

C-h-e-a-t-i-n-g

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Cheat (verb): Act dishonestly or unfairly to gain an advantage, especially in a game or examination.

In bridge, the “worst” kind of cheating is collusive cheating by a partnership – where partners agree to transmit information to each other by means other than normal bidding and play. This has been done through placement of cards, tapping of feet, coughing and many other means. Fortunately, this type of cheating is rare, but unfortunately it is sometimes difficult to detect. Following closely behind are individual acts to try to gain information on a board – frequently called a “wire.” This is accomplished by wandering around the playing area surreptitiously glancing at tables to see cards, deliberately listening for table talk from adjacent tables, or somehow gaining access to hand records.

Lesser infractions usually involve the use of unauthorized information, whether it is accidentally hearing information from a different table and not reporting it to the director, or taking advantage of partners mannerisms, breaks in tempo, or incorrect explanations. Sometimes it involves concealing an infraction, such as claiming to cover up a revoke, or deliberately not correcting your or partner’s mis-explanation when it is appropriate to do so.

Many, perhaps most of these latter infractions may be unintentional. For this reason, there are two different laws written that involve unauthorized information - Law 16, most frequently cited, is a “civil” violation in the sense that it doesn’t suggest intent on the part of the infractor, rather just a choice of action that is not available under the law due to the unauthorized information. Note here that breaking tempo in an “irregularity” – it is *not* an infraction. We all need to think sometimes. But partner is not supposed to be able to gain advantage from that.

The second law covering this issue is Law 73, which clearly states that a player may not deliberately use unauthorized information to his benefit – this is the “criminal” violation. How and when which of these laws is applied is a subject for a different article, but suffice to say, if a player decides to use unauthorized information, he is in violation of Law 73.

To avoid violating Law 16 and some others can be tricky. Here are a few pointers:

1. If you or your partner give misinformation, as the declaring side you *must* call the director and disclose this at the end of the auction. If you are defending side you *must* bring the misinformation to opponents’ attention at the end of the hand, giving them the opportunity to seek redress if they feel they are damaged.
2. If you receive unauthorized information from an outside source, you must call the director and inform him away from the table of the information received. Sometimes he may be able to adjust positions or take some other action which will make the board playable.
3. If you receive unauthorized information from partner by a break in tempo or otherwise, know that you must choose from among logical alternatives one *not* suggested by the unauthorized information. To do otherwise, even if you were “always” going to take that action creates a no-win situation for you. If unsuccessful, you keep your result. If successful, the result will be adjusted.

What to do when you observe cheating or other irregularities

One of the worst offenses in bridge is to publicly accuse another player of cheating or of being unethical. Do *not ever* do this! It can get you in big trouble – subject to discipline under our Code of Disciplinary Regulations, with up to 180 days probation and/or up to 180 days suspension. It can also get you sued!

If you become aware of one of the worst kinds of cheating, *privately* take your information to a tournament official – the Recorder or director-in-charge. That way, an investigation can be done without the accused being embarrassed, and without the accused knowing he is being investigated, which may make it easier to gather evidence.

If one of the more mundane violations occurs at the table, whether you think it deliberate or not, simply call the director. Describe the irregularity, but do *not* try to characterize the intent of your opponent. That is for the director to investigate.

In this way, bridge “justice” will be achieved most effectively without making you the bad guy.

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