



Issue 10: BridgeHands Newsletter

The Street Smart Bridge Player: Part IV

February 2008

Dear *BridgeHands* Friends,

Welcome back to our fourth and final installment of our series on the Street Smart Bridge Player. It has been a dark winter outside so perhaps it's fitting we wrap up this segment by examining the dark side of Bridge.

No, this issue isn't intended to give players tips on how to pull off dishonest acts at the Bridge table! Yet we should all be aware of common situations that constitute the ethical violations for the proprieties of Bridge. Perhaps our partner has unwittingly encroached on the Bridge Laws. Or worse, maybe an unscrupulous opponent is deliberately cheating and trying to get away with the caper. While others do not try to segment such infractions, we will divide these violations into three categories:

1. Inadvertent Laws Violation
2. Soft Cheating
3. Hard Cheating

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Introduction: Bridge is just a game - or is it?

In our prior newsletters, we reviewed some of the common Bridge Laws and the psychology of our delightful game, bound with an emotional element. Like most things in life, you get out of Bridge what you put into it. We've said it before and we will say it again, Bridge is a microcosm of life. We can apply lessons learned at the table to family, friends, and business. Here we will be contrasting inadvertent ethical slip-ups and worse, creating an awareness of acceptable behavior.

Recall in our prior lesson we spoke about the psychological aspects of the game. Should this have anything to do with Bridge? Some would argue against those who resort to psychological mind games, shenanigans, skullduggery, or other devious and unscrupulous acts.

Some may find that mildly innocuous "mind games" add to the spirit of Bridge. And of course, there are those who will do **anything** to win, at life, love, money, their ego, and certainly at Bridge. Yet regardless of where we stand on the psychological aspects of Bridge, there will be a time and a place where we will have to deal with players that may not see life (and Bridge) in quite the same way as our mother taught us to behave.

And yes, there are a few misguided souls who feel the need to win at all costs, assuming they can get away with outright cheating. Fortunately, those who engage in "hard cheating" are few and far between. But they are out there, both in the kitchen playing Rubber Bridge or in an international Duplicate Bridge tournament representing their country.

However, before we get too deep into exploring the assorted misdeeds by opponents, we should cover a few caveats.

1. Consider the possibility that the opponents misdeed is attributable to an innocent misstep.
2. Be aware accusing anyone of cheating is a very serious charge.
3. We should always be certain of the facts and present them in a rational manner, avoiding claims against an opponent's motivation or character.

4. Generally, it's unwise to make accusations which cannot be proved. Whenever possible, privately describe the infraction with the director, your partner, or an unbiased observer - ask the third party to watch for continued occurrences of the observed behavior. That said, don't be surprised if your rulemaking organization does not seem enthusiastic to prosecute the incident. In our increasingly litigious world, Bridge authorities tend to be very cautious when handling cheating accusations without physical evidence (videotape footage). [The ACBL has documented the process to handle disciplinary actions.](#)

5. The information presented here is certainly not intended as a manual to delve into cheating! **BridgeHands** offers this information to our loyal readers in good faith.

So our mission, should we decide to accept it, is to explore the dark side of the force. But just as actors must avoid getting too deeply into their character, so too we must balance our exploration of the dark side of the force. Bridge is a game centered on good will, friendly spirit, the intrinsic joy of learning and mastery. Okay, time to buckle up - here we go.

Inadvertent Laws Violation

First off, one might argue the ethics of a player who claims innocence due to a lack of knowledge of Bridge Laws. This certainly has merit for newcomer and novice Bridge players. However, since this newsletter is intended for intermediate and advanced Bridge players, we shall assume players should have a fairly solid understanding of rudimentary Bridge Law Proprieties. Here's the sections for Duplicate Laws - Contract/Rubber Bridge have similar sections:

LAW 72 - GENERAL PRINCIPLES
LAW 73 - COMMUNICATION
LAW 74 - CONDUCT AND ETIQUETTE
LAW 75 - PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS

Saving Law 73 for last, let's highlight the other proprieties. In essence, Law 72 makes it clear we must follow the rules of the game, with the Director assuming enforcement. The law includes an interesting discussion of inadvertent infractions, stating a player is not required to draw attention to such errors in bidding and play. For instance, if a player revokes (reneges) and has not discovered the irregularity until after the revoke is established, the player is not required to point out the infraction to the opponents. Of course, the Law goes on to say a player cannot deliberately conceal an infraction (such as subsequently hiding a card which would expose an earlier revoke).

