

Revised SBU Alerting Procedures



In September 2007 the Scottish Bridge Union adopted the WBF Alerting policy:

Preamble

- Full disclosure is vital. However, players are expected to protect themselves to a large extent. They are also expected to observe the spirit of the Laws as well as the letter.
- The policy has been made as simple as possible. Players are, however, expected to alert whenever there is doubt.

Policy

“The following classes of calls should be alerted:

1. **Conventional** bids should be alerted, **non-conventional** bids should not.
2. Those bids which have **special meanings** or which are based on or lead to **special understandings** between the partners.
(A player may not make a call or play based on a special partnership understandings unless an opposing pair may reasonably be expected to understand its meaning, or unless his side discloses the use of such call or play in accordance with the regulations of the sponsoring organization).
See Law 40(b).
3. Non-forcing jump changes of suit responses to opening bids or overcalls, and non-forcing new suit responses by an unpassed hand to opening bids of one of a suit.

Do **NOT** alert the following:

- 1 **All doubles.**
- 2 Any no-trump bid which suggests a balanced or semi-balanced hand, or suggests a no-trump contract.
- 3 Any call at the four level or higher, with the exception of conventional calls on the first round of the bidding (for this purpose the first round of bidding is the opening bid and three subsequent calls).

Nevertheless, players must respect the spirit of the Policy as well as the letter

This booklet contains the SBU policy on alerting, and our interpretations of the WBF policy. It replaces the Chapter on Alerting in our 1999 “Handbook of Directives and Conventions”

1 Introduction

It is an essential principle of duplicate contract bridge that a partnership may not have secret agreements, either in bidding or in card play. All agreements must be fully available and fully disclosed to opponents. Each player should have a legibly completed convention card. Partnership cards must be systemically identical. (A partnership that fails to comply with this rule may be required to play a Simple System until they have fully completed two convention cards.)

The fact that your convention card explains the meaning of a bid does not remove the obligation to alert it. The purpose of an alert is to draw opponents' attention to any call that has a special meaning.

The principle of full disclosure (as required by the Laws) is to disclose, not as little as you must, but as much as you can, and as comprehensibly as you can. Please make a positive effort to meet these obligations. A careless failure to disclose fully may result in an adjusted score, and possibly procedural penalties when opponents have been damaged.

'Agreements' include not only the specific agreements that appear on your convention card, but also partnership understandings that have arisen through discussion or experience. Opponents are entitled to know about such understandings. General bridge inferences that could be made by an unfamiliar partner when there has been no prior discussion are not alertable; inferences drawn from partnership experience must be disclosed.

2 Definitions and General Principles

2.1 Artificial Call (replaces 'Convention' in the 2007 Laws)

A bid, double, or redouble that conveys information (not being information taken for granted by players generally) other than willingness to play in the denomination named or last named; or a pass which promises more than a specified amount of strength or if it promises or denies values other than in the last suit named. However, an agreement as to overall strength does not make a call a convention.

(2007 Laws: Definitions)

- any bid that shows the named denomination and another denomination is conventional. This includes all opening bids and overcalls that show two or more suits, whether or not one of the suits is named.
- an opening bid of 1♣ or 1♦ which may contain fewer than 3 cards in the suit opened does not indicate 'willingness to play' and is therefore conventional.
- Certain calls, such as the enforced 3♣ response to a Lebensohl 2NT, do not convey any meaning. Such calls are construed as conventional

2.2 Natural Call

A natural suit bid is one that is not conventional. It follows from the definition of artificial call that a bid is natural if it meets any one of these criteria:

it conveys a willingness to play in the named denomination (with no additional information about another denomination)

it shows high card strength or length (3+cards) in the named denomination.

A natural NT bid is one that shows a willingness to play in no-trump and conveys no specific information about suit holdings.

A natural pass is one that does not convey any conventional message about strength or suit holdings.

Natural calls are in general not alertable, with some important exceptions (See 3.2)

2.3 Cue-bids

A cue-bid of opponent's suit is defined as a bid of any denomination bid or implied by an opponent.

