



Dummy's Rights, Limitations and Obligations

by Bob Gruber

The ACBL has several laws specific to Dummy's Rights, Limitations and Obligations. Since Dummy's Rights may be altered by violation of Dummy's Limitations, limitations are discussed first.

Dummy's Limitations

As dummy, do NOT:

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| | Law # |
| 1. Initiate a Director Call during play unless one of the other 3 players has drawn attention to an irregularity. | 43A1a |
| 2. Call attention to an irregularity <u>during play</u> . | 9A3 43A1b |
| 3. Participate in or comment on play: | 43A1c |
| a. Do wait for declarer to call a card from dummy, | |
| b. Do not touch or indicate any card for play to a trick. | |
| If a violation occurs, the Director should be called immediately. If the Director rules the act was a suggestion to declarer, the Director may assign an adjusted score if the defenders were damaged by the play suggested. A good way to avoid a violation here is to get in the habit of keeping your hands in your lap whenever you're dummy. | 45F |
| 4. Exchange hands with declarer—even as the presumed dummy. Penalties may apply. | 43A2a |
| 5. Leave your seat to watch declarer's play of the hand. Penalties may apply. | 43A2b |
| 6. Look at the face of a card in either defender's hand on your <u>own initiative</u> . Penalties may apply. | 43A2c |

The Director may impose procedural penalties for any violation of the above restrictions on dummy. Typically, such a penalty is 3 matchpoints per violation or ¼ of a board, but the Director has discretion as to the size of the penalty. In addition to matchpoint penalties, specific penalties apply in 3 specific situations subsequent to violations of any of 4, 5, and 6 just cited. **90**

Situation 1: If dummy, after violation of any of 4-6, warns declarer not to lead from the wrong hand, either defender (without consultation with the other) may choose the hand from which declarer must lead. This penalty applies for each occurrence during the hand being played. **43B2a**

Situation 2: If dummy, after violation of any of 4-6, is the first to ask declarer if a play from declarer's hand constitutes a revoke, declarer must substitute a correct card if the play was illegal, and the 1-trick / 2-trick penalty provisions of an established revoke (Law 64) apply. **43B2b**

Situation 3: If dummy, after violation of any of 4-6, is the first to draw attention to a defender's irregularity, no penalty shall be imposed. If the defenders benefit thereby, the Director shall award an adjusted score to both sides to restore equity. **43B3**

In addition to these explicit limitations, various sections of the law book imply other restrictions on dummy—restrictions that may bring procedural penalties. For instance, as dummy do NOT:

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| Ask for a review of the auction, | 41B |
| Request an explanation of a specific bid, | 41B |
| Request an explanation or extended explanation of the defenders' carding agreements, | |
| Ask or state the contract on your <u>own initiative</u> , | 41C |
| Ask a defender about a possible revoke <u>during play</u> . | 9A3 43A1b |



Although not strictly part of the laws, there are ethical considerations that limit dummy’s actions. For instance, if declarer clearly calls for a low trump, apparently not noticing the high trump played by the defender in front of dummy, dummy must play the called card smoothly and without hesitation. It is not dummy’s right to delay to permit declarer to see the error of his way. Nor should dummy do a double take, have a hitch in reaching for the card or ask for a restatement of the called card if dummy clearly heard declarer’s request; that too, may be an attempt to “wake up” declarer. All of these ploys are less obvious than simply asking, “Are you sure you want to do that?” but they are no less unethical. Dummy should play the called card smoothly and in tempo no matter how foolish the play may be[†].

When Does Dummy Become Dummy

The restrictions just listed prompt the question: when does dummy become dummy? In my view, for purpose of these laws, dummy is officially dummy when the face-down opening lead is turned over and the next player faces one or more cards as dummy. If it was a lead out of turn and the person facing one or more cards as dummy was the presumed declarer by the auction, he has effectively stated that he will be the dummy and he must spread his entire hand.

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Dummy’s Rights

Having covered dummy’s limitations and possible penalties, we turn to dummy’s rights. Dummy may/should:

1. Play dummy’s cards as instructed by declarer. 42A3
2. Keep track/count of tricks won and lost. 42A2
3. Draw attention to a card pointed incorrectly, but only before the lead to the next trick is made. If done later, Law 16B on Unauthorized Information may apply. 65B3
4. Ask declarer (but only declarer) about a possible revoke. 42B1
5. Attempt to prevent an irregularity by declarer, e.g. by pointing out which hand is on lead. If declarer has already played/called from the “wrong” hand, it’s a played card and it’s too late for dummy to point out the “wrong” hand led to the trick. 42B2
6. Give information, in the presence of the Director, as to fact or law. 42A1
7. Draw attention to any irregularity after play of the hand. Objecting to a claim or concession is permitted. By law, play ceases after a claim or concession, so dummy may object and call the Director. 9A3 42B3

To ensure these rights, dummy is entitled to see the cards played by declarer and both defenders. If someone plays or turns a card in such a manner that dummy does not have a chance to see it, dummy may ask for it to be faced before the next trick is played.

Dummy’s Obligations

No treatise on Dummy would be complete without mention of dummy’s obligations. The law book identifies some specific obligations.

1. At the start of each hand, all players count their cards face down to be sure of holding exactly 13. 7B

[†] Let’s say dummy has violated the ethical cannons. Now the ethical spotlight shifts to declarer. Declarer should insist that the card he unobservantly called be played. Declarer knows whether it was a true slip of the tongue or a lapse in concentration. If the latter, the only ethical thing to do is to play the card originally called.



2. After the final pass, if a review of the bidding is incorrectly given, all players, including the presumed dummy, are responsible for prompt correction of the misstatement(s). 20E
3. If during the auction, the eventual, presumed declarer gives a mistaken explanation of a bid or bids, then after the final pass but before the opening lead is faced, the presumed dummy should call the Director and must volunteer a correction of the mis-explanation. If the Director determines the defenders were damaged, an adjusted score will be awarded. 75B
4. After the opening lead is faced, dummy spreads his hand on the table, face-up, sorted into suits in columns pointed toward declarer, with cards in order of rank with lowest nearest declarer. Trumps, if any, are placed to dummy's right. 41D
5. After play has finished, all players, including dummy, shuffle their original 13 cards and place them in the proper pocket in the board. 7C

Summary

In broad terms, we summarize by saying that once dummy becomes dummy, during the play of the hand, he may make limited, discrete inquiries of declarer to prevent an irregularity, may ask to see a card if it was hidden from his view when played, and may also provide factual information during a Director Call. Otherwise, dummy remains mute while playing dummy's cards as directed by declarer. When play ends, dummy has full rights to call attention to any irregularity that occurred during the play and to call the Director to seek redress for any violation(s) of the laws.

P.S. Many players have the mistaken idea that everyone is responsible for dummy. Not true. Only the declaring side is responsible for dummy. If dummy has revoked, the revoke rectifications of Law 64 apply.

The misconception about everyone being responsible for dummy may have arisen from a revoke by dummy when the revoke card was face up on the table and visible. In that circumstance, there is no rectification. Players may have mistaken the "no rectification" rule as "everyone is responsible for dummy." But even with no rectification, if the Director deems the non-offending side was damaged, he should assign an adjusted score.