Laws 74.A and 74.B remind us to be courteous and not to do something that may annoy or embarrass another player. Certainly we would all agree Bridge is supposed to be an enjoyable game. Etiquette wise, we should pay attention to the game, avoid gratuitous remarks, avoid detaching cards before play, avoid prolonging play to disconcert opponents, and show courtesy to players and the Director.

Law 74.C provides self-explanatory examples of violations:

1. using different designations for the same call.
2. indicating approval or disapproval of a call or play.
3. indicating the expectation or intention of winning or losing a trick that has not been completed.
4. commenting or acting during the auction or play so as to call attention to a significant occurrence, or to the number of tricks still required for success.
5. looking intently at any other player during the auction and play, or at another player's hand as for the purpose of seeing his cards or of observing the place from which he draws a card (but it is appropriate to act on information acquired by inadvertently seeing an opponent's card).
6. showing an obvious lack of further interest in a deal (as by folding one's cards).
7. varying the normal tempo of bidding or play for the purpose of disconcerting an opponent.
8. leaving the table needlessly before the round is called.

Law 75 informs us we must provide all information about our partnership agreements to our opponents. Incidentally, 75.B is often misunderstood - a player may (at player's own peril) violate a partnership agreement, provided the partner is unaware of the violation. While we may not appreciate deceptive bidding and play, the writers of the Bridge Laws permit such tactics.

Law 73, Communications, targets many forms of deviations from adherence to the laws, with Law 73.B.2 addressing cheating (see Prearranged Communications below). While you won't find the "C" word specifically stated in the Laws, **BridgeHands** defines cheating as any deliberate behavior known to be outside the Laws, intended to give an unfair advantage to one or more players. This may involve a sole player, partnership, team, or other arrangement involving dishonest activities. While this newsletter will refrain from focusing on the laws, let's highlight a few areas where well-meaning players seem to inadvertently stray from the Laws.

Law 73.A.2. and B.1. make it clear players cannot use gestures, mannerisms, voice inflections, hesitations or haste during bidding. If our partner violates these principles, Law 73 says we must not take advantage of that communication.

Unfortunately, ill-advised, over zealous, and unscrupulous players sometimes foul on Law 73. Certainly it's a no-no to make a bid or play and stare at one's partner to quietly reinforce the meaning of one's action. And while we are all passionate about Bridge, overt actions such as sighs, groans, growls, snorts, coughs, snapping/slapping/dropping/thumping cards, or other abnormal gestures are not permitted. Yes, biting, spitting, elbowing, slugging and even crying are similarly prohibited! Of course, Bridge requires an imaginative mind, so one can always think such thoughts (at least until the writers of the Bridge Laws discover we have players with telepathic minds among our ranks).

Law 73 is included here for your reference:

A. Proper Communication between Partners

1. How Effected

Communication between partners during the auction and play shall be effected only by means of the calls and plays themselves.

2. Correct Manner for Calls and Plays

Calls and plays should be made without special emphasis, mannerism or inflection, and without undue hesitation or haste (however, sponsoring organizations may require mandatory pauses, as on the first round of auction, or after a skip-bid warning, or on the first trick).

B. Inappropriate Communication Between Partners

1. Gratuitous Information

Partners shall not communicate through the manner in which calls or plays are made, through extraneous remarks or gestures, through questions asked or not asked of the opponents or through alerts and explanations given or not given to them.

2. Prearranged Communications

The gravest possible offense is for a partnership to exchange information through prearranged methods of communication other than those sanctioned by these Laws. A guilty partnership risks expulsion.

C. Player Receives Unauthorized Information from Partner

When a player has available to him unauthorized information from his partner, as from a remark, question, explanation, gesture, mannerism, special emphasis, inflection, haste or hesitation, he must carefully avoid taking any advantage that might accrue to his side.

