

At the Start of a Round – Pre-Alerts

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I have had a few requests to explain “pre-alerting” which is part of the *ABF Alerting Regulations*. These are relevant at pretty much all Club, Congress, State and National events. At the start of each round (in a pairs event) or match (in swiss pairs or teams events), when you sit down to play against new opponents, there are several things which should happen:

First, you should find out what general system your opponents are playing. Easiest of course is if you just tell each other. In the great majority of cases, this will probably take no more than a second or two. For instance, “5 card majors, better minor, 15-17 no-trump” may be all you need to say.

The second part of the pre-alerting stage are the actual pre-alerts. Let me start by saying that for most pairs the number of pre-alerts they will need to make is zero. Pre-alerts are those parts of your system which are highly unusual. The opponents are likely to need to discuss them and to come to some agreements before play starts. Note that a pre-alert may include some calls which nevertheless are going to be alerted should they come up.

Here, for instance, is a list of agreements which, if you use any of them, you need to inform the opponents before you start play:

- transfer pre-empts (eg. a 3♦ opening which shows a heart pre-empt)
- transfer responses to 1♣
- highly unusual two-level openings (eg. CRO twos)
- canapé-style bidding (ie. an agreement where the second suit you bid could be longer than the first suit)
- unusual doubles (for example, doubles of one level bids which are for penalty or which show a specific suit, rather than takeout as would normally be expected)
- very unusual methods over opponents’ no-trump openings (eg. double shows clubs!)

This list is not exhaustive. You may also have your own special agreements which the opponents may not have encountered before. You need to include these in your list of pre-alerts.

There is one other particular agreement which you may need to be careful to include in your pre-alerts. That relates to card play methods. Again, it is only if you play very unusual methods that this needs to be mentioned. For example, if you and your partner consistently lead low from a doubleton, the opponents need to know this before you start.

As I said before, for most pairs the pre-alert stage will take up hardly any time at all. If however you and your partner do have some highly unusual treatments, you should make sure the opponents know before you start. ❗

Pre-alerts are those parts of your system which are highly unusual. This includes also your card play methods.

