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CHANGES TO THE ORANGE BOOK

On 1st August 2006 new regulations come into force in England governing alerting and permitted conventions. Fortunately the changes to alerting simplify things, especially since most players were largely ignorant of the old regulations, particularly where doubles are concerned.

NEW ALERTING REGULATIONS

- *No alerting above 3NT (except artificial opening bids, lead-directing passes, and lead-directing doubles that ask for a lead other than the suit doubled).*

On the whole this is a good thing and it brings us into line with the rest of the world. Alerting above 3NT only benefits the side doing the bidding as it gives them a clue whether partner thinks a bid is natural or not.

With regard to the last two exceptions, you may well ask: 'What is a lead-directing pass?' It is certainly something I have never come across, but suppose you have bid a suit naturally in the auction and then later the suit is bid by an opponent in response to Blackwood or as a cue-bid; it is possible that

you might have an agreement with partner (though goodness knows why) that double says: 'Don't lead the suit,' and pass asks for the suit to be led. The final exception takes Lightner doubles into account, whereby a double of the final contract says to partner: 'I have a void somewhere. Please try and work out which suit it might be and lead it.'

- *No alerting of natural 1♣/1♦ openings that may be as short as three cards (but not shorter).*

Again a good thing (certainly at least in terms of 1♣) that brings us into line with the rest of the world. Now when 1♣ or 1♦ is alerted you will know that it is certainly not a natural call.

I hear you cry: 'How can a three-card minor be a natural call?' Firstly, the Laws of Duplicate state it to be so in a roundabout way; they don't define the word 'natural', preferring to talk about 'conventional' and 'not conventional', and within their definition one of the requirements for a bid to be 'incontrovertibly not conventional' is that it should promise at least three cards in the suit bid. Secondly, the vast majority of bridge players in the world play five-card majors, a system in which it is normal to open 1♣ or 1♦ on three-card \boxtimes

suits, and this is considered to be a natural system. It is principally Acol players employing a weak no-trump who do not open three-card minors.

- *Doubles – you should not alert a double if it is:*
 1. *A take-out double of a natural or semi-natural suit bid (i.e. a bid that shows the suit or gives preference to one of partner's suits)*
 2. *A take-out double of a short, nebulous, prepared or phoney minor opening*

Those who play five-card majors usually play 'better minor', when their opening hand is unsuitable for one of a major or 1NT, as do many Acol players when they are not employing a 12-14 1NT opening. Some players in both groups prefer to open 1♣ on as little as a doubleton in order to guarantee that 1♦ promises a four-card suit; those who play five-card openings in all suits other than clubs use 1♣ to cover all hands without a five-card suit (other than clubs) that are unsuitable for 1NT. Many of them play the 1♣ opening as forcing for one round, with a 1♦ denial response. Those who play a strong 1♣ system use a 1♦ opening to cover any hand that isn't covered by any other opening bid. In all of these cases a double of these 'dodgy' bids, other than a strong 1♣, are deemed to be for take-out in the absence of an alert.

3. *A penalty double of a no-trump bid*
4. *A penalty/lead-directing double of a suit bid that does not show that suit*

So for example, doubles of a strong 1♣, Stayman 2♣, and transfer bids show the suit doubled in the absence of an alert.

The only change, and it is a sensible one, is that now all doubles of natural suit bids are for take-out in the absence of an alert. Previously Sputnik/Negative doubles (i.e. take-out doubles of overcalls) were alertable and, since their use has become the norm, it seems correct for them not to be alerted.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

This is the part of the new regulations that has ruffled many feathers, so I have to hold my hand up and plead guilty to suggesting the idea of announcements, though not necessarily in as many cases as have been decided, to those involved in framing the regulations. I shall do my best to defend my case!

- *1NT Openings and Responses*

1NT Openings: Where a 1NT opening is natural, even if it may by agreement possibly contain a singleton, the partner announces the strength by stating, for example: '12 to 14' and adding, if applicable, 'possible singleton'. This is a very good thing! The most common area of ethical debate is when a player asks about the strength of 1NT and then passes, thereby passing across to partner the information that he was thinking about bidding.

Stayman: If a 2♣ response to a 1NT \boxtimes

opening (without an intervening double) asks about four-card majors, with the normal responses of $2\heartsuit$ to deny a four-card major and $2\spadesuit/2\clubsuit$ to show the major bid, the partner should say 'Stayman'. Responses to Stayman do not need to be alerted or announced. Note that Stayman is announced *whether or not it promises a four-card major* – it is up to the opponents to find out if they need to. Is this a good thing? I'm not really sure. In most other parts of the world Stayman is considered a normal bid and therefore does not need to be alerted. In England it will mean that if $2\clubsuit$ is straightforward Stayman it will need to be announced; if it is a weakness take-out into clubs, then no alert is required; in all other cases a $2\clubsuit$ response to 1NT will have to be alerted.

Red Suit Transfers: If a $2\heartsuit$ response to 1NT (without intervention) guarantees a five-card heart suit, then it must be announced by the 1NT opener by saying: 'Hearts'; if a $2\spadesuit$ response to 1NT guarantees a five-card spade suit, then it must be announced by the 1NT opener by saying: 'Spades.' Note that if, for instance, $2\heartsuit$ could just be a weakness take-out into diamonds if the suit is repeated, the bid should be *alerted* and not announced, as hearts are not guaranteed. This will clear up the problem of knowing whether a suit is guaranteed without asking. At present, if a player asks about a transfer bid and then passes, his partner is under ethical pressure not to lead the suit bid, but nevertheless he often does and accusations of foul play inevitably ensue.

Finally, on the subject of transfers, the new *Orange Book* states that 'you

should not alert the completion of a transfer unless it shows or denies something specific'. This applies to all transfers, announceable or not. An example of the exceptions would be if you had an agreement that with four-card support you always gave a jump raise in the transfer suit; this would mean that a simple completion of the transfer denied four-card support and therefore would require an alert.

- *Two of a Suit Openings*

A natural opening of two-of-a-suit (i.e. one that relates to the suit bid only, without any guarantee of length in another suit) must be announced by the partner by stating into which category it falls, by using one of the following phrases:

- 'Strong, forcing.'
- 'Strong, not forcing.'
- 'Intermediate.'
- 'Weak.'

Up to now 'Strong, forcing' has required no alert whilst the others, even though they are natural, have required alerting, as of course have all conventional two openings. At least now you will know that when an opening of two-of-a-suit is alerted, it is not a natural call. This is one area where I think we could have gone further, in that all natural, non-forcing jump-overcalls do not require an alert whether they be strong, intermediate or weak; I think to introduce announcements in this area would have been beneficial. Maybe next time!

One strange consequence of the introduction of announcements is that all \boxtimes

openings from 1NT to 2♠ must either be announced or alerted, so if a player fails to do either he is either asleep or has still to come to terms with the new regulations. In that regard the EBU have instructed lenience in failure to follow these regulations diligently for the first twelve months, except in the case of deliberate disregard.

There has been some discussion of whether the hard of hearing might be disadvantaged by announcements. The EBU Laws and Ethics Committee, at a meeting on 6th June, concluded that they do not see it as a problem, so no special provisions will be made*

I know there are people reading this thinking that it is regulation gone crazy. However, it is not that long ago that folks were raging about having to use bidding boxes . . . and now they would be lost without them! ☒

**Editor's Note: I would agree with this as regards alerts, since the hard of hearing are able to 'see' a warning when the Alert card is taken out of the bidding box, but spoken announcements will disadvantage them and it is really sad that this is not being recognised.*