

Boxing Clever

(Use and Misuse of the Bidding Box)

1. Introduction

We all use bidding boxes, but do we all know how they should be used?

Do you know, for example, at what point a call is actually made? Or under what circumstances a bid may be changed?

Please read on to find out the answers to these questions and about some other irregularities which we may unwittingly make.

2. Making and Changing a Call

You may be surprised that a call is made as soon as a card is taken out of the bidding box and not when the card is placed on the table. This is because it is quite easy for the other players to know what call is being made even without seeing the face of the card itself.

Even if this is a call out of turn, it is deemed to have been made and may not be withdrawn. And, by the way, calls include the Pass, Double and Redouble cards.

However, in addition to an Insufficient Bid, there are two circumstances under which the Director may rule that a call can be changed:

- a) Firstly, if you realise that a call you have made is not what you originally intended, the Director may rule that it can be altered provided there is no pause for thought. For example, a mechanical error in simply extracting the wrong bid from the box may be changed, but not an attempt to make a different call. Surprisingly, the 'pause for thought' time starts as soon as you realise the error and not as soon as the call was made. This can even be after the next player has called, but it may not be corrected once your partner has also made a subsequent call.
- b) Secondly, the Director may rule that your call following misinformation about one of your opponents' calls, including a failure to Alert, can be replaced, again provided your partner has not subsequently called.

3. Misuses of the Bidding Box

There are four things to avoid:

- a) Thinking with your fingers. Some players fiddle with the cards in their bidding box before selecting which one to play, lifting one up, then another, before finally pulling a card (usually Pass !) from the box. Players should refrain from touching any cards in their box until they have determined their call, as it may provide unauthorised information to your partner or some useful information to your opponents.
- b) Not stopping or stopping twice. The Stop card should be faced just before a jump bid is made. Although it is acceptable to face the Stop card, retract it and then not make a jump bid at all and to pause for thought before making the jump bid itself, ideally your jump bid should follow as soon as the Stop card is faced. Otherwise your opponents may claim that unauthorised information has been conveyed. The Stop card should remain on the table for about 10 seconds to give the next player time to think, and the next player must pause for this time before calling even if you have removed the Stop card from the table.
- c) Late Alerts. Alerts are used to notify the opponents that a bid has a special meaning. The Alert should be clear to both opponents. If an Alert is made late, so that the next player has already made a call, the Director may rule that this call can be changed, as in 2b) above.
- d) Placing a card at an angle in the box to indicate the final contract. This can have the unfortunate consequence of offering unauthorised information to players at neighbouring tables. Angling the card might also be considered to be a memory aid, which the rules expressly forbid.

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4. **Finally**

The aim of this “Ethic of the Month” series is to make our players aware of the day-to-day irregularities which are easily avoided, and thereby reduce the number of calls to the Director.

However, whenever there is any sort of issue at your table, it is important that you do call “Director, please!” and hold up a hand to show the Director from where the call has come. Please do not make your own rulings at the table without calling the Director, regardless of how long you yourself have been playing or directing.

Above all, enjoy your Bridge in the knowledge that we are playing to the best standard of behaviour promoted by the EBU.

David Burch
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