

UNAUTHORIZED INFORMATION AND THE 2008 LAWS OF DUPLICATE BRIDGE

In the game of bridge communication between partners may come only from legal calls and plays. Any other communication is called unauthorized information (UI). Let's try a quiz:

An opponent thinks for a full half-minute before passing your 3♠ opening, a break in normal bidding tempo that constitutes UI. Do you:

- (1) Call the Tournament Director (TD) immediately?
- (2) Get agreement from the opponents that there was a very slow pass, calling the TD only if they disagree and you want to pursue the matter? With agreement, just play on, not calling the TD until the end of play, and then only if there is evidence of possible damage to your side?
- (3) Call the TD when the slow passer's partner bids or doubles instead of passing?
- (4) Merely comment politely on the slow pass when it happens, refusing to discuss it with the other side except to say that the TD may be needed at the end of play?
- (5) Make that polite comment only if the slow passer's partner bids or doubles?
- (6) Without discussing it, call the TD if the opponent(s) deny the UI?
- (7) Ignore the slow pass for the moment, but call the TD at the end of play if there is evidence of possible damage to your side?

Before answering those questions, let's talk about UI.

Some UI is appropriately communicated. That includes replies to opponents' questions and Alert explanations (assuming they are correct). It also includes Alerts and Announcements themselves, which tell partner "I haven't forgotten." Taking a noticeably long time to bid or play is UI, but perfectly acceptable. Bridge is a thinking game.

Inappropriate UI includes extraneous information (not part of the lawful procedures of the game) that may suggest a call or play to partner, as for example a remark, an Alert or Announcement that is not required, a failure to Alert or Announce when required, unwonted speed of bidding or play, special emphasis, tone, gesture, movement, or mannerism. The UI may range from what is probably harmless (e.g., an unnecessary Alert), to potentially harmful (e.g., a super-fast call or play), to a serious impropriety (e.g., an obvious expression of displeasure), to a violation of an ACBL regulation (e.g., failure to pause for a while over a skip bid), to a clear-cut illegal communication with partner (e.g., calling attention to the vulnerability after looking at one's hand).

Players must understand that the creation of UI, such as failure to pause over a skip bid, is not in itself an infraction. An infraction results only when the partner may have used the UI to his side's advantage. The reader, of course, would never commit this infraction, but what should be done if UI is communicated by an opponent?

And now the quiz answers. Before the new 2008 Laws of Duplicate Bridge, the right answer in ACBL-land was (1). However, players realized that calling the TD for every break in tempo wasn't really feasible, so they came to apply (2), even though it technically violated the Laws. TDs liked (2) because it made their job easier. However both (1) and (2) do not comply with the 2008 Laws, and (3) has never been correct, nor is it now.

(4) is legal but not mandatory. You *may* say something about the UI, but it is preferable to wait until the end of play. Commenting on the UI at this time may lead to complications. It implies that you fear the opponents will commit an infraction related to it, which isn't nice. It may prompt an indignant response that can become unpleasant. The only justification for (4) is that it puts opponents on notice that there may be consequences to the slow pass, leading them to avoid any later action that would constitute an infraction. But why help the opponents in a way that may seem offensive to them?

(5) implies that you suspect the opponent has taken an illegal action. With no concrete evidence of that, a TD call is an insult to the opponent. Don't do it.

(6) is also incorrect. The Laws say it is *they* who should call the TD, not you. The purpose is to preclude the two sides from arguing the matter, with possible unpleasantness resulting. Any discussion should be conducted by the TD, with both sides addressing only the TD. Players should just state the facts when replying to the TD's questioning. It is important that there be no implication of wrongdoing.

Accusations of cheating are unacceptable and could lead to disciplinary action. If the opponents deny the UI but do not call the TD, that is an infraction, but do not tell them that. It is not your job to teach the Laws to the opponents. Besides, if you do call attention to that infraction then you must call the TD.

Choice (7) is an attractive one that should be preferred. After all, most of the time no damage results from the UI.

At the end of play Law 16B3 applies:

“When a player has substantial reason to believe that an opponent who had a logical alternative has chosen an action that could have been suggested by such information, he should summon the Director when play ends. *

* It is not an infraction to call the Director earlier or later.”

That is, when you have “substantial reason to believe” before the end of play (which can only come from seeing the dummy or from cards played by the declarer), you may call the TD at that time. It is an irregularity, since the law says to call the TD at end of play, but it is not an infraction. Perhaps the TD is close by and you don't want him/her to wander away before the end of play.

It is also an irregularity (but not an infraction) to wait until some time after play is ended to call the TD. This could perhaps be the result of a discussion with partner as to whether there was possible damage. Waiting may make it more difficult for the TD to determine the facts, however.

The new procedure has a number of advantages:

- It precludes any unpleasant exchanges between the two sides.
- It properly leaves fact-finding up to the TD
- It avoids the waste of time that an unnecessary call to the TD entails. Duplicate bridge is a timed competition and table time should not be wasted. Also, TDs are busy enough without being called to a table for no good reason.

Warning: Most TDs that you will encounter are not well-acquainted with the current Laws and may not protect your rights if you don't do things their way. There is not much you can do about that, other than to check with TDs about their preferences before the game.