D. Variations in Tempo or Manner

1. Inadvertent Variations

It is desirable, though not always required, for players to maintain steady tempo and unvarying manner. However, players should be particularly careful in positions in which variations may work to the benefit of their side. Otherwise, inadvertently to vary the tempo or manner in which a call or play is made does not in itself constitute a violation of propriety, but inferences from such variation may appropriately be drawn only by an opponent, and at his own risk.

2. Intentional Variations

A player may not attempt to mislead an opponent by means of remark or gesture, through the haste or hesitancy of a call or play (as in hesitating before playing a singleton), or by the manner in which the call or play is made.

E. Deception

A player may appropriately attempt to deceive an opponent through a call or play (so long as the deception is not protected by concealed partnership understanding or experience). It is entirely appropriate to avoid giving information to the opponents by making all calls and plays in unvarying tempo and manner.

F. Violation of Proprieties

When a violation of the Proprieties described in this law results in damage to an innocent opponent,

1. Player Acts on Unauthorized Information

if the Director determines that a player chose from among logical alternative actions one that could demonstrably have been suggested over another by his partner's remark, manner, tempo, or the like, he shall award an adjusted score (see Law 16).

2. Player Injured by Illegal Deception

if the Director determines that an innocent player has drawn a false inference from a remark, manner, tempo, or the like, of an opponent who has no demonstrable bridge reason for the action, and who could have known, at the time of the action, that the action could work to his benefit, the Director shall award an adjusted score (see Law 12C).

Soft Cheating: "I would prefer even to fail with honor than to win by cheating." Sophocles, from a classical Athenian playwright

We profess that not all players will agree on what constitutes soft cheating or even attempt to differentiate soft and hard cheating. Certainly some highly competitive players enjoy playing "on the edge" under the auspices of being a shrewd player fostering gamesmanship. From the ethical Bridge player's perspective, these are the type of folks who exceed the posted speed limit, believing they are not in violation of the basic speed law. Interestingly, these shrewd folks will indeed slow down when in the proximity of a law enforcement official. And at the table, these players seem to modify their behavior when in the presence of a Bridge Director or prospective mother-in-law. Thus, some of us may infringe on certain laws for a number of reasons, perhaps listening to the "dark angel" on our bad shoulder. So despite a consensus among us, let's discuss this so-called soft cheating.

Let's begin with a crafty play that borders on the line of deceptive play - others might say it skirts the line of ethical behavior. In Dan Romm's book "[Things Your Bridge Teacher Won't Tell You](#)", he describes a shifty method to better one's finessing odds (page 21).

```
10 9 x
A K x x x
Q
x x x x
```

```
A K J x x x
Q x x
K x
A K
```

The contract is 6 Spades in the South. West begins leading the CQ to South's CA. Playing in tempo, declarer South begin with the Ace of Spades and smoothly continues with the King of **Clubs!** West was probably expecting the declarer to draw trump, anticipating the King of Spades. The declarer South casually observes West, looking for a "tell". A pause by West (before realizing the Club switch) indicates the player may be out of trump, considering which card to pitch. In this case, the declarer wins the trick, goes over to dummy with a Heart, finessing East's King. Otherwise, if West seemed to be prepared to play another Spade then declarer South will play both players for doubletons, continuing with the SK to drop opponent's Queen. While some might not be impressed with such "parlor tricks", technically speaking **BridgeHands** would not categorize this tactic as unethical behavior.

Later in Dan Romm's book, he recaps a diabolical declarer play from the 1950s. First, let's set the stage - a well known pro was playing with a client opposite two senior women in a duplicate tourney. On this hand the pro was in 6 Spades. After the Heart lead the contract seemed doomed, assuming East held the HK.

```
A Q x x
A x
A K
K J 10 x x
```

```
K J 10 x x x
Q J
x x
Q x x
```


Losing the HK and the CA, the contract would be down one. So what could the pro do to improve his odds? Well, the pro tanked for many minutes giving the *appearance* of considering a spectacular play. In reality, the pro was about to make an unethical play - what was it?

