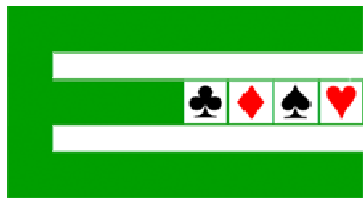


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THE LAWS OF BRIDGE

SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

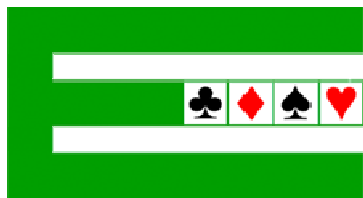
By Eitan Levy and Fearghal O'Boyle



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In the old 2007 Laws, there were many occasions where a player was forced to Pass for one round or maybe even the full auction e.g. when a player called out of turn.

The result on the board was then a complete guess with a lot of 'Rub of the Green' results - there was no real bridge result.

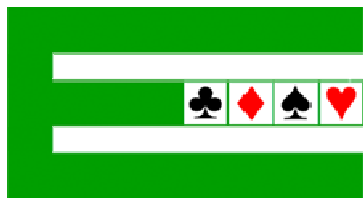


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(Under the old 2007 Laws)

LAW 30 – Pass out of Turn at Partner's Turn to Call

When a player has passed out of rotation, at his partner's turn to call, before any player has bid, the offender must pass when next it is his turn to call.

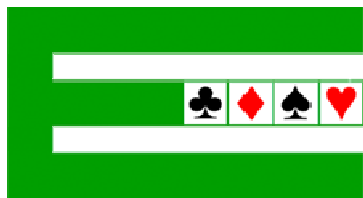


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You are dealer. Your partner passes out of turn. The TD gives his ruling – the auction reverts to you and your partner is told that he will have to 'Pass' for one round. What do you bid?

♠	K Q J 4 3
♥	A 2
♦	K J 9 3
♣	J 6

Under the old 2007 Laws



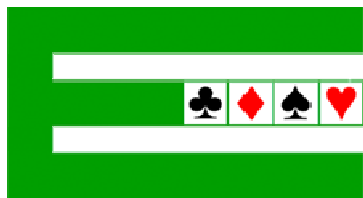
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If you bid 1♠.

You might be lucky and find partner with.

♠	K Q J 4 3
♥	A 2
♦	K J 9 3
♣	J 6

♠	9 7
♥	K 6 3
♦	J 8 2
♣	Q 8 5 3 2

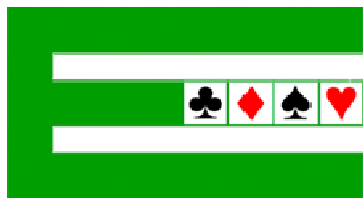


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Or you might be unlucky and find partner with.

♠	K Q J 4 3
♥	A 2
♦	K J 9 3
♣	J 6

♠	A 9 7 2
♥	K 6 3
♦	Q 2
♣	8 5 3 2

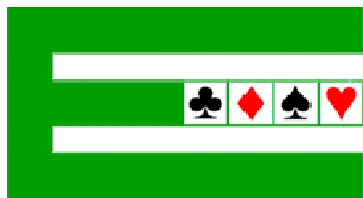


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If you open 4♠.
You might be lucky and find partner with.

♠	K Q J 4 3
♥	A 2
♦	K J 9 3
♣	J 6

♠	A 9 7 2
♥	K 6 3
♦	Q 2
♣	8 5 3 2

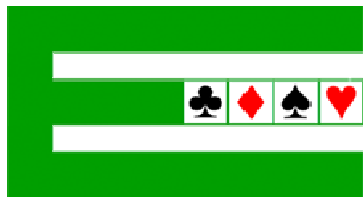


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Or you might be unlucky and find partner with.