Examples:

an opponent opens 1♠: a 2♠ or 3♠ bid is a cue-bid.

an opponent opens 3♦ as a transfer pre-empt, showing hearts: 3♥ is a cue-bid.

an opponent overcalls 1NT with 2♦ showing spades and another suit: 2♠ is a cue-bid.

A 2NT overcall of 1NT is a cue-bid.

2.4 Non-alertable conventional calls

These fall into two categories:

- doubles and redoubles
- calls above the level of 3NT made after the first round of bidding (for this purpose the first round of bidding is the opening bid and three subsequent calls).

These calls should not be alerted.

It may be risky to make assumptions as to the meaning of such calls. You are entitled, at your next turn to call, to ask about their meaning, but bear in mind that unnecessary questions may be more helpful to opponents than to your own side, and may convey unauthorised information, thereby limiting partner's options.

2.5 Other definitions

A **transfer bid** is an artificial bid that promises length in a specified suit

A **puppet bid** is an artificial bid that requires a particular response by partner, but does not promise a holding in the suit of a forced response.

A **pass or correct bid** is a bid that, after partner has shown possession of an unspecified suit, conveys the meaning: 'Pass if this is your unspecified suit, otherwise correct to your suit.'

3 Alert Stages

There are three stages of the alerting process. All are important. They are:

- System Description, before bidding starts
- Alerts during the auction
- Auction Explanation by the declaring side before the opening lead

3.1 System Description

At the start of a round or match pairs should acquaint each other with their basic system, length of their one-level openings, and strength and style of their opening 1NT. Subsequent questions about these, whilst legal, may be regarded as conveying unauthorised information.

This is the stage where you should draw opponents' attention to any unusual agreements you have that might surprise them, or to which they may need to arrange a defence. Pay particular attention to unusual non-alertable conventional calls such as: unusual two-level openings, canapé style bidding, very unusual doubles, unusual methods over opponents 1NT or strong club openings, unusual cue-bids of opponent's suit, etc.

These should appear on your convention card, but should also be verbally described before the start of the round or match.

Highly unusual carding, for example leading low from doubletons, should also be described at this stage.

3.2 Alerts during the auction

You must alert a call that is conventional unless it is a non-alertable conventional call. (See 2.4)

Two classes of natural bids must also be alerted (unless the bid is a non-alertable conventional call):

(a) the bid is by agreement unexpectedly forcing or nonforcing. For example

- Responder's first round jump shift on weak hands
- a non-forcing response in a new suit by an unpassed hand to an opening suit bid (whether or not after intervention)
- a single raise of partner's suit which is forcing

(b) the bid is natural but its meaning is affected by other agreements your opponents are unlikely to expect.

For example the rebid in a canapé sequence where the second suit may be longer than the first

3.3 Auction Explanation

At the end of the auction the declaring side should draw attention to any unusual features, particularly any unusual non-alerted calls. Upon enquiry you must disclose fully, not only the specific meanings of all calls, but also any inferences you have drawn from the auction based on partnership experience (as distinct from

general bridge knowledge). These explanations may occasionally need to include negative inferences, such as hand types partner probably does not have for his bidding. Defenders must not, at this time, draw attention to their own calls, nor voluntarily offer explanations (they must, of course, fully disclose upon enquiry).

If a possible misexplanation emerges during the explanation stage the Director should be called before the opening lead is faced. Defenders, however, must wait until the play of the deal is completed before calling the Director to report any misexplanation by their partner.

4 Some Common Conventions

4.1 Stayman

Stayman is alertable because it is conventional, even though it is almost universally used. Conventional responses to Stayman are alertable, as are natural responses which convey a message about special distribution.

4.2 Transfers

The transfer bid is alertable. Acceptance of the transfer, whether or not after interference, is not. Do not alert acceptance or jump acceptance. Alert transfer breaks to 2NT or to a new suit

4.3 Multi 2 bids.

For example, 2♦ showing an unspecified 6-card major with or without other options. The opening bid is alertable, as are all conventional responses, including pass-or-correct bids.

4.4 Michaels (and other conventional cue-bids)

Alert a cue overcall of opponent's opening bid that shows a two-suited hand, or a jump cuebid that asks for a stopper.

