



# Ruling the Game

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## Proper procedure following a skip bid

The ACBL Board of Directors has voted to discontinue the use of Stop cards at sanctioned tournaments effective Jan. 1. Clubs are encouraged to do the same to provide players a consistent experience at both tournaments and clubs.

So what's the proper protocol following a skip bid? Here's what the Board says:

"The Stop card should not be used. No verbal or visual skip-bid warning is required. Following the skip bid, 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 of bids) before making a call. Note: If a player accidentally uses the Stop card, there is no penalty. It is each player's responsibility to maintain appropriate tempo at all times."

With this change, the onus is on players to develop the good habit of pausing after their right-hand opponent has made a skip bid. The pause should be about 10 seconds, but strict observance of this duration is less important than making sure that there is a clear break in the tempo of the auction.

While pausing, the player should give the appearance of studying his hand – even if that player has a clear-cut pass. The player should not exhibit lack of interest, for example, by keeping his hand folded or verbally counting off the seconds of the required pause.

Likewise, if the player has an "automatic" bid or double after the skip bid, the player should wait approximately 10 seconds before making that call.

Here are some examples. RHO opens 2NT or a strong 2♣? Wait before making *any* call (even pass). RHO opens 3♦? Wait before making any call. Partner opens 1♣ and RHO overcalls 2♠ (weak)? Wait. LHO opens 1♣, partner passes and RHO jumps to 3♣ (weak)? Wait. When RHO jumps – whether to show a strong, average or weak hand – pause before acting.

The rationale for this procedure is to decrease the likelihood that unauthorized information is transmitted. For example, you open 2♥ (weak), and LHO passes quickly. Your partner passes, too. Your RHO may now know that competing is dangerous because his partner's quick pass could suggest a weak hand. RHO, of course, is not entitled to this information.

In addition to the removal of the Stop

cards from bidding boxes, the use of the verbal skip-bid warning is being discontinued. Again, this is to put the obligation to pause where it belongs: on the skip-bidder's left-hand opponent.

Note that there's no penalty prescribed for players who forget this new rule and use the Stop card (in bidding boxes that still have them) or issue a skip-bid warning. Because these behaviors are well developed in many players, directors should merely encourage proper procedure while players transition to the new protocol. However, continued use of the Stop card or skip-bid warning simply to alert partner to strong or weak actions is, of course, a violation of the Laws and subject to penalty.

What happens when a player fails to maintain proper tempo following a skip bid? The director should be summoned immediately so that the rights of all four players are protected for the remainder of the auction. Waiting to call the director at a later point in the auction (or when the auction is over) can cause other complications.

The bottom line: Slow down after jumps to avoid telling partner something about your hand. ■