♠	K Q J 4 3
♥	A 2
♦	K J 9 3
♣	J 6

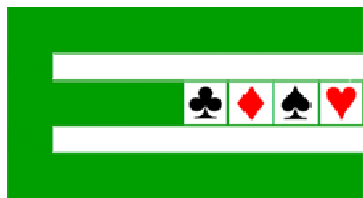
♠	9 7
♥	K 6 3
♦	J 8 2
♣	Q 8 5 3 2



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The new 2017 Laws endeavour to get a bridge result on the board rather than immediately silence any player.

If the offender can find a comparable call – in this case a call that shows less than opening values - the auction and play can continue freely, thereby avoiding a 'rub of the green' result. An admirable aim indeed.



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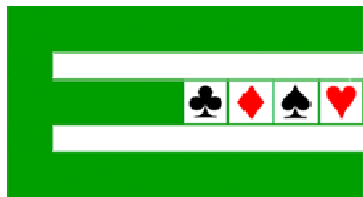
New 2017 Law 30

Pass out of Turn at Partner's Turn to Call

Offender's partner may make any legal call at his proper turn (not allowing himself to be influenced by his partner's Pass).

Offender may make any legal call at his correct turn and when that call is a **comparable** call there is no further rectification. There will not be any lead penalties but there may be a score adjustment later.

If the replacement call is not a comparable call, offender's partner must pass when next it is his turn to call. There may be lead penalties and UI restrictions etc.



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LAW 23 – COMPARABLE CALL

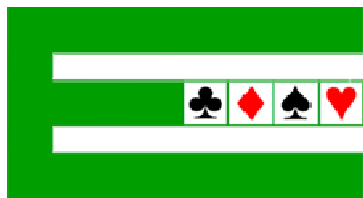
A call that replaces a withdrawn call is a comparable call, if it has the same or **similar meaning** as that attributable to the withdrawn call,

or

If it defines a **subset** of the possible meanings attributable to the withdrawn call,

or

If it has the same **purpose** (e.g. an asking bid or a relay) as that attributable to the withdrawn call.

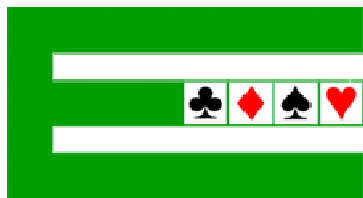


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Now with the New 2017 Laws....you can make your normal 1♠ opening bid and partner can respond 1NT. A sensible contract will be reached without any need for 'guesswork'.

♠	K Q J 4 3
♥	A 2
♦	K J 9 3
♣	J 6

♠	9 7
♥	K 6 3
♦	J 8 2
♣	Q 8 5 3 2

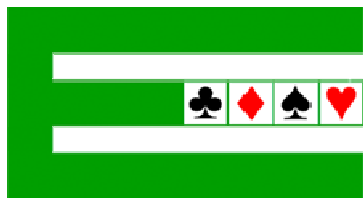


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Similarly on this hand – under the new Laws - you can make your normal 1♠ opening and partner can respond 3♠. You can bid 4♠ and once again a sensible contract has been reached without any need for ‘guesswork’.