5 Specific Examples

This section provides a number of examples by way of illustration and amplification. It is not exhaustive. The examples follow the principles specified previously.

There is an overriding requirement that non-alertable conventional calls should not be alerted.

5.1 Opening bids.

- Alert: (a) 1♣ or 1♦ if it may contain fewer than 3 cards in the named suit.
(b) an opening 2 bid that does not promise a holding of at least 4 cards in the named suit, or that promises a holding in the named suit and another suit. Examples:
 2♥ showing hearts and another suit (whether specified or not)
 strong artificial 2♣ or 2♦
(c) Any opening bid which is not natural, eg a transfer pre-empt

Do not alert: an opening 2 bid that only promises length in the named suit, whether weak, intermediate or strong.

5.2 Development of the auction

- Alert: (a) Weak jump shift responses, for example 1♣- (P) - 2♥ where 2♥ is weak, therefore not forcing
(b) Inverted minor raises, where a single raise is unexpectedly forcing. Do not alert the weak jump raise.
(c) Forcing 1NT responses
(d) Baron 2NT response. (This is unexpectedly forcing)
(e) Jacoby Style 2NT responses to one of a major that promise 4-card support
(f) Bergen raises
(g) Fourth Suit Forcing
(h) Splinter bids (but alert above the level of 3NT only on the first round of bidding)
(i) Transfer bids (but alert above the level of 3NT only on the first round of bidding)

- (j) Forced bids in a pass-or-correct sequence
- (k) Conventional responses, including pass-or-correct bids after a Multi 2♦ opening
- (l) Short suit trial bids
- (m) A pass which conveys a special meaning as to strength or distribution

5.3 Competitive auctions

- Alert: (a) all overcalls that show 2 suits, whether one is named or not
 (b) Unusual 2NT bids that show 2-suited hands
 (c) Transfer overcalls, and multi-meaning overcalls

Do not alert single-suited overcalls that promise only the named suit, whether weak, intermediate or strong

Over an opponent's takeout double or overcall,

- Alert: (d) Any bid in a new suit that is non-forcing (except by a passed hand)
 (e) Fit-showing jumps in a new suit.
 (f) a Lebensohl 2NT after interference over your no-trump

After partner's takeout double,

- Alert (g) Any bid that conventionally shows weakness (Lebensohl, Herbert negatives etc)

6 Bidding Styles

Be aware that there are different approaches in bidding style in natural systems.

For example, some partnerships play limit jump raises, for others, particularly those playing 5-card major systems, the sequence 1♥- (Pass) - 3♥ is pre-emptive. Similarly, the sequence 1♣- (Pass) - 3♣ may be either game-invitational or pre-emptive. Pre-emptive jump raises are very common in competitive auctions. After a minor suit opening, especially a 1♣ opening, some partnerships bid 'up-the-line', others prefer to show a major ahead of a minor, even when the minor is longer. Some partnerships may skip a 4-card major in making a response or rebid in NT. Such approaches are commonly used, and need not be alerted during the auction. You are advised to protect yourself by asking when necessary.

7 Alerting Procedure

1. Alerts are compulsory – you may not ask opponents not to alert. The requirement to alert applies even though the convention or other agreement is listed on the convention card.
2. Alert partner's calls, not your own (except when screens are in use). Alerts should be made immediately after the alertable call has been completed.
3. Alerts are made by displaying the Alert card. It is the alerter's responsibility to ensure that both opponents have seen his alert. If bidding boxes are not in use the alert is made audibly by saying: "Alert".
4. Auction explanations are made by the declaring side at the end of the auction, before the opening lead is made by indicating verbally which unusual calls require explanation. Do not offer an explanation of any call until requested to do so.
5. If you know that partner's call is alertable but you have forgotten its meaning, you should nevertheless alert. If asked, explain that you have forgotten the meaning. The Director should then be called. His normal action would be to send you away from the table and have your partner explain the meaning of his own call.
6. When a player makes a call in tempo, and an opponent then alerts (late alert), the director may allow the player to retract the call and substitute a legal call without penalty, provided that his partner has not subsequently called, and it is probable that his action might be different after the alertable bid's meaning has been explained. (Law 21B1). Any call retracted in accordance with the provisions of this Law is authorised information to the partner of the player retracting the call (Law 16C2), but not his opponents.
7. Do not alert any play of the cards.

