

Claims

by Bob Gruber

Law #

A clear, concise claim is appreciated by all. The other players don't have to ponder needlessly and play is expedited. Unfortunately, far too often, the claim is inappropriate and play is prolonged past the point of just playing out the hand. And of course, you commonly hear, "Play it out! Let's just play it out!!"

Law 68D is clear that once a claim or concession is made, playing it out is no longer an option. 68D states that all play ceases. The Law further states: "A claim should be accompanied at once by a clear statement as to the order in which cards will be played, or the line of play or defense through which the claimer proposes to win the tricks claimed."

If no clarification statement is given, a non-claimer may ask for one, pointing out that it is required by Law 68C. It is, after all, not your job to determine the claimer's line of play. Also, you should make a habit of always requiring a statement. If you only do it when you have an outstanding trump, you'll be tipping declarer off to that fact.

If done properly, claiming saves time and energy. When a table is behind, conceding tricks that must be lost and claiming the rest with proper statements will get everyone caught up and back on track.

What is the proper way to claim? When you can take the rest of the tricks and you are on lead, face your hand and state your line of play. Be specific. If there are any trumps out, be certain to mention that and how you plan to deal with them. Leave the cards out for inspection until both opponents agree to the claim.

If the claim or concession is doubted by any player (dummy included), the Director must be summoned immediately and Law 70 applies. No action may be taken pending the Director's arrival. First, the Director requires the claimer to repeat the clarification statement made at the time of the claim. Next, the Director hears the opponents' objections to the claim and determines whether the claim is valid or not. The Director may require all players to face their remaining cards.

In the absence of a clarification statement or an insufficient statement—such as "I've got the rest"—the Director should not accept a successful line of play not in accord with the original clarification statement if there is a less successful, alternative line of play that is normal but careless or inferior for the class of player involved.

In adjudicating the claim as equitably as possible, the Director resolves any doubtful points against the claimer. If the claim is not valid, any tricks that could have been lost by any normal line of play will be awarded to the opponents. "Normal" play includes play that is careless or inferior for the class of player involved, but not irrational. For instance, in pulling trumps, the Director assumes the claimer would do so from the top down.¹

The more you play, the more you will claim. Just wait until you win the current trick, face your hand completely and take the time to clearly state the exact order of play of the remaining cards. Play is now over and the Director will help both sides with any problems arising from a contested claim, including a request to "Play it out."

¹ Possible misconceptions on various options in penalty situations are covered on the next page.

Contested Claim or Concession

Law 70D. 1. “The Director shall not accept from claimer any successful line of play not embraced in the original clarification statement if there is an alternative **normal*** line of play that would be less successful.”

“* For the purposes of Laws 70 and 71, “**normal**” includes play that would be **careless** or **inferior** for the class of player involved.”

Note that careless or inferior does not include playing a card that is a known loser when known winners are available to play. Nor does it include play that is just plain silly.

For an unstated line of play, claimer may be denied taking a finesse unless: a) it was already a marked finesse, b) would become a marked finesse with “**normal**” line of play, or c) it would be irrational not to take the finesse, e.g. a successful finesse is the only path to make the contract.

Further note that none of the laws concerned with claims or concessions allow a non-claimer to specify play of a particular card or even a particular suit by the claimer.

Director, He Claimed and I’ve Got a Trump

Many players labor under the misconception that a defender holding an unaccounted for trump when a claim is made automatically entitles his/her side to trick. That’s not true. It’s not sufficient in and of itself. Law 70 tells us three (3) conditions must be met:

1. the claimer made no statement about that trump, and
2. it is likely the claimer was unaware of the remaining trump in an opponent’s hand at the time of the claim, and
3. a trick could be lost to that trump by any normal play as defined in the section above

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The cause of the misconception may be that many non-claimers seem to be unaware of condition #3.

Requiring Dummy to Play a Particular Card

Normally, only declarer specifies the card to play from dummy. However, if declarer says words to the effect of “play anything,” either defender may call a specific card from dummy. That card cannot constitute a revoke, but other than that, anything goes.

Lead Directing Options

There are basically two (2) situations in which lead directing options apply:

1. opening lead out of turn
2. defender to lead when defender’s partner has a penalty card (or cards—see the next Section, Multiple Penalty Cards)

In both of these situations, it is **declarer** and only declarer who has lead directing options. Declarer may require (1 time only) or forbid the lead of a predetermined suit (the one that was led out of turn), but not a specific card.

Multiple Penalty Cards

Law 51

If a defender has multiple penalty cards that can legally be played to the current trick, declarer may designate which card shall be played.

If a defender is to lead when defender's partner has penalty cards in more than 1 suit, declarer may require the lead (1 time only) of one of those suits. The penalty cards in that suit are no longer penalty cards and are picked up. Alternatively, declarer may prohibit the lead of one **or more** of those suits. All penalty cards in the prohibited suit(s) are no longer penalty cards and are picked up.