♠	K Q J 4 3
♥	A 2
♦	K J 9 3
♣	J 6

♠	A 9 7 2
♥	K 6 3
♦	Q 2
♣	8 5 3 2



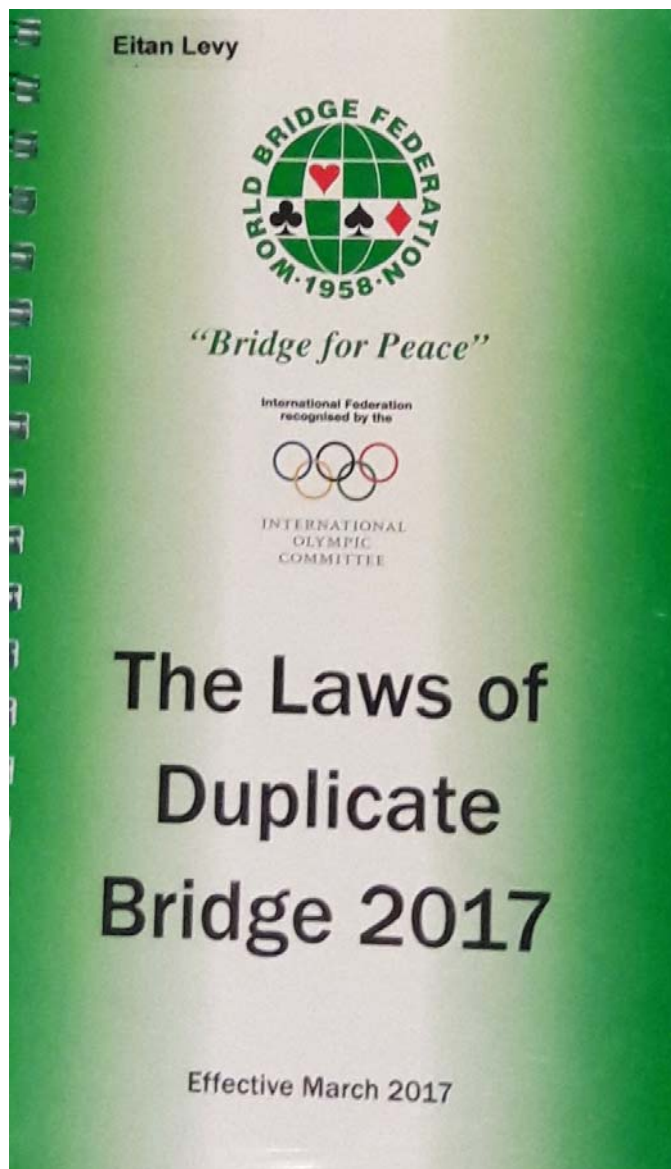
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The general idea is a very welcome one and if you say it quickly enough you can even make it sound like a very easy ruling.

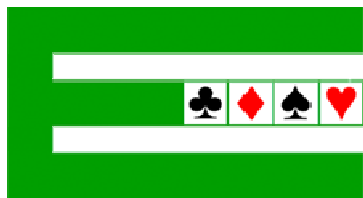
Indeed for a very experienced Tournament Director 'it is not that complicated' but

....over to you Mr. Levy

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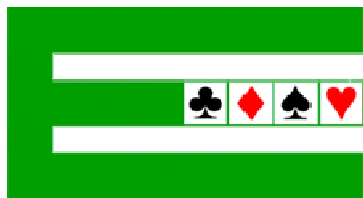
The latest edition of the Laws of Duplicate Bridge was published nearly a year ago. These laws contain some very significant changes from the previous version. At first sight, most of these changes seem highly positive and an improvement, and many of the ambiguities in the 2007 laws have been clarified. The 2017 Laws are a testament to the hard work and expertise of the members of the WBFLC.



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I have the highest respect for the knowledge, judgement and professionalism of the members of the WBFLC.

Nevertheless I am critical of some of these new laws, not because they are flawed in themselves, but because in many of the most common situations they are impractical and almost impossible to implement.



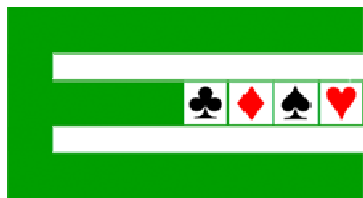
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The Laws of Bridge, in addition to setting out the rules also define correct procedure and provide remedy when there is an irregularity.

The philosophy of providing an adequate remedy is set out in the preface and introduction:

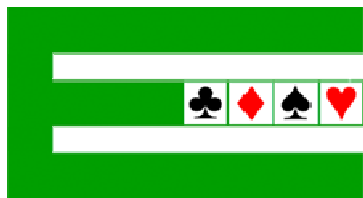
Rectify a situation rather than penalize.