When the South-seated pro figured the opponents were sufficiently distracted enough to completely lose focus on the play, South played his HQ from his **declarer's** hand (instead of the correct rotation from the dummy)!!! Sure enough, the weary East player was seduced into following the incorrect counter-clockwise rotation of play, going up with the HK! At this point, the pro faced his cards and made a claim of 12 tricks. We agree with Dan's assessment; certainly this nameless pro infringed on the ethics of Bridge. If you don't already own a copy of "[Things Your Bridge Teacher Won't Tell You](#)", we wholeheartedly recommend you purchase a copy of this excellent book.

Looking deeper into soft cheating, certainly the [Alcatraz Coup](#) goes over the edge. The Alcatraz Coup is actually a tongue-in-cheek name used to describe nefarious methods when trying to deduce opponents' holdings. This obviates the "who holds the Queen?" guess when holding the remaining honors. Here's an example:

	A 8 7 6	
	3 2	
	A 9 8 7	
	K Q 4	
3 2		5 4
8 7 6 5		Q J 10 9 4
Q 3 2		5 4
J 10 9 8		A 7 6 5
	K Q J 10 9	
	A K	
	K J 10 6	
	3 2	

Contract: 6S in South

After getting in, South leads the SJ, providing an opportunity to observe West's ethical behavior during play. South's careful lead of the SJ seduced West to believe the declarer was missing the SQ, thus attempting a finesse. The bait is set - how will West respond? If West hesitates or fumbles his cards as though he holds the SQ, declarer South has a read on West's "tell" (West likes to fake it). The declarer now safely pulls trump, switching to the low Heart and surreptitiously observes West behavior. This time West smoothly plays a low card in tempo. Accordingly, the declarer may deduce West's holds the missing Queen based on the new demeanor, i.e., an "inverted tell." Thus, the declarer finesses West's Queen.

Speaking of tells, as we mentioned earlier a player should not intently watch an opponent for the sole purpose of discerning "tells". Worse, a player should not intently watch the gestures of partner and opponents, particularly noting the placement of cards withdrawn from the hand when played.

In no particular order, we will begin with [Law 73.A.2](#), Correct Manner for Calls and Plays: A player may not attempt to mislead an opponent by means of remark or gesture, through the haste or hesitancy of a call or play (as in hesitating before playing a singleton), or by the manner in which the call or play is made.

Some shrewd Bridge player attempt to *control* the tempo of bidding or play of their opponents. These players use ploys such as the declarer "quick play" maneuvers, hoping the defenders will not become aware of their vulnerability during play.

Conversely, our unscrupulous declarer might realize the contract is doomed if the defender offer a normal defense, thus delaying play an abnormal interval in an attempt to distract the opponents (the "Sominex" coup).

Along the same lines, during play a sneaky declarer may realize they are playing from the wrong hand; after waiting a considerable period, the declarer plays from the wrong side, hoping the opponent will have forgotten the correct side and mistakenly play to the out-of-turn trick.

Claiming tricks at the end of play is always a controversial topic; devious opponents have been known to quickly make bad claims to secure a winning score. As the Romans taught us, "caveat emptor!" - let the buyer beware! Never accept a questionable claim when the declarer should be clearly stating the line of play. And don't allow the declarer to "play it out" knowing the offending defender holds the questionable cards. Instead call the Director for assistance. If playing Rubber Bridge; L69 begins: The objective of subsequent play is to achieve a result as equitable as possible to both sides, but any doubtful point must be resolved in favor of the defenders. Declarer may not make any play inconsistent with the statement he may have made at the time of his claim or concession. And if he failed to make an appropriate statement at that time, his choice of plays is restricted thereby (etc).

Incidentally, you and your partner should discuss the ethical obligation when dummy notices their declaring partner's claim is ambiguous (not clearly stating all lines of play).

Now let's examine a few low tech forms of cheating. Deliberately logging an incorrect (better) score occurs from time to time. When an opponent resorts to this type of devious behavior, lacking repeated instances it's not easy to prove malice. Always validate the contract score with the scorekeeper, carefully looking at the recorded score. Duplicate players should not permit North to record the score without showing the recorded result to you or your partner.

Along the same lines, be wary of the unscrupulous declarer who quickly claims an incorrect number of tricks. Do not fold up your cards until you and the declarer have an accurate agreement of the correct tricks taken, the contract result, and the resulting score.

