

My Partner Didn't Alert - What Now?

Unless you and your partner quit playing bridge immediately, you will inevitably run into the situation in which one of you fails to alert, or announce, a conventional bid. What should you do if this happens? Panicking is not an option.

Let's look at some alert basics. The ACBL does not make it easy for you with their use of "fuzzy" terminology in defining what must be alerted, but their web site does give you some good basic information. **You need to read this information!** Begin here:

<http://www.acbl.org/play/alertprocedures.html>. You should also study the ACBL's current convention card: <http://web2.acbl.org/documentlibrary/play/newss1131.pdf>. It will help you identify the bids that must be alerted or announced. Instructions for filling out the convention card may be found here: <http://web2.acbl.org/documentlibrary/play/howtofilloutcc2.htm>.

You and your partner are responsible for knowing your system and the conventions you must alert. Although opponents are also expected to protect themselves, failure to alert a conventional bid may constitute misinformation, and if opponents are thereby damaged, a director may award an adjusted score. **Ignorance is no excuse.** Whenever you add a new convention to your bidding arsenal, it's a good idea to check with a director about the necessity of alerting that bid.

There are four types of alerts:

- ♣ It's not likely that you and your partner use a system that requires a *pre-alert*. These alerts are given before the auction on the first board of each round, and are only required for those systems in which opponents may need to make special preparations.
- ♣ The *immediate alert* is an alert your partner gives when you make a conventional bid (or *vice versa*). As the name implies, this alert is given immediately. Like all alerts, it's given for the opponents' benefit, not to wake up the partner. Bids requiring an alert appear in *red* on your convention card.
- ♣ There are several bids that you or your partner must *announce*. These bids include, but are not limited to, your opening 1NT range, major suit transfers after no trump openings, and forcing 1NT responses to major suit openings. Bids that should be announced appear in *blue* on your convention card.
- ♣ A few conventions require a *delayed alert*, an alert that is made at the end of the auction, but before the opening lead is made. Like pre-alerts, it's unlikely you are now playing any of these conventions.

According to ACBL regulations, "*If partner fails to Alert or Announce, a player may not make any indication during the auction. Showing surprise or discomfort may awaken partner to the error and would be a violation of Law. In addition, a player may not make allowances for*

partner's error. The auction must continue as if partner had acted properly." What does this mean in practice? An example may help.

Partner opens the bidding, "1NT," and you properly announce, "15 - 17." Your RHO passes and you bid, "2H." LHO passes and your partner bids, "3H." Oh, no! Your partner did not say, "Transfer." Maybe partner forgot that your 2H bid shows at least five spades, not hearts. What do you do?

- ♣ First, you do not indicate in any way that partner forgot to make the announcement. You do not squirm, and you do not frown or look surprised.
- ♣ Second, all your bids must be made as if partner had alerted or announced properly, even if you end up in a bad contract. You are allowed to make corrections based on authorized information, but you may not correct based on partner's failure to alert or announce. Is this easy? No, and it's very subjective. Don't take it personally if the opponents, the director, or a committee fail to agree with your logic.

♠AJTxx	♠JTxxx	♠AQTxx	♠Kxxxxx
♥xxx	♥QJT	♥Axx	♥Kxx
♦xxx	♦Kx	♦Axxx	♦xx
♣xx	♣QTx	♣x	♣xx

What would you bid with each of these hands if partner failed to announce your transfer bid? To answer this, determine what you would bid if partner *did* announce the transfer. Although some partnerships have defined what partner's 3H bid would mean, it's likely you and your partner don't have an agreement. Could the bid mean partner has four hearts? Heart controls? A bad doubleton in hearts? Regardless of your answer to this question, you must assume that partner's bid shows spade support and a maximum hand. The bid has forced the partnership to the three-level, despite partner's lack of knowledge of your hand's strength. Make your subsequent bids based on this assumption, not the knowledge that partner failed to announce your transfer bid.

- ♣ **Finally, you are required to tell the opponents that there was a failure to alert or announce.** (1) If your side is declaring the contract, this statement must be made before the opening lead is made. (2) If your side is defending the contract, this statement must be made after the hand is over. By the way, it is improper to leave the table to talk to the director in these situations - but we may let you get away with it in the EZ Game.

Let's look at this situation from the opponents' point of view. You're all set to make the opening lead when an opponent says, "There was a failure to alert." Unless you're already aware of the situation, it's in your best interest to **call the director**. You knew that was coming, didn't you? Remember, when an irregularity happens at your table and you fail to call the director immediately, it is assumed that you have given up any rights to protection you and your partner may have.