

COLLUSION (CHEATING) IN ON-LINE BRIDGE

Some background... Just to bring everyone up to speed.

conspire

1. make secret plans jointly to commit an unlawful or harmful act.

collude

1. cooperate in a secret or unlawful way in order to deceive or gain an advantage over others.

cheat

1. act dishonestly or unfairly in order to gain an advantage, especially in a game or examination.

Rules of Duplicate Contract Bridge --- LAW 73: COMMUNICATION, TEMPO AND DECEPTION

A. Appropriate Communication between Partners

1. Communication between partners during the auction and play shall be effected only by means of calls and plays, except as specifically authorized by these laws.
2. Calls and plays should be made without undue emphasis, mannerism or inflection, and without undue hesitation or haste. But Regulating Authorities may require mandatory pauses, as on the first round of the auction, or after a skip-bid warning, or on the first trick.

B. Inappropriate Communication between Partners

1. Partners shall not communicate by means such as the manner in which calls or plays are made, extraneous remarks or gestures, questions asked or not asked, or alerts and explanations given or not given.
2. The gravest possible offense is for a partnership to exchange information through prearranged methods of communication other than those sanctioned by these Laws.

C. Player Receives Unauthorized Information from Partner

1. When a player has available to him unauthorized information from his partner, such as from a remark, question, explanation, gesture, mannerism, undue emphasis, inflection, haste or hesitation, an unexpected alert or failure to alert, he must carefully avoid taking any advantage from that unauthorized information.
2. A penalty may be assessed against a player who violates C1, but if the opponents have been damaged, see also Law 16B3.

D. Variations in Tempo or Manner

1. It is desirable, though not always required, for players to maintain steady tempo and unvarying manner. However, players should be particularly careful when variations may

work to the benefit of their side. Otherwise, unintentionally to vary the tempo or manner in which a call or play is made is not an infraction. Inferences from such variations are authorized only to the opponents, who may act upon the information at their own risk.

2. A player may not attempt to mislead an opponent by means of a question, remark or gesture; by the haste or hesitancy of a call or play (as in hesitating before playing a singleton); by the manner in which a call or play is made; or by any purposeful deviation from correct procedure (see also Law 73E2).

E. Deception

1. A player may appropriately attempt to deceive an opponent through a call or play (so long as the deception is not emphasized by unwonted haste or hesitancy, nor protected by concealed partnership understanding or experience).

2. If the Director determines that an innocent player has drawn a false inference from a question, remark, manner, tempo or the like, of an opponent who has no demonstrable bridge reason for the action, and who could have been aware, at the time of the action, that it could work to his benefit, the Director shall award an adjusted score.

Developments In On-Line Bridge

Recently (within the past three weeks) there have been two well-publicized admissions of on-line cheating by World-Class players. In both of these instances, the players have admitted their wrong-doing, so there is no room for claims of innocence, and no defense of their actions is required or appropriate. There has always been some amount of cheating in bridge, but this recent outbreak is particularly troublesome because it is, I believe, just the tip of the iceberg. I have just about abandoned playing in ACBL-wide events on BBO (Support Your Club games, On-line regional tournaments) where I see subtle (and not-so-subtle) evidence of suspicious behavior with disgusting frequency. It's just too, too easy.

While I worry about the future of duplicate bridge in general, my (immediate) concern is for integrity of the Virtual games that Rob and I run under the banner of the Valley Forge Bridge Club. I have observed occasions where there is cause for concern that partnerships are acting upon Unauthorized Information or that other less-than-ethical behavior is taking place. Additionally, your Directors spend time almost daily dealing with players who stubbornly refuse to volunteer their partnership agreements about bidding and carding, will not answer simple questions regarding these agreements, and feign ignorance when it is suggested that (as regular partners) they should take 15 minutes to complete and post an on-line Convention Card. This conduct would never be tolerated in face-to-face (F2F) events at the Club.

Unauthorized Information, one of the expressions of cheating, can take many forms, not all of which are intentional. Even at the Club, hesitations, grunts, groans, facial expressions, sighs, and body language can convey information that is beyond the rules. The onus is always on the partner of the offender to NOT utilize that Unauthorized Information to help

guide tactical decisions. But the opportunity for this is much greater on-line than it was at the Club, where the opponents are seated at the table and are able to observe most of the same things that the partnership observes. And, from the recent admissions of guilt, apparently the temptation to gain a little edge has exposed the baser elements of some players' character.

When we are directing at the Club, part of our obligation to all of the players is to watch for suspicious activity. In particular, when unusual bidding or defense is spotted, particularly when that activity leads to consistently positive results, we must question the methods. And we depend upon the opponents to assist us in this area. "If you see something, say something." It applies to on-line bridge as well as to combatting terrorism. Use the Director Call button to send a message: "Could you look at the bidding on board 11?" will suffice.

Please keep in mind that playing duplicate bridge remains a privilege. No 'proof beyond a reasonable doubt' is required to revoke this privilege. We enjoy and value the participation of the vast majority of those who choose to play at the Club, but the associated privilege may be withheld for any number of reasons. When players engage in behavior that is of questionable ethics, or is offensive to others, or is of a nature that it continuously occupies the Director's focus to the detriment of other necessary functions, those players will be cautioned about their behavior. If that behavior continues, the privilege of playing will be revoked. This will likely occur without further warning and without appeal.

It is our desire to conduct a game that is pleasurable to that overwhelming majority of players that comply with the Laws of Duplicate Contract Bridge and the straightforward code of ethics and behavior that is expected of all participants. We are dedicated to achieving that goal.