In Alan Sontag's delightful book, "[Bridge Bum: My Life and Play](#)" he describes the ploy of offering the opposition free alcoholic beverages, heavy meals and the like before play. On the face, such tactics do not directly constitute cheating yet seem to skirt the ethics of fair play.

How do you feel about shuffling and dealing? Would it matter if the opponents didn't thoroughly shuffle the cards or dealt more than one card from the pack to the same player? First, let's take a look at how the cards are placed on the deck from the prior hand. During the course of play, suits tend to be played in groupings of 3 or more cards. So at the end of play, cards are clumped adjacent to one another by suit. Thus, if the cards were not shuffled and dealt out one by one to each player, each player would tend to have the same number of cards in each suit, i.e., flat hands. Ahead in a match, the devious dealer might be tempted to avoid distributional hands that might lead to wild scoring swings. So if you are behind in a match and note the opponent making a cursory shuffle, ask for a thorough shuffle. Similarly, if the opponents are behind in a match, do not permit the dealer to deal multiple cards from the pack to the same player; so-called "goulash" dealing may lead to wildly distributional hands.

A player should not deliberately note an exposed card or hand held by an opponent (L74.C.5). Bridge professional Charles Goren was known for holding his cards far away from his chest, while his partner Helen Sobel did quite the opposite holding her cards extremely close to her chest. On the other hand, on one occasion Helen signaled Charles for a Spade ruff while Charles kept leading other suits, which caused Helen to noticeably fidget in her chair. Finally, Charles stated, "Helen, you have to stop that - it makes for a bad partnership. Besides, I have no more Spades!" [See L73.B.1](#)

Along the same lines, be wary of an opponent who deliberately exposes non-essential cards to opponents. The player may be hiding an important card, causing the opponent to think a critical card is held by the other partner.

A player should refrain from "keeping an open ear", listening to players discuss results at another duplicate table when the eavesdropping players have not played the board. Another variation is to peek at opponents' personal scoresheet in an attempt to observe their results for boards yet to be played by the unscrupulous observer.

As we mentioned earlier, once a revoke is established (and was unknown by the offending partner at the time), a player is not obligated to disclose the error to the opponents. However, a player may not hide or otherwise conceal revoke cards at the termination of play.

A player may not make extraneous or overt actions with the express purpose to frustrate or distract a player. Some unscrupulous players use various emotional hooks, snapping cards, drumming fingers on table, inducing FUD: Fear-Uncertainty-Doubt, false flattery, sarcasm, embarrassment, greed, etc. Better known as "coffee housing", such misdeeds include making improper remarks, gestures, hesitations or the like, with the intention to confuse or mislead opponents (Law 73). After numerous deliberate opponent hesitations, Charles Goren advised a perpetrator, "Madam, that second hesitation certainly was an overbid!" Similarly, George Kaufman once retorted to his opponents, "Let's have a review of the bidding again, with all the inflections."

Beware of acts of one-upmanship. In the 1934 Men's Pair New York Championship, Ely Culbertson partnered with Ted Lightner against Oswald Jacoby and David Burnstine. With the tourney outcome on one hand, Lightner risked bidding 6 Spades. Knowing Ely would be quick to table dummy after the all important opening lead, David deliberately paused to get a stick of gum out of his pocket, take it out of the wrapper and chew it for a moment. After a further delay, Burnstine finally threw the paper down on the table - not the lead card but the wrapper! Sure enough, Culbertson tabled the dummy, giving Burnstine a good look before making the killing lead to defeat the contract.

Watch out for the shifty declarer claiming they made an improper call or that a card from the dummy was a "slip of the tongue" when in fact the error was actually a thinking error (slip of the mind). Certainly when a duplicate player pulls a bid from one area of the bidding box, they cannot legitimately claim the error was attributable to a mechanical error when the new bidding card was not adjacent to the prior bid!

Be wary of an opponent who deliberately fails to alert a conventional bid or giving an inadequate or misleading description when asked by an opponent.

Conversely, do not permit an opponent to surreptitiously glance at one's own convention card in order to refresh their recollection of a partnership agreement. During play, the convention card is available for your reference, not theirs.

