

Dumb and Dummy

(What dummy may and may not do)

1. Introduction

We find ourselves as dummy in a quarter of hands at the Bridge table, and many of us like to take an active interest during the play of the hand while sitting as dummy. However, dummy has surprisingly few rights and, if we take too active an interest, we may easily find ourselves straying beyond the boundaries of what the Laws of Duplicate Bridge permit.

Please read on to discover the everyday actions that dummy is not allowed to take, and the few rights that dummy does actually have.

2. Taking part in the play of the hand

Dummy's first action is to lay out his hand in suits, with the cards in order of rank and trumps on his right. He must then await declarer's instruction to play to the first trick, even if it is obvious which card, a singleton for example, will be played. He must continue to wait for declarer's instruction before playing to each subsequent trick from the dummy hand. If declarer is imprecise about the card to be played, dummy should interpret "high" and "low" as the highest and lowest card in the suit respectively. If declarer says "win", this indicates the lowest winning card, and "a spade" means the lowest spade available. If declarer says "play anything", then either defender, and not dummy, may designate which card is to be played. It should go without saying that dummy may not ever indicate, in any way, which card to play from dummy. If this does happen, then the Director should be called immediately. Play will continue and the Director may award an adjusted score at the end of the hand if it is considered that the defenders were damaged.

Quite commonly, the dummy player points out that the lead is in the other hand when declarer mistakenly either plays a card from hand or calls for a card from dummy. In both cases, dummy has exceeded his rights and that card is deemed to have been played. Either defender may then accept the lead or require it to be retracted, and if they disagree, then their collective decision is made by the player to the left of the card led. Nevertheless, dummy is allowed to prevent a lead from the wrong hand if declarer begins to reach for a card from dummy or to extract one of his cards and before it is actually played (that is held face up touching or nearly touching the table).

In similar vein, dummy is not permitted to indicate to declarer which hand is on lead. Some dummy players like to help declarer by placing their hand on the table to indicate whether the lead is in dummy or in hand: this is simply not allowed by the rules.

Dummy may keep track of the tricks won and lost for his own information and should retain this record until the result has been agreed by the players at the end of the hand. During the play, he may not inform the other players of how many tricks have been won or lost by each side, although he may let any player know that they have placed a card played to a completed trick in the wrong direction – but only before the lead is made to the next trick.

3. Preventing Irregularities

Although dummy must not comment at all on the play as it progresses, he is allowed to prevent irregularities from happening. However, once an irregularity has actually occurred, he may not draw attention to it until the play of the hand is complete.

Potential revokes are a particular case. Dummy may ask declarer if he is unable to follow suit, and point out a potential revoke by dummy. But he may not ask either defender if they have revoked.

It follows that dummy may not call the Director until the end of the hand if he is aware of an irregularity. It is only permissible for dummy to call the Director during play if another player has pointed out an irregularity. Once the Director has been called at any stage, then dummy may contribute facts or points of law.

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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.

You will also be well equipped if you venture out of the club to represent Woking Bridge Club in the Wanborough Trophy, or to play in events at other clubs and in Surrey County or national tournaments. Above all, enjoy your Bridge in the knowledge that we are playing to the best standard of behaviour promoted by the EBU.

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30th June 2016