The reason given for this approach in bridge is that **“we want to achieve a genuine bridge result.”**



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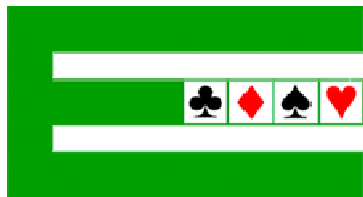
This approach is unusual in games and sports, including mind sports such as chess, where irregularities in procedures or in following the rules are penalized.



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In bridge the situation is, basically,

**“You are not allowed to do this,
but if you do do this we’ll find a
way to “rectify” it so that it
doesn’t matter too much”**

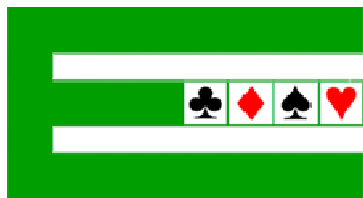


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The justification given for this is that bridge is a mind sport and we want the actual play of the cards to determine the result.

However there is a downside to this approach, and the time has come to take stock and evaluate this approach.

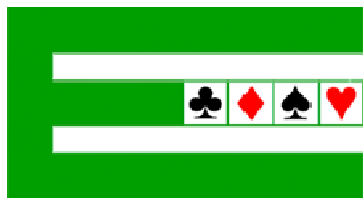
Let's see some background.



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In the European Open Championships in Montecatini, where there were near record numbers, the number of players in the various pairs and team events amounted to **1,635**



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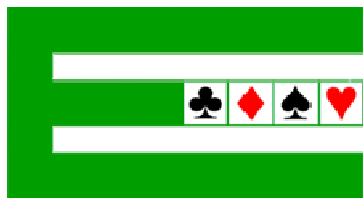
Member Federations

The members of the European Bridge League are the National Federations of the affiliated countries.

Currently, the EBL comprises **46** member countries, totalling **384,186** registered players, as follows:

	Country		Organization		Membership	Status
1	Albania		Albanian Bridge Federation	ALBF	169	OK
2	Austria		Osterreichischer Bridgesportverband	OBV	2,774	OK
3	Belarus		Belarus Contract Bridge Union	BCBU	141	OK
4	Belgium		Royal Belgian Bridge Federation	BBF	7,433	OK
5	Bosnia & Herzegovina		Bosnia & Herzegovina Bridge Federation	BHBF	65	OK
6	Bulgaria		Bulgarian Bridge Federation	BuBF	640	OK
7	Croatia		Croatian Bridge Federation	CrBF	631	OK

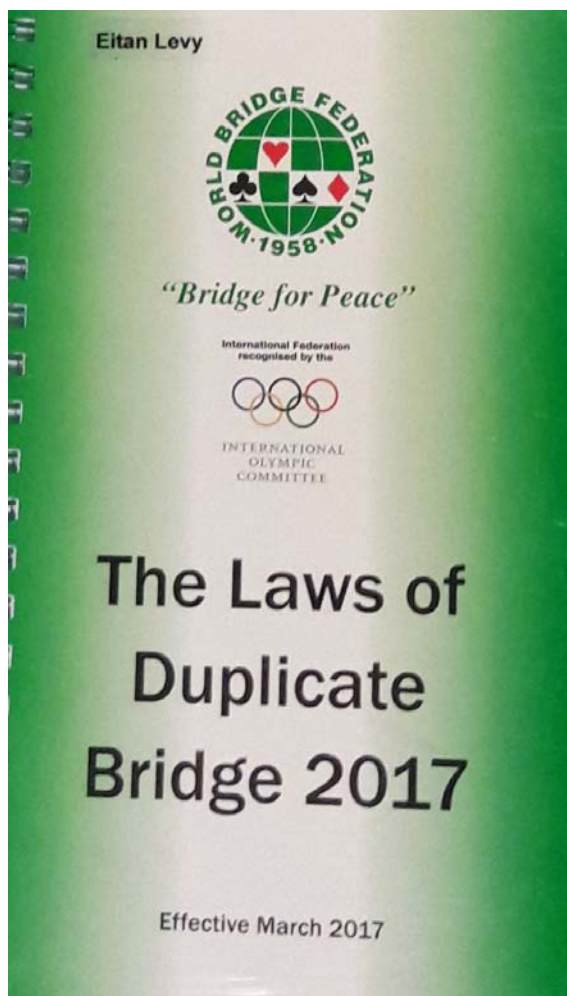
The number of registered players in the EBL NBO's is **384,186.**



