

Changes to the ABF and BAWA Alert Procedures

As of August 1 2013 there will be two significant changes to the current alerting procedures and both of these changes will have an impact upon the average club player.

The first is that when a player opens the bidding with 1♣, his partner will no longer need to alert it. This is irrespective of whether the 1♣ opening is natural or conventional. Instead the responder will be required to make a prescribed statement (otherwise termed an 'Announcement').

From the new regulations:

It is the responsibility of the responder to make a prescribed statement (otherwise termed an 'Announcement') whenever their partner opens either 1C or a natural 1NT. The form of the announcement required varies depending upon the nature of the opening bid:

(a) Announcements required after a 1♣ opening:

- For Natural-type systems (e.g. Acol or Standard), the appropriate minimum length of the club suit (i.e. "1+", "2+", "3+", "4+") should be announced.
- For Strong Club systems (e.g. Precision or Moscito); the word "Strong" together with the minimum HCP holding (i.e. "16+") should be announced.
- For system options other than those above (e.g. a Polish 1C, which has multiple meanings), the word "Unusual" should be used.

(b) Announcements required after a natural 1NT opening:

- The appropriate HCP range (e.g. "12-14" or "15-17" etc.) should be announced.

All announcements should be made in a consistent manner using the prescribed terminology. Alternative designations are not permitted."

It is the responsibility of the Responder to make the announcement whenever their partner opens either 1♣ or 1NT. Either call will now trigger the prescribed announcement, or in the case of a conventional 1♣, the announcement will replace the current requirement to alert. These are the only two calls that will lead to an announcement, the Alert Regulations remain unchanged in respect all other actions.

After any announcement, the opponents will still be able to ask supplementary questions, however hopefully the basic information already conveyed will obviate much of that need. A side benefit of this new approach is that many of the problems currently created due to inopportune (and sometimes pointed) enquiries will now disappear.

Another major positive is that announcements will lead to a better level of disclosure than was previously possible. Up until now the task of providing adequate levels of disclosure has been quite difficult for those partnerships employing either a variable 1NT or for those using a quite different system in 3rd and 4th seat. A reduction in the likelihood of any opposition confusion about the methods being employed (and the agreed countermeasures) should be a benefit to all concerned. The Laws relating to mistaken explanations and unauthorised information will still however apply to incorrect announcements in the same way that they currently apply to incorrect Alerts.

Since these new procedures represent a significant change in approach, it is to be expected that some players will need time to adjust. Consequently, Directors will be encouraged to exercise suitable tolerance in respect to inadvertent non-compliance and this will continue until most of the players become familiar with the newly promulgated procedures.

Announcements have been used in both England and the United States for a number of years and it is felt that the above application of the same approach will also be beneficial in Australia.