

A Quick Look At The Rules, Part 2: Be The Best Dummy You Can Be

As dummy, you do not have to do anything once you have properly (see the next paragraph) put down your hand. It's your chance to rest, visit the facilities, or grab a snack. Customarily, though, we remain at the table to play the cards declarer calls for. What else may you do? What can't you do? And what difference does it make how you put down your hand? This week we'll deal with these questions, the rules dealing with dummy's rights, and how good dummy play can make a difference to one's partner.

Duplicate law 41 requires that dummy be placed on the table divided into suits with the cards sorted in columns by rank, arranged to point lengthwise toward declarer. If there is a trump suit, it should be on dummy's right.

Once play begins, dummy may keep track of tricks, play cards called for by declarer, and prevent a revoke or any other irregularity by the declarer. After play is over, dummy may call attention to an irregularity by a defender, may summon the director, and may, at any point in the play or afterward, "give information in the Director's presence as to fact or law." See the complete Law 42.

By the way, dummy does have the right to see cards as they are played and may ask a defender to show a card that the dummy could not see. (Mike Flader, ACBL rules guru, says this should not be a case of not paying attention, and it should not be done with the intent of influencing play.) When you are defending, hold a played card so all at the table can see it before it is turned over.

Here's what you *can't* do as dummy:

1. Touch or play a card not called for by the declarer.
2. Call attention during the play to an irregularity by a defender.
3. Make any comment on the play of the hand to declarer as it is going on.
4. Summon the director (unless another player is the first to call attention to an irregularity).
5. Look at declarer's hand or leave your seat to watch the play of the hand.
6. Of your own initiative, look at a defender's hand.

What happens if you do any of these things? If you do 5 or 6, you lose the right to speak up when declarer is about to lead from the wrong hand, the right to ask if he has revoked, and the right *at any time* to be the first to point out an irregularity by a defender. If you do number 4, the director cannot act on the matter for which you summoned him other than to issue an adjusted score if the defenders benefit from the otherwise unpunished irregularity. See Law 43.

The penalties for numbers 1-3 are more general, but they are also more severe. The director may choose to award an adjusted score, deduct points from dummy's partnership's or team's overall score, suspend a player from all ACBL-sponsored events, or some combination of all three—so don't do these things! See Law 90.

Finally, does it make any difference how you arrange the suits in dummy, other than trumps? While it's true that you don't have to alternate suit colors and that there are no other rules on the subject beyond those discussed above, the following example of my poor dummy play shows how it can matter where a suit goes.

North (partner)	East	South (me)	West
1♥	Pass	2♣	Pass
2NT	Pass	3NT	Pass
Pass	Pass		

My hand: ♠Q85 ♥95 ♦J9 ♣AKQ954

Of course, I put my clubs down first. After all, I was quite proud of all the lovely tricks I had there for my partner. The opening lead was a spade, partner won in hand with the king and played the top 2 clubs, all following, and I waited for the next club to be played so the discarding could begin. But partner now led the 9 of hearts (Crafty, I thought, to set up those overtricks in hearts before running the clubs.). My RHO won and led the spade ace and then another to the board's queen. Partner led a heart to the ace and then...well, you can see it coming...asked me to "trump small." The defenders captured that trick, cashed a couple of spades, and then did us dirty in diamonds (no, partner didn't have the other club, either).

This was not our finest hour, but I learned a valuable lesson: when I'm dummy in a no trump contract, I should never put my longest suit down first. My responsibility is to do all that I can ethically and non-verbally to help partner realize we are *not* in a suit contract. And it must work, since this sort of mix up has never occurred in the same way since.

My partner has another idea to help declarer. When we are in a no trump contract, she puts down last the suit that was led. That way, if I can't later recall the opening lead, I have a "jog" for my memory if I just look at the dummy. If you have tips of your own to add, Email to the address on the home page or see me at the game.

Good luck with your bridge this week and remember to be a good dummy!