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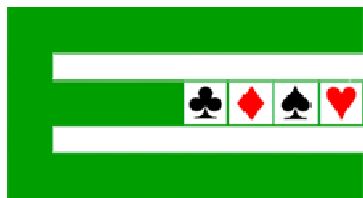
This means that only 0.43% (1,635/384,186) of the registered European players played in Montecatini.

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The laws are meant to apply to all bridge players - the small percentage of high level players as well as to the vast majority of players who play locally.

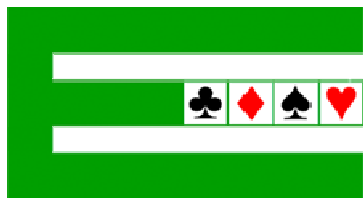
In practice, this cannot be done.



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Let us visit a typical club.



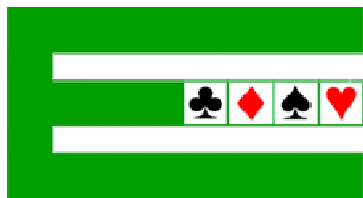


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These players are there to enjoy an evening of playing bridge.

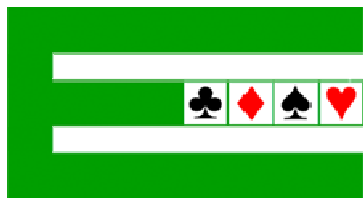
They are the “bread and butter” of the club and the national organization and therefore of the EBL.

We cannot ignore them.



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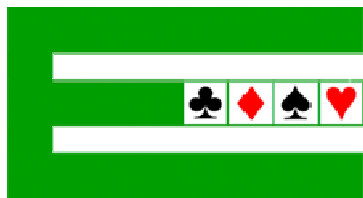
The average club bridge player is prepared to accept an automatic ruling – even though it might affect his bridge score.



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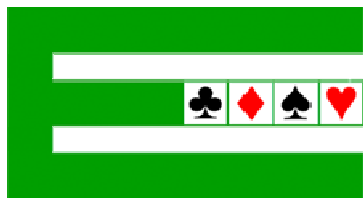
West	North	East	South
	1 ♣	1 ♠	Dbl
2 ♠	3 ♥	Pass	4 ♥
....Dbl	Pass	4 ♠	All pass

But tell a club player that his 4S bid is not allowed because pass is a logical alternative.



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Club players are willing to accept automatic penalties when they do something wrong but when a judgement ruling is made this is not as easily accepted.



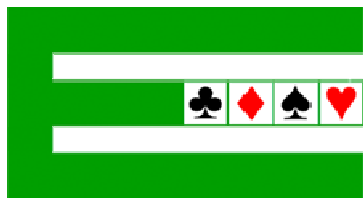
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A player bids out of turn. Under the 2017 laws certain “comparable call” substitutions are allowed.

But whether a call is comparable or not depends largely on the particular system and methods of the pair.

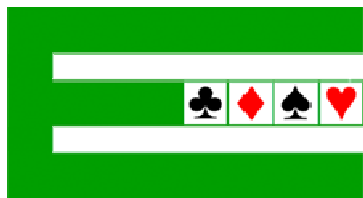
This may not be too difficult for top level players and TDs.

But it is impractical at club level, especially in pairs events.



