

Misunderstood Laws – Alerting

It is an essential principle of the game of bridge that you may not have secret agreement with partner, either in bidding or play. Your agreement must be fully available and fully disclosed to your opponents.

The laws of bridge allow the individual bridge regions to make their own policy on alerting. Zone 7 (Australia and New Zealand) has established their own set of alerting regulations and these are available on the ABF and QBA web sites.

Some bids are specifically non-alertable (and should not be alerted even if they convey a special meaning).

These are:

- All bids beyond 3NT (the exception is any opening bid that is not natural e.g. a 4D opening which is a weak spade hand, sometimes referred to as “Namyats”)
- A cue bid (defined as any bid in the same denomination bid or shown by an opponent)
- Doubles and redoubles
- 2C in response to 1NT opening bid in an uncontested auction, no matter what the meaning

Examples

The regulations go on to provide some examples of common bids that are **alertable**:

- 1C opening where the club holding may be as few as 2 (ie a short club)
- Relays e.g. a 2D waiting bid after a 2C opening
- Transfer requests
- Transfer acceptances if the receiver has different ways of accepting a transfer e.g. super accepts
- Bids that show 2 suits even if one of the suits is shown e.g. opening bid of 2S showing spades and minor

- All responses to a Stayman ask, except 2H / 2S when Simple Stayman is being used
- Jump response that is weak and non-forcing e.g. 1D – 2H
- Any free bid (i.e. non-forcing) as responder's first bid when a non-passed hand
- A "pass or correct" bid
- Other less common examples – 4th suit forcing, splinters below 3NT, Jacoby style responses, a natural NT bid that may not promise a stopper in the immediate seat, pass-out seat 1NT bid.

These bids are **not alertable**:

- Transfer accepts if bidder has no option as to how to accept
- Giving a suit preference even if the bidder may not have a natural holding in the suit (e.g. 2NT by partner (alertable) showing the minors, 3C by you preferring clubs over diamonds is not alertable)
- Jump response that is strong and forcing
- Natural weak 2-level or higher opening bids or jump overcalls where only the actual suit is shown

How to alert

Alerting is done by circling your partner's bid and saying "alert". Both of these things must be done. It's actually to your advantage to say "alert" as soon as partner makes the bid even before you have circled it – if you're a bit slow to move your hand to the bidding pad and an opponent makes their bid and then requests a change because of a supposed late alert, having said "alert" as soon as the bid was made is your protection.

If your partner forgets to alert, do not say anything at the time, but keep bidding as though the alert was made. The opponents should be advised of the failure to alert either at the end of bidding if your side is declaring, or at the end of the hand if your side is defending. The director should be called if damage may have resulted.

Pre-alerts and delayed alerts

Pre-alerts are conventions that your opponents would be entitled to know if they came up, but you are unable to alert them during the bidding, for example, any self-alerting bids like cue bids or doubles. These should be announced at the

start of the round. Your NT range should always be part of your pre-alert. An example would be “we play 15-17 no trumps and have a weak redouble”. There is also provision on your system card for pre-alerts.

Such items usually give rise to delayed alerts. The declaring side should offer a full explanation of the bidding to the opponents at the completion of the auction, especially regarding self-alerting calls and unalerted calls over 3NT. Matters of partnership style should also be raised here. Examples are “4NT is a keycard ask in spades and partner is showing 2 aces without the spade queen” or “partner’s 3H bid shows a weakish raise as we have other methods to show a strong heart raise”.

In summary, (with some exceptions) you alert any bid that is not natural or has an unexpected systemic meaning that might not be apparent to your opponents. The principle is that an opponent is entitled to know as much about the meaning of your bidding (and play for that matter) as does your partner.