

DIRECTOR! (please?)

Don't you just hate it when you hear those words, look around and realize your opponents are the ones with their hands in the air? In my third trip to Gatlinburg, I managed to elicit three director calls on the same hand – which was the first of the day! (Insufficient bid, I missed an alert and remembered it later; and I led out of turn.)

When I played pick-up soccer games, the rule of thumb was “no harm, no foul” (or “no blood, no foul.”) But duplicate bridge isn't the same as social bridge and it is important to follow all the rules, whether or not there is any harm. The director is like the umpire in a basketball game. When the ball goes out of bounds, or is kicked, or a player is fouled, the umpire steps in and gets the game going again. Sometimes your side loses the ball; sometimes the other side gets to shoot a free throw or two; and sometimes it's a jump ball. Whatever happened, the ump assesses the penalties and gets the game going again.

The bridge director does the same thing. If you haven't made a mistake that requires your opponents to call, “Director, please,” you are either much more skillful than I, or haven't played enough bridge.

Thanks to those of you who allowed me to practice as a director (under watchful eyes) while I studied for the club director's test. I've been playing bridge for 5+ years and realized I didn't really know the rules for the game. The best way to fix that oversight was to study for the director's test. Assuming I passed (I did), it would also give the club another person to fill in if the regular director couldn't run their game.

My mother was right: I didn't know it all

I found myself saying, “Really? I didn't know that,” a bunch of times as I read the Laws of Duplicate Bridge for the first time. One area I only partly knew had to do with Penalty Cards. Before you read any further, try to answer these questions:

1. How do you create a minor penalty card?
2. How do you create a major penalty card?
3. When do you have to play your minor penalty card?
4. When do you have to play your major penalty card?
5. If you have two or more penalty cards, who decides which card to play first?
6. You have a penalty card and your partner gets the lead. Are there any restrictions on what she can lead?

1. A minor penalty card must not be an honor (10 or higher) and must have been exposed accidentally. For example, you play your ♥Q to follow suit and the ♣4 falls out at the same time. The ♣4 is a minor penalty card. If the ♣J or ♥J had slipped out, it would be a major penalty card.

2. Any card intentionally (and erroneously) played is a major penalty card. Often these come about through a revoke or lead out of turn. Sometimes (see #1) an honor jumps out of your hand at an inopportune moment.

3. You must play your minor penalty card at your first legal opportunity, BUT if you have an honor in that suit, you may play the honor instead of the penalty card if you choose (in which case the minor penalty card still remains.)

4. You must play your major penalty card at your first legal opportunity. So, you'll need to play it when the suit is played, or when you gain the lead or if you have to discard, whichever opportunity arrives first.

5. If you have two or more penalty cards, they are all major penalty cards. It doesn't matter how they came about. Dump your whole hand on the table – thirteen major penalty cards. If you can legally play more than one penalty card, the declarer decides which card you must play.

6. If you get the lead while your partner has a major penalty card, Declarer has a bunch of choices. (There are no lead restrictions if your partner has a minor penalty card.) Declarer can let you lead whatever you want, in which case the penalty card remains. Alternately, Declarer can prohibit you from leading the suit of the penalty card for as long as you have the lead or require you to lead the suit of the penalty card. You must comply (if you can) and your partner gets to return the penalty card into her hand and play anything her little old heart desires when it's her turn – as long as she follows the rules, of course.

If you answered all six correctly, you were way ahead of me. Do you need to remember all these rules? Well, it wouldn't hurt, but the most important takeaways from this article are these: when a penalty card situation occurs, you should call, "Director, please," and the director will help everyone at the table understand all the available options. Remember, the director is there to help get the game going again as fairly as possible.

~ Jim Jackson
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