

A player's guide to the changes in the laws

A new version of the Laws of Duplicate Contract Bridge will take effect in September. Here is what you need to know about the changes.

As a player, you may be asking what impact the changes in the laws have upon you. The answer is, as usual, very little. This is because the changes deal with restoring equity when there has been an irregularity. There have been no changes of the basic rules or laws — *e.g.*, scoring is unchanged and the ranks of the denominations are the same.

One overall change in wording is reflective of the original intent of the laws to “redress damage and not to penalize.” To emphasize this intent, the laws now use the word penalty only in reference to procedural and disciplinary penalties. In all other cases, the Laws use the word “rectification.”

There was a global attempt to reorganize laws or sections of laws to put the sections of law dealing with a topic in one place. However, the numbering system remains intact — there are still 93 laws and the general topic of each is unaltered.

The changes in Laws 1–15 will not be noticed by ACBL players. Many of the changes are in wording and organization. Of the content changes, most only codify and clarify current ACBL practices.

While Law 16 has been reorganized and reworded, there is only one change affecting ACBL procedures and current practice. Under the revised law, when an opponent has made extraneous or unauthorized information available (*e.g.*, an unmistakable break in tempo — hesitation), an ACBL player may announce that he is reserving his right to call the director later. If an opponent disagrees that unauthorized information might have been conveyed or made avail-

able (*i.e.*, believes there was no break in tempo), the director should be called immediately.

In Laws 17–21, again most changes, if any, are in wording and organization. In Law 20, however, some current ACBL practices and procedures have been codified or clarified and should be noted:

- ❖ A player may not ask a question (at the appropriate time) solely for partner's benefit.
- ❖ If your partner asks a question at his turn to call or play, you may not ask a supplementary question until it is your turn.
- ❖ Declarer's first turn to play is from dummy except when accepting an opening lead out of turn.

Law 22 now defines the time between the end of the auction and the end of the auction period as the clarification period. This is the time when questions can be asked before the opening lead is made and faced.

In Laws 23 and 24, there are no changes that affect current application of the laws.

Law 25, Changes of Calls, has been substantially changed by deleting the current “purposeful correction” option. Under the revised law, if a call is deemed unintended (inadvertent), it may be changed if done without pause for thought. This is identical to current law.

The new part is that if the call was



not unintended, it stands unless the caller's left-hand opponent accepts an attempt to substitute another call. Law 16D applies to the call that was withdrawn: Knowledge of the withdrawn call is unauthorized for the offender's partner.

Law 26 has no changes that affect current application of the laws.

Under Law 27, which addresses insufficient bids, a player who makes a natural insufficient bid may still make it sufficient at the lowest sufficient level without any bidding restriction on partner.

Law 27 has been amended such that the director may permit an insufficient bid to be corrected, without rectification/penalty (*i.e.*, bidding restriction), by another call that has, in the director's opinion, the same meaning or a more precise meaning. For example: 2NT – Pass – 2♦ (over 1NT this is a transfer to hearts), the 2♦ bid may be corrected to 3♦ without a bidding restriction (rectification) on partner if the 3♦ bid is also a transfer to hearts. However, part D of Law 27 allows the director to assign an adjusted score if without the insufficient bid the outcome (result) may well have been different and the non-offending side

was damaged. Also, the withdrawn 2 ♦ call is regarded as unauthorized information, but this will rarely matter because the legal 3 ♦ replacement conveys essentially the same information.

One major caution: If you make an insufficient bid and an opponent brings it to the attention of the table, do not do anything until the director arrives. If you change your call prior to the director's arriving, unless the opponent next to call accepts your original insufficient bid, you will be stuck with that call (the changed, sufficient one) and the director will apply the correct section of Law 27 — *i.e.*, if the change requires your partner to pass for the remainder of the auction, that will be the director's rectification. So wait until the director arrives and explains your options before correcting the insufficient bid.

Laws 28–39 have no changes that affect current ACBL application and procedures.

Law 40 has been extensively reworded and reorganized. However, there is little change to current application and practice. There are two items of note:

- ❖ The law in the ACBL is now explicit in prohibiting pairs, by prior agreement, to vary their methods dependent upon and following a question asked, response to a question or an irregularity (*e.g.*, after an insufficient bid).
- ❖ In the ACBL, a player is permitted to consult his opponent's convention card at his right-hand opponent's turn to call (*i.e.*, after his partner has called). This is permitted because many times it is necessary to know what your left-hand opponent's call means to determine whether to Alert your partner's call or to know what your partner's call means in order to fully explain its meaning.

In Laws 41–63, there are mostly wording and organizational changes that cause no change in current application and practice. It is now

specifically stated in Law 54 (with reference to Law 24), however, that an opening lead by declarer or dummy may not be accepted.

Law 64, Procedure after Establishment of a Revoke, has two significant changes.

- ❖ There is a return to the fairly simple one- and two-trick penalty (rectification) of the 1973 Laws — *i.e.*, generally, if the revoking player won the trick on which the revoke happened and the offending side won another subsequent trick, the non-offending side gets two tricks. If the revoking player does not win the revoke trick and the revoking side wins some subsequent trick, the non-offending side gets one trick. However, part C requires the director to restore equity on deals where the non-offending side would have won more tricks without the revoke, even after taking into account the additional trick or tricks awarded in accordance with part A of this law.
- ❖ When each side has revoked, there is no rectification (penalty) for either revoke — sort of offsetting infractions. However, the director is required, under part C, to adjust the result to that result that was most likely had neither revoke occurred.

The revised law 65 now addresses specifically the matter of drawing attention to the fact that a card has been incorrectly pointed — *i.e.*, indicating that the player's side had won the trick when, in fact, they had lost the trick, or vice versa. While declarer may require that a card incorrectly pointed be corrected at any time, dummy's or either defender's right to do so expires when a lead is made to the next trick (the one immediately after the one on which the card was incorrectly pointed). If done later than that by dummy or a defender, the director may apply Law 16B if he determines that this extraneous information could have affected partner's play.

Laws 66–71 contain for the most

part wording and organizational changes that lead to more specificity and clarity. However, in the laws dealing with claims there are some things to note:

- ❖ While Law 68 mandates that play cease immediately when a claim is made, Law 70 gives the director the option of using play after a claim as evidence of players' probable plays.
- ❖ Law 69D2 now addresses defenders' claims.
- ❖ A section of Law 70 gives ACBL the authority to determine an order of play of the remaining cards in a suit when such was not clarified in the statement of a claim. Presently, for example, directors generally rule that declarers, in leading trumps from their hand or dummy, lead from the top down. This will probably be codified by regulation prior to implementation of the Laws.

Laws 72–91 contain a great many wording and organizational changes. In addition, many sections of the 1997 laws have been incorporated into earlier laws in the 2007/8 version. However, none of these introduces any significant changes or different applications or practices.

Law 92, Right to Appeal, has a slight change. Under the present law in a pairs contest, an absent pair member is deemed to concur. In the revised law, both members must actively agree to lodge the appeal. If not, the appeal is not heard.

Law 93 was modified quite a bit in part C, Further Possibilities of Appeal. However, ACBL has already approved legislation about further appeal. That regulation states that a further appeal may be made only on a point of law to and at the discretion of the ACBL Laws Commission or, on an allegation of bias of a committee member or members, to and at the discretion of the ACBL Appeals and Charges Committee. In the latter case, the appellant is required to present evidence that the bias was not known at the time of the hearing. □