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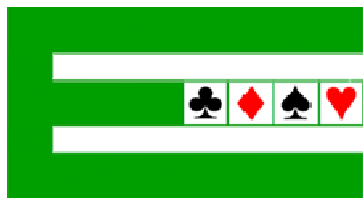
The situation now is that the laws apply to all bridge players – experts, average players, palookas.



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We have been told that we must interpret the term “similar meaning” in Law 23 flexibly. How “flexible” are we allowed to be? This will inevitably lead to different TDs giving different rulings for the same infractions.

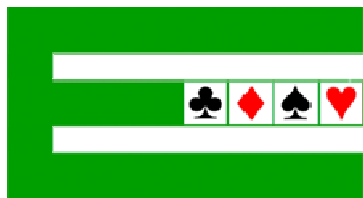
What is the boundary for “similar but not similar enough”?



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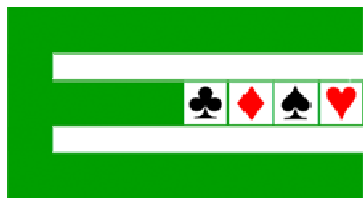
And not only that: the use of **screens** means that the irregularities covered by such laws as “comparable calls” will hardly ever occur at top level but in practice only at club level where it is impossible to implement them.



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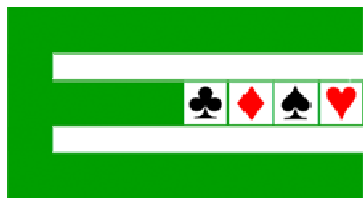
Another example of a law unsuitable for clubs is **Law 15**.

(Wrong board discovered after commencement of auction period).



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In Montecatini I prepared a set of 20 situations, common situations not esoteric ones, where the TD has to decide whether the substitute call is comparable or not. I gave this questionnaire to 17 TDs – all of them in the highest levels of the TD Register and including 3 of the members of the WBFLC.



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There was 100% agreement on only 10 of the situations, on all the rest opinion was divided on whether the call was comparable or not.

There was even an instance where 9 voted “yes” and 8 voted “no”.

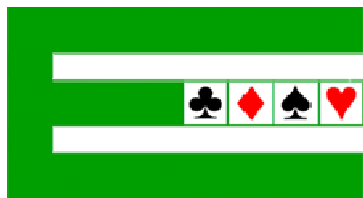
If TDs at that level are divided what can we expect from the local director? And what about consistency of rulings?

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					NO	YES	CONCLUSION
1	W	N	E	S			
	1♥	1♦					
	Replaced by						
	1♥	X			11	6	UNDECIDED
2	W	N	E	S			
	1♦					
	Replaced by						
	1♥	X			8	9	UNDECIDED
6	W	N	E	S			
	2♠ (one suited)					
	Replaced by						
	1NT	2♦ (multi)			14	3	CALL IS NOT COMPARABLE
15	W	N	E	S			
	1NT					
	Replaced by						
	2S (weak)	2NT			0	17	CALL IS COMPARABLE

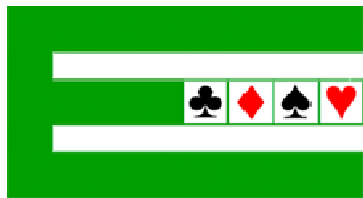




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The time has come to accept the reality that there is top level bridge and there is club level bridge and we need to take that into account when drawing up the Laws.

We cannot have the same laws for high level bridge and for club bridge.

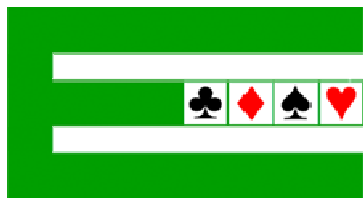


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The Laws for dealing with infractions such as bids and leads out of turn, revokes, insufficient bids and so on are written for the TD to implement.

