

Playing the Wrong Cards



Probably the most common calls for the director are for an insufficient bid, for an opening lead out of turn or for a **revoke**. This may seem far fetched, but in my experience, there appears to be a “seasonal” element to them! As the weather starts to get colder there seems to be more insufficient bids. As spring comes around, players get a bit frisky, more enthusiastic and get ahead of themselves, so opening leads out of turn come to the fore. While around Christmas time, **revokes** seem to be all the rage. In this Yuletide spirit (even it is a Winter one in July) this month I will look at **revokes**.

What constitutes a revoke? There are many mistaken clichés which get spouted – “dummy can’t revoke”, “you can’t revoke at trick 12”. However, revoking is simply failing to follow suit when you could do so. Perhaps the reason for these misapprehensions is that in certain cases (such as the two mentioned) there is no penalty for the revoke. However, a revoke has still occurred and that is important for the correct application of the laws.

What is the procedure when a player revokes? Well, to start off, if your partner fails to follow suit, you have the right to immediately ask them if they really don’t have any of the suit. (“No clubs, partner?”) This applies to either defender, and also dummy – it is one of the few times during the hand when dummy can “pipe up” uninvited. If it turns out that the player could have followed suit, the director should be called and he will deal with it using the appropriate procedures under the laws.

But what about if partner doesn’t say anything and then you realise that you have revoked? You should say something straight away. The quicker you admit it, the less painful the consequences are likely to be for your side. Again, call the director. The reason why timing is of the essence is that up to a certain point, the director will allow you to correct the revoke. That means that you get to take back the card you played in error and follow suit. (If you are a defender, your original play becomes a penalty card.) You can correct a revoke up until the time a member of your side plays to the next trick. So, even if the trick has been quitted, all players have turned over their cards, and maybe even a lead has been made to the next trick, it may still not be too late to correct a revoke. In such a case, the director will get the players to turn over the cards from the previous trick, the revoke card is withdrawn and a card of the correct suit played. Cards played by other players after the revoke is corrected may, in most cases, be changed.

If you don’t realise in time, then the revoke is considered to have been “established” and the director will make a ruling at the end of the hand. “Established” revokes are subject to penalty, which involves the transfer of a trick or tricks from the offending pair to the other side. The important principle overlying all of the following is that you cannot lose any tricks which your side had won before the revoke happened. With that in mind, if the player who revoked took the revoke trick (that is, he trumped when he shouldn’t have and won the trick), the penalty is that trick plus one of any subsequent tricks won by the offending side – two tricks. In all other cases, the penalty for an established revoke is one trick (provided, of course, that the offending side won a trick on or after the revoke trick).

Note that the penalty for an established revoke applies no matter whether or not the revoke had any effect on the hand. For instance, dummy has ♣ AKQJ109 while you, as declarer, hold ♣ 32. On ♣A you play ♣2, on ♣K you play ♦3 and on ♣Q you play ♣3 – there has been an established revoke and your side will be subject to a one trick penalty. This does seem harsh, but the director has no power to waive the penalty.

Finally, there may be cases where the penalty for the revoke is insufficient to compensate the non-offenders. For example, look at this hand:

Dealer West, NS vulnerable

♠ 42	
♥ A73	
♦ 106532	
♣ 1074	
♠ KQJ10873	♠ 65
♥ J85	♥ Q10964
♦ 8	♦ A7
♣ 85	♣ QJ96
♠ A9	
♥ K2	
♦ KQJ94	
♣ AK32	

South plays 3NT after West has opened ♠S. The opening lead is ♠K which South correctly ducks. On the spade continuation, East discards ♥4!, while South wins the ace. Declarer must play on diamonds to get to nine tricks. East takes the ace and leads his “carefully preserved” ♠5, so West gets to cash five more spades for two down. The director is called for the revoke and applies the penalties. The offending side did not win the revoke trick but did win subsequent tricks, and therefore, as you may have surmised from above, the penalty is one trick. That means declarer is now one off. But if we have a look at the hand more closely, we will see that if East had not revoked, he wouldn’t have had a spade to get back to West after winning the ace of diamonds. Declarer would have made four diamond tricks, two hearts, two clubs and a spade – for nine tricks and his contract. This is clearly unfair. In such a case, the laws give the director the right to award an adjusted score – that is, the score which would most likely have been achieved had the revoke not occurred, NS + 600.

There are a few other instances where this law may be applied. These include a revoke by dummy. The laws specifically say that there is no penalty for a revoke by dummy. However, the director still has the responsibility to adjust the score to what would have happened had dummy not revoked.

Similarly, there is a time limit after which revokes are no longer subject to penalty – after the end of the round, or when a member of the non-offenders makes a call on the subsequent board. Sometimes, for instance, you may not notice that there has been a revoke until you see the hand records at the end of the session. Say, for instance, that one of your opponents had trumped your ace on the opening lead and then cashed ace of trumps – you claim the rest and enter the result as making 11. When you see the hand record, you discover that the player actually had a singleton in the suit they ruffed. (Typically, the defender has got a card stuck behind another and hasn’t realised what he has done.) Had the revoke been discovered at the time, there would have been a penalty of two tricks. (A revoke is the only way to make thirteen tricks when missing the ace of trumps!) However, the time for revoke penalties has expired, so all the director can do is adjust to the likely result without the revoke. That is, just losing to the ace of trumps – 12 tricks.

** When a revoke occurs at Trick 12, the Laws require that the Director go back and get the players to replay the last two tricks with no revoking. The only time that there would be any change to this result would be if the offending player’s partner in deciding what to play at Trick 12 in some way benefited from the knowledge of partner’s last cards. That is very rarely the case.