

THE E.B.L. SYSTEMS POLICY

What is the authority for this Policy?

The Systems Policy is part of the EBL's rules and regulations for its tournaments.

It applies to all EBL Championships and to other tournaments specified in the Policy itself or in the regulations published for any tournament by the Sponsoring Organization.

The regulations are made under Law 40D of the Laws of Duplicate Bridge 1997.

Does any question arise concerning the authority?

In general, no. However, at 5.4(b) it is not clear on what authority in the laws the Policy prohibits, over opponent's natural opener of One of a suit, a natural overcall showing by agreement at least three cards in the named suit.

How does the Policy operate?

Players' methods are classified in one of four categories according to the nature of the opening bids of one. The categories are colour-coded:-

Green - a system with natural openers.

Blue – a system having a strong club or strong diamond opener, where one club/diamond is strong and artificial.

Red - covering all artificial systems that do not fall within either the blue or the yellow category. [Ask yourself: Is this a natural system? Is it to be classified as 'Blue'? Is it to be classified as 'Yellow'? If the answer is 'no' to each of these questions the system is classified 'Red'.]

Yellow – a 'HUM' system (see later).

What is the effect of this classification?

With only minor modification the EBL Systems Policy is a transcript of the WBF Systems Policy. In Section 6 it lists what systems are allowed in WBF Championships and other tournaments. It is necessary to refer to the Conditions of Contest for EBL Championships and tournaments in order to find out the relevant information relating to these. Directors should make a point of looking in these regulations on each occasion that they are appointed to an EBL tournament.

If they wish NBOs may use the EBL System Policy (possibly modified) for their own events. Again it is for Directors to study the tournament regulations to be sure that they know of any restrictions on players' systems.

What are the essential questions?

The first question is: are HUM methods allowed? They are only allowed in Category I events – the Bermuda Bowl, Venice Cup, or equivalents.

When HUM Systems are allowed there are restrictions on the line-up of the teams using them unless they are opposed by a team submitting a HUM System. It is very unusual these days to find teams that play such methods – they have very largely gone out of fashion.

If Directors are aware of the presence of one or more team(s) that may play a HUM System they should take time to remind themselves of the conditions that apply.

Does it happen that a team submits a HUM System without knowing that it is HUM?

The factors that make a System HUM are so distinctive that it really should never happen. The partnership agreements, any one of which makes the System HUM, are listed at 5.2 in the Systems Policy. All but one of them concerns an opening bid of one; the exception is the Pass in the opening position that may show values generally accepted for an opening bid of one (or more than those values).

If the Director finds a pair using a HUM System in a tournament where it is not allowed he must require them to play a legal system. If he discovers the situation in the course of a board they are playing he allows the board to be completed before he makes a ruling. His ruling should be agreed with the Chief Tournament Director. When changing to a different system the pair concerned is subject to any regulation in the Conditions of Contest that restricts the change.

The next question is: are Brown Sticker conventions and agreements allowed?

Brown Stickers? Who said anything about Brown Stickers? Indeed, so we must have a look at Section 5.4 of the Systems Policy. The essential information is this:

1. Situations to look at are:
 - (a) Opening bids of two clubs through three spades (not lower than two clubs, not higher than three spades);
 - (b) Overcalls of a natural opening bid of one of a suit;
 - (c) Two-suited bids, whether opening bids or otherwise, at the levels of two or three;
 - (d) Psychic bids (in any position).
2. Opening bids of two clubs through three spades are Brown Sticker if they may be made by agreement on hands of less than average strength and do not guarantee four or more cards in a known suit. There are two exceptions defined in the Systems Policy. In regard to these Exceptions please note that (i) in the first the explanation in parenthesis is clearer than what precedes it, and (ii) the second Exception does not cover a two level opening in a minor – Multi style – if the *agreement* includes the possibility of its having both majors.

3. When an opponent makes a natural opening bid of one of a suit an overcall of that opening bid must guarantee four cards or more in a known suit. There are three Exceptions, listed in the Systems Policy. It is important to note that neither in the general requirement nor in the Exceptions is there any mention of the level at which the overcall is made.

[Let us consider an opening bid of 1 Spade. Opponent overcalls 4NT. Is this Brown Sticker if it shows

- 'any two suits other than Spades'? *Yes.*
- 'any hand on which the overcall is an enquiry about controls'? *Apparently also yes.]*

I am unable to say whether the latter was intended.

4. A weak 'two-suited' bid at the level of two or three is Brown Sticker if the agreement allows of fewer than four cards in one of the suits shown. This is so whether the bid is an opening bid or is made at a later point in the auction (as a rebid, or in competition or in defence).

['weak' = high card strength below that of an average hand. An average hand is defined as one containing ten high card points (Milton Work) with no distributional values.]

5. Psychic bids that are protected by system or that are required by system are Brown Sticker. Note that this does not refer only to psychic opening bids. Any agreement by which use of a psychic bid is protected (or required) in any situation is a Brown Sticker convention. The Policy does not extend this condition to psychic calls that are not bids, which is surprising perhaps.

The EBL (but not the WBF) has a further stipulation concerning psyches. This applies in Pairs Championships and in matches of fewer than 16 boards in team play. In these no psyche of a conventional opening bid is permitted (see Section 6 of the Systems Policy). The ban is on the action, regardless of agreement.

[Note: conventional defences against strong artificial opening bids and defences against BS or HUM conventions are excluded from categorisation as BS.]

What restrictions are there on the use of Brown Sticker conventions?

1. (a) Brown Sticker (BS) conventions may be played in Category I events. Stress is placed on the requirement for full disclosure.
(b) BS conventions may be played in Category II events subject to submission in advance of convention cards and BS Announcement Forms, as the Conditions of Contest require. Failure to submit in a timely fashion is expected to bar the use of the BS conventions in question. It is also requisite to provide a 'viable' suggested defence to each BS convention submitted.
(c) In Category III events no BS convention may be used.
2. Defenders may consult their written defences to BS conventions at the table. Copies of these defences must be supplied to opponents prior to the segment of play in which they will be used.
3. Note that any defence suggested by a pair using a BS convention must be 'viable'. There can be a lot of argument about what constitutes a 'viable defence'. It is a matter for the Systems Committee to clarify and resolve.

[Note: 'viable' = of such a kind that it has a prospect of success; practicable.]

Miscellanea

As part of the Systems Policy note that:

1. A pair using BS convention(s) must state this next to the System Classification on the front of the convention card.
2. The number of Red or Yellow systems allowed for a team in a category I event is limited – see Section 10.
3. The submission of Systems Material and the disclosure requirements are governed by Sections 7 & 8 of the Policy.
4. It is forbidden to make opening bids to show hands which, by agreement, may contain fewer than 8 HCP and for which no further definition is provided – see Section 5.6.
5. The use of encrypted signals, as defined in Section 5.5, is prohibited.
6. The definition of 'Short Match' in 5.1 is not the same as the definition in Section 6 of matches in which psyching conventional opening bids is disallowed. (This is so in the 2004 version of the Systems Policy – watch for any update).

Grattan Endicott
grandeval@vejez.fsnet.co.uk