accept a claim ("I'll take the last five tricks") or concession ("I'll give you a heart"), without involving the Director, but situations do arise where a player thinks the opponent's claim is unsound – usually he has not fully explained it, or a common case is that he has forgotten an outstanding trump. The Director does not allow a player in any way to alter his original statement (he can't suddenly remember the outstanding trump), and the Director should allow any reasonable line of play consistent with the original statement – giving any benefit of doubt to the non-offending pair. (Note – an actual score must be achieved, weighted scores are not allowed in these circumstances).
4. Psyches/Deviations/Mis-bids. These are all legal bidding mis-representations of a player's hand. A psyche is gross and deliberate, a deviation is minor and deliberate, a mis-bid is accidental (usually having forgotten the system or not seeing a bid).
The remedies are entirely different:
Psyche – not as common nowadays – player's realise it makes them unpopular. Whilst the psyche is legal, if partner attempts to cater for the psyche, this can be heavily and deservedly penalised.
Deviation – usually just a slap on the wrist, until it becomes a general habit
Mis-Bid - everyone does this, but if partner caters for the fact that you may have mis-bid ("he's always forgetting the system!"), it can be penalised and moreover if the call has mis-led the opponents they can possibly be allowed to change their bid, and can be compensated.
5. Bad Behaviour. Bullying, aggression, arguing, inconsiderate behaviour, physical violence (yes, it does happen in our genteel game) – these are the major ones, but many others. These are not tolerated, and can be heavily punished, even to the extent of disqualification. They are detailed in a separate code – Best Behaviour at Bridge (BB@B) published by the WBU (and previously distributed to all affiliated clubs). The Director should not be influenced by one player's attitude (e.g. an experienced player bullying a novice) and they will be penalised. These incidents are normally considered in the context of 'at the table', but also after the event, players should not refer disparagingly to a previous incident at a table, particularly when they have been ruled against. This may still be dealt with by the Tournament Organiser or Sponsoring Body (area, WBU etc.).

Appeals

Any ruling given by a Director can be appealed by any player directly involved in the incident, with the exception that any procedural or disciplinary penalty (including those under the BB@B code) cannot be appealed. A player should politely inform the Director that he would like to appeal. Prior to accepting the appeal, the Director may advise the player to seek further guidance from an 'appeals advisor' (not necessarily a fellow Director, but could well be a more experienced player). The Director should assist the player in finding an appropriate advisor.

Once the player has confirmed that he intends to appeal, he must have the consent of his partner (or in teams, the captain). The appeal must be lodged within 20 minutes of the official score being posted. He will be asked to complete a form, which must also be completed by the opponents and the Director. The appellant will be asked to pay a deposit (£20 pairs, £30 teams). This will only be retained if the appeal is deemed to be 'without merit', otherwise it will be eventually returned.

The Director will normally then assemble an appeals committee at a convenient time (usually within the timeframe of the event). Ideally this should be of three people whom the Director deems suitable (other Directors are not recommended), one of whom will chair the meeting. Players have a right to attend the hearing (and are advised to do so). The committee will hear all the evidence, possibly referring back to the Director on clarification of points of Law. The committee have a duty to make all parties as comfortable and relaxed as possible – it is not a court of Law.

The committee will not over-rule the Director on any point of Law – e.g. even if the Director has given a book ruling which is wrong, and will only act on points of fact or the interpretation of these facts. Nor will the committee alter any score weighting (unless a gross error). Having made their decision they will refer back to the Director, who is then responsible for advising the players and scorer if necessary (and hopefully returning any deposit).

It is hoped that by giving players a better insight into the procedures that a Director has to consider, that they can better understand both their responsibilities and rights, and the same of their opponents. Directors are there to help and educate players.

More detailed and rigorous explanations of the above are available from the WBU (Chief Executive - Neville Richards) by way of the official WBU Director training guides.