

UNAUTHORIZED INFORMATION AT THE BRIDGE TABLE

Have you ever had a transfer sequence go awry? Suppose, your partner has opened 1NT and your RHO bids 2♣ to show a one-suited hand. You'd like to play a diamond contract so you bid 2♦ only to hear partner announce it as a transfer to hearts. Belatedly you remember that you had agreed to play transfers in this sequence. You have been awakened by the Alert/Announcement procedure and now have the Unauthorized Information that you have misbid. What do you do now?

It is completely legal for a player to make a call or play based on information obtained from (1) legal calls or plays and (2) mannerisms of opponents. However, basing a call or play on other extraneous information may violate the Laws of Duplicate Bridge. Law 16A tells us that extraneous information can be given by “a remark (including an alert or an announcement), a question, a reply to a question, or by unmistakable hesitation, unwonted speed, special emphasis, tone, gesture, movement, mannerism or the like.” In practice, extraneous information from partner nearly always will result in Unauthorized Information.

When partner provides us with extraneous information, he or she is giving us extra information to help determine our best next call or play. Now partner may be doing this entirely subconsciously but, regardless, Law 73C says we must carefully avoid using this extraneous information to our benefit. In other words we may not choose one action that could have been suggested by the extraneous information as opposed to another logical alternative action.

When a player considers that an opponent has made such information available and that damage could well result, he may immediately announce that he reserves the right to summon the Director later. However, if there is a dispute over that fact that unauthorized information might have been conveyed, the Director should be summoned immediately.

Also, 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 immediately. The Director shall require the auction and play to continue, standing ready to assign an adjusted score if he considers that an infraction of law has resulted in damage.

Sometimes a call or play may be withdrawn, and another substituted, either by the non-offending side after an opponent's infraction or by the offending side in order to rectify an infraction. For the non-offending side, all information arising from a withdrawn action is authorized, whether the action be its own or its opponents'. For the offending side, information arising from its own withdrawn action and from withdrawn actions of the non-offending side is unauthorized and therefore not useable. Once again a player of the offending side may not choose from among logical alternative actions one that could demonstrably have been suggested over another by the Unauthorized Information.

So to answer the question posed in the first paragraph, it is proper for you to proceed as though you MEANT to transfer to hearts. You must pretend that you didn't hear a thing that was said at the table. To try and correct back to diamonds is an attempt to use Unauthorized Information to your advantage.

Some more common examples of extraneous information that becomes Unauthorized Information:

(1) Asking about one specific bid in an auction rather than asking about the entire auction. Your partner gets the Unauthorized Information that the suit asked about is the only one in which you are interested.

(2) Hesitations at some specific point or points in the auction. This tends to provide partner with the information (unauthorized) that your bids and/or particularly your passes are not getting across the message that you would like.

(3) Using partner's failure to alert to your advantage (lebensohl is an example)

(4) Gratuitous remarks of almost any kind.

(5) Making faces or gestures of any kind when happy or unhappy with partner's calls.

There is one other kind of Unauthorized Information that needs addressing. When a player accidentally receives Unauthorized Information about a board he is playing or is going to play (by looking at the wrong hand, by overhearing calls, results or remarks, by seeing cards at another table, or by seeing a card belonging to another player at his own table), the Director should again be called by the

recipient of the information before the board is played. If the Director considers that the information could interfere with normal play, he may: (1) adjust the players' positions at the table if the type of contest and scoring permit so that the player with information about one hand will hold that hand; or (2) with the concurrence of all four players, appoint a temporary substitute to replace the player who received the unauthorized information; or, (3) award an artificial adjusted score.

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