

For the Record

By Robb Gordon, National Recorder
What is a “logical alternative”?

One of the most frequent causes for both tournament director calls and Player Memos involves unauthorized information. Law 16A defines specifically what information is authorized. Anything else is unauthorized. What are some examples of unauthorized information? You overhear a result at another table. The wrong pair starts play against you, and it is discovered during the auction.

When these happen, it is your obligation to summon the director immediately. The director will either assign an artificial adjusted score, or permit you to continue to play the hand, reserving the option to adjust the score.

The more troublesome forms of unauthorized information (UI) include extraneous things like Alerts by partner (when he shouldn't), explanation of Alerts by partner (when they are incorrect), non-Alerts by partner (when she should), and sometimes even questions partner asks the opponents. Additionally, there are times when partner's tempo is unusually slow or fast. When a player breaks tempo, or asks a question out of turn, it is an irregularity. Unlike some other irregularities, a director should not necessarily be summoned immediately. However, if you have reason to believe that this break in tempo or question is going to put your opponent in a difficult position, it is good to notify the director, first to establish facts, and second, to remind the recipient of UI about their obligations.

In and of themselves, none of these things are illegal. However, UI can put a burden on the partner of the person providing it. For example, you hold:

♠A K J x x ♥K Q x x ♦3 ♣K J 9.

You	LHO	Partner	RHO
1♠	Pass	2♣	Pass
3♥(1)	Pass	3♠(2)	Pass
?			

- (1) Game try or choice of strain?
- (2) Slow

If you had meant 3♥ as a game try, as many would, partner rejected the try. The fact that it was rejected slowly is unauthorized information. But perhaps you meant to bid game and offer an alternative strain. Sorry, but since there is no way to prove that (unless your system oddly carries only that specific meaning), you are stuck. Now if your hand were much stronger, so you had obviously intended 3♥ as a slam try, of course, you

may carry on to game.

Law 16B1 states: “Any extraneous information from partner that might suggest a call or play is unauthorized. This includes remarks, questions, replies to questions, unexpected Alerts or failures to Alert, unmistakable hesitation, unwonted speed, special emphasis, tone, gesture, movement or mannerism.

(a) A player may not choose a call or play that is demonstrably suggested over another by unauthorized information if the other call or play is a logical alternative.

(b) A logical alternative is an action that a significant proportion of the class of players in question, using the methods of the partnership, would seriously consider, and some might select.”

To use Edgar Kaplan's description of logical alternative, “Would it have been obviously foolish to pass, an egregious error, absurd? No, it wouldn't; pass would be right quite often.”

A similar hand was recently discussed on Bridge Winners:

♠— ♥A K Q 5 3 ♦A J 9 6 5 2 ♣A K

East was dealer, both vul:

West	North	East	South
		1♠	2♣
3♠	Pass	Pass	Dbl
Pass	4♥	Pass	4♣
Pass	5♥	Pass	?

As a bidding problem, probably most of you would press on. But it isn't automatically right (say partner had:

♠x x x x ♥x x x ♦x x ♣x x x x).

But when partner breaks tempo over both 3♠ and 4♣, doing what you were “always going to do” doesn't cut it. Pass is a logical alternative. Remember Kaplan: “Would it be obviously foolish to pass?” Hardly. To avoid this problem, you need to make a bid that incontrovertibly pushes you to 6♥ over 4♥ or give up on the grand and just bid 6♥ over 4♥, or find a partner who doesn't create problems in tempo-sensitive situations!

With East dealer and E-W vul, you hold this hand as North:

♠10 8 ♥Q J 4 ♦A K Q 8 7 2 ♣6 2

West	North	East	South
		Pass	Pass
1♠	2♦	Pass	Pass
Dbl	Pass	2♠	Pass (1)
Pass	?		

- (1) Break in tempo

This is a hand from an older NABC which the director got right and the appeals committee dropped the ball. This was from a single-session

matchpoint game, and North bid 3♦ which was passed out and made on time. One is tempted to bid 3♦ with the solid suit, but certainly risks disaster. As it happened, partner had a 3♦ bid the first time as well as the second, so all was well. But passing 2♣ is certainly a logical alternative here. You have no assurance of a diamond fit or any useful values from partner. In fact, you might be changing a plus to a minus by bidding.

After receiving UI from partner (break in tempo, missed Alert, body language), if one chooses an action that is judged to be suggested by the UI (perhaps by polling other players) when a logical alternative exists, the director must do two things. First, the director should determine if there is damage to the non-offending side (Law 16B3) and adjust the score as appropriate under Law 12C. If the director feels that offender's action, although not permitted, is normal for a player of this ability, then an adjustment could be made with no procedural penalty. However, if a player with the offender's level of expertise should have known that he was violating the Law, then the director should also penalize the offender per Law 73C2.

The reason that these violations are not fully remediated by simple restoration of equity using Law 12 is that players should be aware that when they cross that line two things will happen. The first is that they get the worst of equity, keeping their bad results and losing their good ones, but additionally possibly paying a score penalty (which does not accrue to the non-offenders).

Proper enforcement of these practices should reduce the frequency of players reflexively “doing what they were always going to do.”

The reason this is a “recorder” article is that we get many Player Memos about tempo. Some of those involve situations where UI leads to good “guesses,” and the director was never called. Obviously, the recorder can't adjust your score. But you also lose a great witness when the director isn't involved. Nonetheless, we investigate. If the action by the subject is one that they should have known was unlawful, we can be very stern, counseling at the least, and taking disciplinary action is quite possible, especially if the subject has had other similar incidents reported.

Notice to players

Each player must have an ACBL convention card filled out and on the table. Please note that other types of convention cards, such as the WBF convention card or homemade cards that do not sufficiently resemble the ACBL convention card, are not acceptable substitutes.



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