A devious opponent may know the consequence of a law better than the opponents. Rather than calling the Director, the player innocently offers the opponents what initially appears to be a satisfactory resolution when their side commits an irregularity. For instance, an opponent may have made an insufficient conventional call. Let's say an opponent opened 2 Notrump and their sleepy partner made an insufficient Stayman bid of 2 Clubs. The opponent is aware the Laws and Director's forthcoming ruling - the offender's partner is barred for the remainder of the auction. So our devious opponent innocently offers the opponents to "make the contract sufficient" by bidding 3 Clubs and continue playing normally. Should the opponents be seduced into this trick, the offender is off the hook. Always call the Director when an irregularity occurs at the table.

Be wary of an opponent who asks leading questions about the auction before partner has made a face down opening lead, providing partner clues about the best lead or play. Unless a player is intending to bid, they should refrain from asking unnecessary questions before the face down opening lead by partner.

How about the situation where an opponent strongly wants their partner to refrain from bidding? Beware of the unethical tactic by a player taking an unusual action that will force an action by partner. For instance, do not permit an opponent to deliberately hesitate during a competitive auction to force one's partner to pass or refrain from making a double when opponents' contract is makeable. Again, call the Director who may need to adjust or assign a score. Most players are unaware that when an opponent hesitates, the Director may adjust the auction both **up** and down to restore equity! (if dictated based upon a player's logical alternatives).

Some shrewd tournament players have been known to resort to a tactic known as "double insurance," attempting to get the best result. Let's say a player inadvertently forgets to alert a conventional call known by the opponents to be conventional call. The shrewd opponent neither asks the opponent for clarification, looks at their convention card, nor calls the Director. If a good result is obtained upon viewing the score (perhaps the traveler), the player overlooks the infraction; if the shrewd player decides a more favorable result could be realized, the player belatedly calls the Director to get a second chance to obtain a good result. The [San Francisco Fall 1996 Appeals](#) addressed this issue for ACBL players -

we must call the Director when the irregularity occurs as opposed to "reserving our rights" after play (the practice in international play).

Occasionally, an unscrupulous opponent may attempt to expose a played card very quickly, then quickly face down the played cards. A similar tactic is to tilt the card at an angle with the intent to make its face hard to discern. When in doubt, do not face your card down and kindly ask the opponent to clearly face their card. Ditto when the dummy's hand conceals cards in the dummy or some cards are hidden behind other cards. Incidentally, speaking of the dummy it is within the dummy's rights to see each card faced by the opponents. While a dummy is not permitted to first call attention to an irregularity during play, the dummy is allowed to note the occurrence of the irregularity and call the Director after the completion of play.

In rare situations, an opponent will modify, withhold, or fabricate facts to the Director. Be sure to have a clear accounting of the facts and clarify ambiguities or misstatements to the Director.

This next tactic should win a booby prize for the most creative form of unethical behavior. Here the player creates a diversionary tactic to cushion additional time needed to make a thoughtful bid or play. Lacking the distraction, the player might draw a Director call due to a hesitation. The tactic typically involves asking to view the opponent's convention card or unnecessarily inquiring about the meaning of an opponent's call, disturbing cards from the bidding box and the like, with no intention to use the response other than to buy the player extra time. We are unclear whether such tactics merit a hearty laugh or Director call!

Hard Cheating: "See what it is to play unfair! Where cheating is, there's mischief there." By poet William Blake

Okay, we've saved the worst for last. If soft cheating is a misdemeanor, than hard cheating is reserved for felons involved in blatant misconduct. Let's take a look at various cheating scandals and other overt techniques.

In 1954 Frenchman Franck Bodier and Pierre Figeac were found to always make perfect leads. Without noting the signaling methods, a tournament committee eventually summoned the pair, who chose to resign and disappear from Bridge. In 1974 Indonesian brothers M. F. and F. E. Manoppo were also noted to make flawless leads. After the World Bridge Federation reviewed 600 hands and confronted the brothers, they were suspended and barred from playing together in official tournaments.