The way an infraction is rectified does not in any way influence how a player bids or plays a hand, or whether he revokes or not, or whether he leads out of turn.

It is the TD who needs to apply the law.

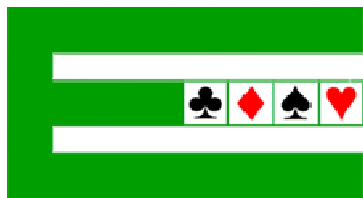


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After the 2017 laws were published feedback from TDs caused the WBFLC to reconsider some of laws, and discuss ways of determining just what the law meant and how to implement it.

In one case a law was rewritten after the Laws (and some law books!) had already been published or printed.

A trial period would help prevent problems like these in the future.

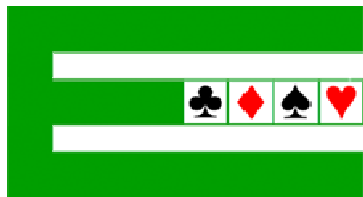


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In many sports, when a modified or changed law is proposed, there is a running in or trial period.

We should consider applying a trial period with respect to our laws.

The laws are changed every ten years. This gives us sufficient time to allow clubs willing to do so, the possibility of adopting a suggested law change in their local events.

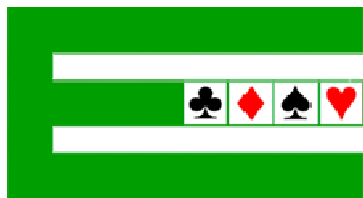


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The preface to the 2017 laws states that “*the trends to increased discretion given to TDs ... have continued*”.

The upshot of this is that the laws are aimed mainly at high level TDs officiating at high level bridge events.

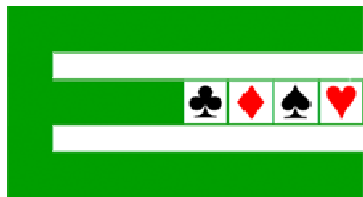
This is a problem for the majority of local TDs and inevitably leads to rulings that are not consistent and differ from club to club and from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.



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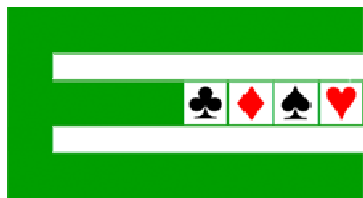
To summarize:

- **Many of the laws are suitable for high level players who in any case play with screens and hardly ever need these laws.**
- **Even at the high level there is confusion about implementing some of the laws, and not only the “comparable” laws.**
- **Many of the laws are impossible to implement effectively at the local level where the vast majority of bridge players play, and we are advised to be flexible in implementing them.**



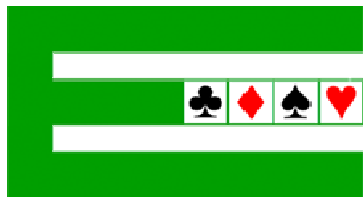
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- There is no consistency in the application of many laws.
- The more complicated the laws become and the more they rely on TD discretion the less they become understandable and acceptable to the average recreational player.
- This often leads to feelings of favouritism among these players – that the TD is biased in favour of the “good” players.



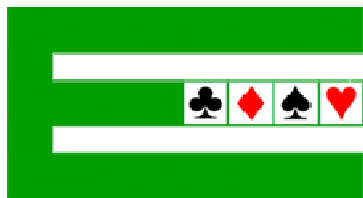
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CONCLUSIONS



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- The WBFLC must take into account that bridge is played mainly by players who consider the game a hobby or pastime or form of entertainment and want to spend an enjoyable evening with some competition and challenge.
- At least at the local level automatic or easily applied laws should be an option or should replace many of the laws relying on discretion, judgement and opinion of the TD.



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- **Proposed changes to the laws should be tried out in real situations.**
- **The philosophy of “achieving a genuine bridge result” should be re-examined and the views of players at the top level taken into account.**