

Rick's Tricks

OBLIGATIONS

By Rick Roeder

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Sometimes, we delude ourselves into thinking that we always have free choice. Ha! If only that were true. We have to deal with the IRS each year. Many who have gone through the trauma of divorce will testify that any legally-agreed terms need to be met to avoid draconian alternatives. And, if your significant other ever has the audacity to ask if they are the best looking mate you have ever had, you MUST answer, "Of course, dear!"

Similarly, bridge has some situations where you must make an obligatory falsecard to give declarer a chance to go wrong. Pas de choix, as the Parisians would say.

Let's take a look at a recent hand, declaring 4♠ in matchpoints, after the following auction:

SOUTH	NORTH
—	1♣
1♠	1NT
2♦	2♠
4♠	(all pass)

SOUTH	NORTH:
♠AJ986	♠K43
♥98	♥QJ4
♦5	♦QJ7
♣KQJ92	♣A1074

The ♦A is led, with a switch to the ♣8 at trick 2. You win Dummy's Ace and, for better or worse, decide to play a low spade at trick 3. You note RHO's ♠10 as you successfully finesse the Jack. RHO plays the trump Queen under your Ace as you happily claim your contract.

Let's rewind. Suppose your RHO plays the ♠Q when you play a low trump off dummy at trick 3. Wouldn't we all play RHO for a stiff trump? You gobble up the Trump Queen and triumphantly run the ♠9. To your chagrin, RHO's ♠10 momentarily wrecks your universe. Yes, RHO made a very alert play of the trump Queen at trick 3, but it was no brilliancy. The play was virtually obligatory as the only possible cost is if Declarer started with Ace sixth of Spades and then made a subsequent, anti-percentage play of a trump to the Jack.

Let's review several, TOTALLY obligatory falsecard situations.

Dummy holds AQ10x in a suit, with you holding J9xx. When Declarer plays a small card toward this holding, playing the 9 will almost always be right. This gives Declarer a losing option he will likely take if his holding was K8xx.

Often, playing the card you are known to hold will give declarer a losing option. Dummy holds KJ2 of a suit. Declarer plays a small card and successfully finesses the Jack. Your initial holding is Q104. When Declarer plunks down the King, you must play the Queen. If Declarer started with A9xx, he may well play your partner for the 10.

Dummy's trumps are AJ9xx. You are in front of dummy, holding 1087. Declarer leads a low trump and dummy's 9 is taken by Pard's king. Declarer gets back to his hand and leads another low trump. In another example of playing the card you are known to hold, falsecard with the 10. If Pard's initial trump holding was KQ tight, your falsecard offers an almost ironclad shot to secure a second trump trick.

Sometimes, the auction forces you to falsecard in a situation where you might not otherwise do so. You regret opening 1♣ in second chair, when LHO overcalls 1NT and Righty quickly bids 3NT. Declarer will surmise that your Partner holds a wretched hand and will play you for everything but the kitchen sink.

Pard leads a club in the following scenario:

DUMMY

♠AJ10

♥A10x

♦xxxx

♣J9x

YOU

♠KQ9x

♥xxx

♦Qx

♣AQ102

Pard leads a Club and your 10 holds the trick. Hopefully, you play Ace and another club. Pard disappoints as he discards a Heart at trick 3. In dummy with the ♣J, declarer successfully wins a Diamond finesse with the Jack. Hopefully, Declarer bangs down the ♦A and ♦K, hoping for a 3-3 break. Instead, he sees your discard of a Spade. At trick 7, a Spade is played to the 10. Given the auction, you have a mandatory falsecard of the ♠K. Because you are marked with virtually all your defensive assets, you want to leave Declarer some doubt as to the location of the ♠Q. If Declarer thinks that your Pard could hold the ♠Q, he may well play you for the rest of the HCP.

In your dream scenario, the following happens: Upon winning the ♠K, you put Declarer back in his hand with your last Club. Declarer's initial Heart holding is KJx. Declarer then travels to the ♥A and finesses the Jack. Happily, your Partner takes the Queen and cashes his good Diamond for down 1. (Declarer whizzes will note that a stronger play for Declarer, upon winning the Diamond finesse at Trick 4, would be to immediately play a Spade to the 10 in order to maintain maximum communication between the two hands).

PLEASE be polite and never ask Eddie Kantar about obligatory falsecards! His failure to make one may have cost America the 1975 Bermuda Bowl against the legendary Giorgio Belladonna and his to-date, invulnerable Italian Blue Team. Late in a tight match, Kantar was on Cloud 9 when Belladonna bid to 7♣. A strong hand, with Club length, was on his right as Eddie happily stared at ♣K10 doubleton. His ecstasy quickly morphed into angst as dummy came down with ♣AJ doubleton. When Belladonna led a club toward dummy, the crestfallen Kantar woodenly played the 10. If Kantar had instead played the King, feigning a stiff, Belladonna had enough entries to play for a trump coup if Kantar's partner, Broadway Billy Eisenberg, had started with ♣10xxx. If this article helps you sleep better at night than Eddie Kantar, I have done my job. ♣