In 1957 Austrian pair Karl Schneider and Max Reithoffer were found by Swiss expert Jaime Ortiz-Patino to hold their cards in peculiar positions based on their Ace holding. Interestingly, Reithoffer was the President of the Austrian Federation hosting the actual tourney. After the accusation was discreetly offered, without inquiry the pair agreed never to play in a major tourney again.

In 1958 the USA team (Tobias Stone) accused the world winning Italian team of cheating, stating they held their powerful hands up high not only for kibitzers, but for the benefit of their partner.

In 1933, Ely Culbertson hired card detective Mickey MacDougall to watch suspected opponent Willard Karn for cheating. Posing as a waiter, Mickey noted Willard would interleave high and low cards when taking a trick before his turn to deal. When shuffling, Karn would use a false pull-through shuffle, crimp the deck before offering the cut and restore the deck with a hidden return cut before dealing favorable cards to his side in their Rubber game.

The 1965 Bermuda Bowl was the setting for the notorious "Buenos Aires Incident", the USA team accusing England's Terence Reese and Boris Schapiro of cheating. B. Jay Becker noted Reese and Schapiro had unusual hand placement when holding their cards, asking partner Dorothy Hayden to confirm his observation. After several sessions comparing noted hand signals with printed hand records, Dorothy noted Reese and Schapiro's hand positions regularly coincided with their Heart holding. Here's an example:

```

                10 8 3 2
                K 9
                Q J 7
                A 8 4 3
9 5 4                K 6
A 8 6 5                J 2
A 5 4                K 9 8 3 2
Q 10 2                J 7 6 5
                A Q J 7
                Q 10 7 4 3
                10 6
                K 9
```

1S - 3S; 4S - AP

On behalf of the United States playing team, Dorothy Hayden noticed Terence and Boris seemed to awkwardly hold their cards in different manners and became suspicious. Between sessions, Dorothy discreetly discussed this with her playing partners, B.J. Becker and Alan Truscott.

After the U.S. team observed and logged more questionable play and compared the gestures against the actual cards, they lodged a formal complaint. Britain's captain, Ralph Swimer, withdrew his team from the tournament, conceding the matches.

On the above hand, Schapiro was sitting West and made a surprising underlead of the H5 to partner's HJ, won by South. The declarer returned a Heart to West's HA, who returned a third Heart that was overruffed by Reece sitting East with his S6. Terrance returned a Diamond to partner's Ace, followed by another Heart, again overruffed by Terrance to set the contract by two tricks. Perhaps underleading the Ace was an inspired lead - just be certain you are not strangely holding the cards from hand to hand.

In the "1975 Bermuda Bowl Incident", newspaper correspondent Bruce Keidan observed Italian team partners Gianfranco Facchini and Sergio Zucchelli were using foot signals to communicate under the table during bidding and before opening leads. Reported to the tourney committee who assigned observers to confirm the findings, small coffee tables were ultimately placed diagonally under the tables. These events led to screen usage in major tournaments.

In the 1977 "Houston Affair", Larry Cohen and Richard Katz suddenly resigned in the middle of the final round of competition. Newspapers articles speculated the pair were using improper communications based on prior agreements ([Law 73.b.2](#)) Similar to other high-profile scandals, the accused filed a massive lawsuit which ultimately led the ACBL jurisdictional body to reinstate the pair in full standing, with the ACBL's insurance company reimbursing the legal fees of Cohen-Katz.

In the 1979 "Sion-Cokin Affair", the ACBL found Steve Sion and Alan Coken of improper pre-arranged communication ([Law 73.b.2](#)). The ACBL found the pair used illegal signals based on the placement of their scoring pencils after writing down the contract. The ACBL barred the pair from ACBL play, reinstating them after 5 years but disallowing them from partnership play.

Here is a litany of other highly unethical misdeeds:

Beware of the scorekeeper (North) who deliberately enters an incorrect score to benefit their side.

Take heed against the dealer who specializes in "bottom dealing." Bottom dealing is a method of illegally influencing the outcome of the game by way of dealing certain known cards from the bottom, rather than the top of the pack. Generally, a bottom dealer will sneak a peek at the bottom card of the deck just after or during the cut, then dealing marked cards to self or partner.