8 Enquiring about an alerted call

When opponents make an alerted or non-alertable conventional call you are entitled to ask specifically about that call at your first turn to call thereafter. Otherwise any questions should be directed at the whole auction, not a specific call. An appropriate method of asking would be: "Please explain the auction." Any questions about a call or calls must take into account the Laws covering unauthorised information:

After a player makes available to his partner extraneous information that may suggest a call or play, as by means of a question....., the partner may not choose from among logical alternatives one action that could demonstrably have been suggested over another by the extraneous information. (Law 16A)

Hence, while the Laws give you the right to ask questions, unnecessary enquiries or questions directed at particular calls, may limit partner's options in the subsequent bidding or play. It is therefore not advisable to ask questions if your intention is to pass regardless of the answer.

Questions may be asked only for your own benefit. It is improper to ask questions for the benefit of partner.

9 Explanations

If an enquiry is made, a full explanation of the call must be given. This includes any conventional or partnership agreement, whether the agreement is explicit or based on partnership experience.

Explanations may well include distributions and point ranges specifically excluded by a call, as well as those shown directly. When giving explanations it is not necessary to repeat information given earlier in the hand, unless such information is requested. When explaining an alerted, or non-alertable, conventional call, you should indicate if this same call may have a slightly different meaning (for example, a different point range) due to a variation of vulnerabilities and/or position around the table.

If there is no partnership agreement as to the meaning of a call you must say so (eg "no partnership agreement") and not attempt to offer a possible explanation. When, however, as a result of partnership experience and style, you are able to form a cogent view of the likely meaning of such a call, that information shall be given to opponents. Where there is no partnership agreement about a call do not offer statements such as: "I take it to mean...." or "I'm treating it as..." Such responses are improper as they give unauthorised information to partner. Similarly, it is improper to ask questions such as: "What are you taking it as?"

Merely to name a convention (eg Michaels, Lebensohl) is not an acceptable explanation. Most conventions have many variations, and a more specific explanation is normally required. Similarly, "Standard" or "Natural" is rarely a sufficient description of calls signals or leads. Nor are the terms "Weak", "Strong" or "Intermediate" without appropriate qualification

An explanation given in response to an enquiry about the meaning of any call should avoid reference to the meaning of any response yet to be made to that call (unless requested by an opponent).

You need not divulge knowledge or conclusions you have reached based on your own card holdings, nor as a consequence of your general bridge knowledge.

10 Irregularities in procedure

10.1 Misinformation

Pairs that frequently forget their system or conventions have a damaging effect on the tournament. The Director is empowered to require such a pair to play a simpler system. In extreme cases he may apply a procedural penalty under Law 90.

10.2 Late Alert

In the case of a late alert (i.e. a member of the non-offending side has taken action before the alert is made), the Director should be called immediately before any further action is taken (See 7.7). He may be able to take steps to prevent damage at this time. If the non-offending side fails to call the Director at this time they may jeopardize their rights to later obtain redress for damage.

10.3 Failure to alert/Mistaken explanation

When there has been a failure to alert, or a mistaken alert, the following principles apply:

- If a member of the offending side becomes declarer or dummy: before the opening lead is faced declarer and/or dummy is required by Law to call the Director and, in his presence, correct the failure to alert, the mistaken alert, and/or the misexplanation.
- If the offending side become defenders: no correction may be given until the end of play, at which time a Director must be called.
- When there is reason to believe that a failure to alert has caused damage, the Director will consider awarding an adjusted score, providing there is a direct link between the irregularity and the result achieved at the table.

11 Tournament Director's Responsibility

Tournament Directors will not allow players to manipulate these regulations to their advantage. For example, opponents must be allowed enough time to alert: a speedy action out of tempo followed by a claim for a late alert will receive little sympathy. Likewise, experienced players claiming damage through a technical failure to alert will need to present a strong case.

Directors are urged, when giving a ruling, to consider whether players have adhered to the principle of full disclosure.

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