

## FVBC Talk – Bridge Procedures, Rules & Etiquette

### 5. Penalty Cards

A PENALTY CARD is a card exposed prematurely by a Defender. This may occur a number of ways:

1. A lead out of turn,
2. A revoke, corrected before it is established,
3. A card held in a manner that it was *possible* for the *Offender's Partner* to see it,
4. An accidental play of two cards at once, or
5. An accidentally dropped card.

A MINOR Penalty card is a single, accidentally exposed card below the rank of a ten.

A MAJOR Penalty card is an exposed card that was deliberately played, any exposed honor, or one of two or more penalty cards.

When a card is exposed prematurely the Director should be called to determine the type of penalty card, and to explain the consequences and options.

When Declarer leads out of turn either Defender may accept the lead (without consulting each other). If the lead is not accepted, then the card may be returned to the hand with no penalty.

If a Defender leads out of turn, then Declarer may accept it and there is no penalty. If Declarer does not accept a lead out of turn, then the card becomes a major penalty card.

Since most penalty cards are MAJOR penalty cards, this discussion will focus on MAJOR penalty cards.

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### Treatment of Major Penalty Cards

Once an exposed card is determined to be a major penalty card, it must be placed on the table, face up, in front of the offender. It then must be played at the first legal opportunity. This may include:

- When another player leads the suit of the penalty card,
- When another player leads a suit in which the offender is void, or
- If the offender takes a trick and is on lead.

Any time a penalty card is on the table and the offender's partner is on lead, there may be lead restrictions.

#### *Why Are Lead Restrictions Necessary?*

Suppose you are on lead against a 6NT contract. You lead your 4<sup>th</sup> best spade from K J 6 3. You are thrilled to see partner take the ace. If partner will just return a spade, you will defeat the contract. One action could be to drop your king of spades on the table, creating a "lead out of turn". If Declarer accepts the lead, you beat the contract. If Declarer does not accept the lead, your king of spades is placed on the table as a penalty card. Now partner can lead a spade, confident that you can take the setting trick.

Clearly, we cannot allow this to happen. Because of situations like this, Declarer may restrict the lead from the partner of the player with a penalty card.

Before the offender's partner leads, the Declarer must choose one of these three options:

1. Require a lead in the suit of the penalty card, or
2. Forbid the lead of the suit of the penalty card (for as long as he retains the lead), or
3. Allow any card to be led.

When one of the first two restrictions is chosen, the offender returns the penalty card to his hand and he may play any card. If the lead is not restricted, then the penalty card remains on the table.

Knowledge of the penalty card is authorized information to all players as long as it remains on the table. Once a penalty card is returned to the offender's hand (when partner's lead is restricted) it becomes unauthorized information to the partner of the offender, but authorized to declarer.

*What happens if Offender plays another card when the penalty card should be played?*

- Declarer may require that the penalty card be played, and the improperly played card remains on the table as a major penalty card, or
- Declarer may accept the improperly played card, if legal, and the original penalty card remains on the table as a penalty card.

*What happens if Offender's Partner leads before Declarer has exercised their option on lead restrictions?*

- His lead also becomes a major penalty card.

*What happens if a player has two or more penalty cards?*

- Declarer may choose which penalty card is to be played, so long as it is a legal play.

*How are lead restrictions handled when a player has two or more penalty cards in front of them?*

- It's complicated. Call the Director!