



Stop Cards – the case for and against.

Stop cards were introduced in NZ in 2007 in an effort to reduce the unauthorised information passed to partners when there was a skip bid. Skip bids often lead to a pause by the next player in turn while they consider the meaning of the skip and what implications that has for them looking at their hand.

At that time, they were mandated for use in many international jurisdictions including the WBF, EBL, EBU, ACBL and ABF.

There was some opposition to their introduction in NZ, but they were eventually accepted by the majority of players.

Current International Regulations

World Bridge Federation

The World Bridge Federation's regulations mandate the use of Stop Cards when playing when screens are not in use.

'Before making a skip bid a player should place the Stop Card on the table in the left hand opponent's clear view, then make the call, and remove the Stop card after 8 to 10 seconds. LHO should not call until the Stop card has been removed.'

If the Stop card has been removed hastily or has not been used, an opponent should pause as though the Stop card has been used correctly.'

<http://www.worldbridge.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Playing-and-entering-scores-when-screens-are-not-in-use.pdf>

English Bridge Union

The EBU mandate the use of Stop Cards

Use of the STOP Card

Before making a jump bid (i.e. a bid at a higher level than the minimum in that denomination) a player should place the Stop card in front of them, place their call at once, and then eventually remove the Stop card. Their LHO should not call until the Stop card has been removed.

The Stop card should be left on the table for about ten seconds, to give the next player time to reflect. It should not be removed prematurely.

After a jump bid, the next player MUST pause for about ten seconds before calling. It is an offence either not to pause or to show indifference when pausing. If the Stop card has been removed prematurely or has not been used, an opponent should nevertheless pause as though the Stop card had been used correctly.

If a Stop card is taken from the box no call has been made until the card for the actual bid is taken out. Thus a player who has pulled out the Stop card is entitled to change their mind and make a call which is not a jump bid. Also a Stop card played out of turn is not a call out of turn, and the player can make any legal call when it reaches their turn. Unauthorised information is available to partner in either case?

<https://www.ebu.co.uk/documents/laws-and-ethics/blue-book/blue-book.pdf>

American Contract Bridge League

The ACBL mandate that Stop Cards and skip bid visual or verbal warnings should not be used although they then mandate the play next in-line must pause for approximately 10 secs while studying their hand as if to consider what action they may take.

‘Section 3 – Skip Bids

- 3.1 *The Stop Card should not be used.*
- 3.2 *No verbal or visual skip-bid warning should be used.*
- 3.3 *Following a jump in the bidding, left-hand opponent is obligated to wait approximately 10 seconds (while giving the appearance of studying his hand and not in excess time to determine a choice o bids) before making a call.’*

<https://web2.acbl.org/codification/Codification.pdf>

Australian Bridge Federation

The ABF has a definition for Stop Cards in their Tournament Regulations but no further reference in the body of the document.

Stop Card A stop card is a card used during the auction by a player about to make a “skip bid” to warn his left-hand opponent of his impending action.

<https://abfevents.com.au/events/tournregs/ABFTournamentRegs2024.pdf>

European Bridge League

There is no reference to skip-bids nor Stop Cards in their current regulations.

The case for Stop Cards

Stop Cards, if used properly, will reduce the likelihood of unauthorised information being passed from the left-hand opponent (LHO) of the player making the skip board. They are forced to pause for approximately 10 secs before making a call and therefor the partner is unable to take any inference from that pause (hesitation).

If a player fails to use the Stop Cars when making a skip bid then what ever action LHO takes passes information to their partner. If they pass in tempo then they have nothing to consider but if they pause for thought, then there is something to think about.

This use of the Stop Card is dependent on the players understanding the purpose of the card and to adhere to their correct use every time they are used.

The case against Stop Cards

There are numerous ways in which Stop Cards are used inappropriately.

Some partnerships believe that their purpose is to alert each other about when they have made a skip board. *‘Sorry partner, I didn’t notice the Stop Card when you made the jump’*

It seems that some players may use the stop card to indicate that they are at the top of the range for their bid. This is difficult to prove but there are numerous reports of the Stop Card being placed in front of LHO, then withdrawn and the player makes a simple raise of partner's suit. They have a hand that is borderline for a simple jump raise.

LHOs often push the card away and make their call before the mandatory pause has occurred, thereby giving the partner unauthorised information (UI),

Many players use them intermittently, sometimes using them and sometimes not. This can be unintentional but there is the possibility that this behaviour could be used to signal.

Current International Situation

WBF

The WBF mandates the use of Stop Cards when not playing behind screens. I understand that the last event not played behind screens was a Youth event in 2008.

EBU

The regulation quoted above is in the latest version of their Blue book and I assume that this is their current practice. I have no evidence to the contrary.

ACBL

The regulation quoted above is current practice in North America since 2017.

ABF

Laurie Kelso sent me the following comment regarding the situation in Australia.

“The ABF retains a reference to them in the General Regs, but none of the Supplementary Regulations of any of our events currently authorise their use. Also, most of our Tournament Organisers (and many of our players) actively resist moves to re-instate them”

EBL

There is no reference to their use in their regulations. Both the WBF and EBL now use electronic bidding for the major events. I am unable to find out whether the software highlights a skip bid in any way.

Summary

Stop Cards, if used appropriately, are a valuable tool in preventing UI being created and used to advantage.

Current use in NZ is not appropriate and there incorrect use, in itself, is creating UI.

Internationally, many jurisdictions have abandoned their use. One exception being the English Bridge Union. There may be other non-English speaking NBOs that mandate their use.

In Zone 7, the ABF still reference Stop Cards in their Tournament Regulations but their use is not authorised by any of their Tournament Organisers.

Recommendation

NZ Bridge should remove the mandate that Stop Cards be used when making a skip-bid and all reference to them should be removed from the Tournament Regulations.

Players should be encouraged to pause following a skip bid by their RHO. Any break in tempo is unauthorised information to their partner, whether that is an immediate call or a call made after a pause for thought. They should refrain from acting on that information.

Directors need to be aware of the possibility of UI after a skip bid based on the tempo of the LHOs call. They must remind the partner of the LHO to ignore any information suggested by the timing of their partner's action.

This recommendation does not prevent clubs from continuing to use Stop Cards during club sessions.

Murray Wiggins

Chief Director

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