Watch out for the card mechanic ("artists") who specialize in sleight-of-hand manipulation of cards often with various forms of misdirection, exposing cards to partner when dealing, false shuffles, "mechanic grip" (holding pack with index finger in front of cards to obscure which one is dealt to opponents), faro shuffles (false riffle), false cuts, palming, switching to stacked decks (cold decks), and blind shuffles. See [Mississippi Heart Hand](#) and [Duke of Cumberland Hand](#).

Keep on the lookout for the base dealer/second dealer who specialize in dealing second cards (next to the top) or other known locations pre-arranged by the dealer or an accomplice.

Believe it or not, in some card games the nefarious dealer may be a "paper player" who exploits the use of marked cards, slick or shiny Aces, marked edges (crimping, culling, denting, rounding, punching, sanding, nailing/indexing, etc), daubing (golden glow) and luminous readers using either special glasses or contact lens.

Then there is the hand mucker, who specializes in switching cards from hand to hand.

A variation in Bridge is when the opponents are already aware of the hands and outcome of play. In some duplicate Bridge team events (Swiss and Knockouts), a team is reassigned to the same table between events. Here's a prime example why players should always reshuffle cards in the presence of opponents.

While more likely in non-Bridge card play, some dastardly "machine players" cheat by using mechanical holdouts as clips under the table or up the sleeve, mirrors, reflective rings, etc.

The crossroader refers to a traveling hustler, purporting to be a so-so player in order to fleece average players. In Bridge, these folks seek money Rubber Bridge games.

Keep your eyes open for the colluders, spectators/kibitzers that pass signals to a player after peeking at another player's cards, or observing the playing results of the duplicate board from a prior table

As we've seen above in the Bermuda Bowl Incident and other scandals, take note that one of the most common (and hard to detect) forms of Bridge cheating involves the signalers - those who send bidding or play signals to their partner. Then there's the whimsical "[Chicago Convention](#)", ostensibly a tongue-in-cheek prank by Rubber Bridge players. In essence, the players look at their cards and when they both hold inferior hands, they signal one another through a pre-arranged question and answer. Like spies using a challenge-response protocol, the nasty players immediately claim one has too few cards - the other too many cards, so they intermix their cards and insist on a redeal.

The dumpers are a consortium of players who privately pool aggregate winnings against a rotational "partner" in a crooked game. The consortium plays poorly with their unsuspecting mark, playing soundly with their colluding partners to fleece their mark. Alan Sontag provides how both a personal friend was on both sides of this scam (along with Alan's assistance) in his book "[The Bridge Bum: My Life and Play](#)".

The peekers are players who deliberately look at cards being shuffled, dealt, sorted, and held by players.

A marker is a player that manipulates marked decks, using color readers (including contact lens), or cuts the cards (often detected by "going to the movies" - flipping through the deck rapidly).

The North cheater, involving tactics including artificially positioning the cards in a board (not fully inserted in board pocket, etc) or positioning the board differently (backward, upside down, etc) among a set in a team event, etc. The purpose of the North cheater is to send distinguishing characteristics (signals) about the hands to one's playing partners when the boards arrive at their table, such as a hand that produces a surprising slam result, etc.

The eavesdropper is a player that carefully listens to discussion about results or player's holdings at another duplicate table with the intention of using the information at the table when the board arrives at the table. In a match point game, the stationary South player is in the "ideal position" to eavesdrop on the results for boards headed towards the player (boards move up).

Well, that sums up our litany of misdeeds that live in infamy. If you have others to share, please drop us an EMAIL for discussion on our Bridge blog.

BridgeHands Archive

If you missed a back issue of a ***BridgeHands*** Intermediate-Advanced newsletters, here's the links:

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[Issue 1 - Forcing Pass](#)

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[Issue 3 - Opener Reverses](#)

[Issue 4 - Reverses, Part II - Responder Rebids](#)

[Issue 5 - Psyches, Part I](#)

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[Issue 7, Street Smart Bridge Player, Part I](#)

[Issue 8, Street Smart Bridge Player, Part II](#)

[Issue 9, Street Smart Bridge Player, Part III](#)

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Sincerely,

BridgeHands

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