

Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About ... 01/27/2020 Penalty Cards???

Here are some things that you may not know about penalty cards. The point of this lesson is partly to educate you, but mostly to illustrate the importance of calling the director whenever ANY infraction occurs at the table.

Case #1: A defender fails to follow suit to a trick. Fortunately, the defender discovers the error before the next person plays. So the defender plays a card from the suit that was led. The card that was played in error remains on the table as a **major penalty card**. This card must be played at the first legal opportunity.

You probably know all of this. But what you might not know is that if the offender's partner gains the lead while the penalty card is on the table, declarer has options. (Note: These are the same as three of the options that declarer has when there is an opening lead out of turn.)

Option 1: Declarer may require that the offender's partner lead a card of the same suit as the penalty card. If this option is chosen, the penalty card is picked up and returned to the offender's hand. The offender's partner must lead a card from that suit, and offender may play any card from that suit. In other words, offender does not have to play the penalty card. This option lasts for one trick only: If offender's partner retains the lead, he may lead any suit to start the next trick. One caveat: If offender's partner doesn't have a card from the penalty card suit, then he may lead anything he likes. Declarer doesn't get to choose another option!

Option 2: Declarer may forbid the offender's partner from leading the penalty card suit. If this option is chosen, the penalty card is picked up and returned to the offender's hand. The offender's partner must lead a card from any other suit. This restriction lasts for as long as offender's partner retains the lead. Once he loses the lead, then either defender may lead any suit whenever they regain the lead. When the penalty card suit is led, offender may play any card from that suit.

Option 3: Declarer may allow offender's partner to lead anything he wants, and the penalty card will remain on the table as a penalty card which must be played at the first legal opportunity. So whenever the penalty card suit is led, that is the card that offender must play. If offender cannot follow suit, that is the card he must discard. And if offender wins a trick, that is the card he must lead to start the next trick.

Case #2: A defender goes to play a card, and a second card accidentally pops out or drops from his hand and lands face-up on the table (as they always do). What happens to this card? What you might not know is that the answer depends upon the **rank** of the card!

If the dropped card is not an honor (i.e., if it's Nine or lower), then it becomes a **minor penalty card**. This card remains face-up on the table. However, it does NOT (necessarily) have to be played at the first legal opportunity. And if the offender's partner gains the lead, declarer does NOT have lead options: The offender's partner may lead any card and any suit that he chooses.

The only restriction with a minor penalty card is that the offender must play it before playing any other non-honor card from the same suit.

Example: You're a defender and you have AJ942 of diamonds. You go to play a spade – and the Four of diamonds somehow manages to drop from your hand and it lands face-up. This is now a minor penalty card. The only restriction is that you must play the Four of diamonds before you play the Two or the Nine. So if a diamond is led and you want to play the Ace or the Jack, that's fine. If you're leading to start a trick and you want to play the Ace or Jack of Diamonds, or if you want to lead another suit entirely, that's fine. But whenever you choose to play a low Diamond, you MUST play the Four (the minor penalty card) before playing the Nine or the Two.

If the dropped card is an honor (i.e., if it's Ten or higher), then it becomes a major penalty card and is subject to all of the limitations and restrictions described in Case #1.

Please note that in order for a card to be a minor penalty card, it must be exposed accidentally. If you deliberately play a card and it becomes a penalty card for whatever reason, it is always a major penalty card, regardless of the rank.

Just to reiterate: You should call the director whenever any infraction occurs at the table. Remember that the answer to the question, "Should we call the director?" is always "YES!!!"