

Notes on Duplicate Bridge Etiquette

Although we seem to be living in a world where winning is paramount, for most of us playing bridge at NDBC on a Monday and Thursday afternoon is a pleasant way to catch up with friends and exercise any brains that we still have! One of the great things about duplicate bridge is that, in spite of the fact that it is highly competitive by design, there is an etiquette that moderates overtly competitive behaviour and creates an atmosphere of respect for both one's opponents and one's partner. These notes are intended to remind members of the key elements of bridge etiquette in the hope that they will make playing bridge at NDBC even more enjoyable.

Speed of Play

Just like chess and most sports time is a factor in duplicate bridge and play should be completed within the time allowed on the clock. Playing slowly could be seen as giving a player an unfair advantage by having more thinking time. Throughout the session bridge should be played "in tempo" which means that during both the bidding and play a natural rhythm is maintained. Taking excessive time to bid or agonizing over which card to play could be construed as indicating to your partner that you have a hand that has potential - especially if you pass after a long hesitation during the bidding.

Arriving at the Table

Say hello, and if necessary introduce yourself to visitors, when you arrive at the table. Before players take their cards North should check the Bridgemate read-out and confirm that the correct players and boards (in the correct order) are present. Players should check the board is correctly orientated; extract their hand, count their cards and then start the bidding.

Bidding

Decide on your bid before you touch the bidding box. Do not vacillate as to which bidding card to select as this could be conveying information to your partner. Bids of 1C or 1NT should be 'announced' by the partner of the bidder and the length of the 1C bid (eg two or more clubs) and the point range of 1NT (eg 12-14) indicated. Any special or non-natural bids should be 'alerted' by your partner and an explanation of the alert given if requested by your opponents. During the bidding, and only when it is your turn, you may ask the partner of the player making the bid for an explanation as to the meaning of that bid. At the end of the bidding leave the bidding cards exposed until the opening lead has been faced. Then return the bidding cards to the box and get ready to play.

Entering the Contract Details

As soon as the bidding is completed North should confirm the contract with the players and enter the details into the Bridgemate. Those who keep personal records should not let the completion of the record interfere with the speed of play ie if you are on lead make the lead before you update your personal record.

During the Play

To avoid playing out of turn the opening lead should always be made face down and agreement sought/questions asked before it is faced up. As dummy goes down it is customary for Declarer to thank their partner for the excellent quality of the cards being tabled! Once dummy is down then the player who is Dummy should make no attempt to play a card until instructed by Declarer.

During play please maintain the tempo and avoid unusual movements or facial expressions. In particular do not aggressively slap cards onto the table; sigh when your partner doesn't return your lead; hesitate when playing a singleton, or look to the heavens when your partner trumps your winner.

If there is any irregularity during play the Director should be called. And please note that the Director's decision at the table is final. If you believe that a wrong ruling has been made then you should raise any objection at the end of the session.

If Declarer can clearly see the outcome of the hand being played then they should claim and save time. However when claiming you must indicate your line of play (eg I'll draw the remaining two trumps, cross to dummy and cash the two winning hearts) Once the hand has been played all players should agree on the result before disturbing the 'tricks made/lost' on the table. North should then enter the result and have this verified by East/West who should carefully check the entry before 'accepting' the result.

At the Conclusion of Play

While it is acceptable for either party to compliment Declarer on a hand well played that should be the only comment that is made at the end of play.

Under no circumstances should you offer gratuitous advice on how the hand might have been better played and it is extremely uncomfortable for those at the table to hear you berating your partner on the inadequacy of either their bidding or play.

And, while the Bridgemate will show the percentage achieved and list the results of any particular board, it is unbecoming to gloat on the result or to brag on how effective your sacrifice bid turned out.

General Conduct

Please have regard for those around you at all times. If you finish your boards ahead of time please talk quietly so that those still playing can concentrate on the job in hand. If you are unable to resist the temptation to discuss the hand at the end of a round then do so politely and quietly as it may alert the players on an adjacent table that 7NT is makeable but not biddable when the boards arrive for the next round.

At the end of a round East/West should move the boards to the next lower table and then move quickly and quietly to the next higher table.

Finally, please remain seated until the electronic timer or the Director instructs players to move for the next round, and at the end of the session, please do not move or start packing up until the Director indicates that the session has ended.

.... and if you remember nothing else please - no post mortems at the table; always accept the Director's decision with good grace, and keep up with the clock!