



Ruling the Game

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Q I am a fairly new club director, and I've been having complaints from more experienced players about how long the games take. I hate to admit it, but they're right. Do you have any advice on how I can speed the game up?

A Slow play is the bane of directors and most players. There are several things a director can do to help a game move along, but there does need to be cooperation from the players. Many of these things should be done as a matter of course.

First, if there is not a timer the players can see, get one. There are several online which can be displayed on the computer screen if the club doesn't have the resources to buy an actual timer. An egg timer is traditional, but it is better if there is something that the players can actually see.

Second, use the clock as more than just a suggestion. You don't have to be heavy-handed. In fact, that doesn't work out well, but a reminder of how late a table is running should always be given. Don't interrupt, but, when they finish, simply say, "OK, you're a couple of minutes into the next round, I need everybody's help in getting caught up." If it's the second time the same pair has been late, be more forceful: "North-South, you've lost time. You have two rounds to get caught up, or you'll end up losing a board." An alternative is a penalty or the warning of a penalty. In order to do this properly, you need to be aware of who the culprits really are,

and to do that, you need to be out in the game being attentive to what's going on. Players will accept lost boards and even penalties, as long as the "punishment" is applied fairly to everybody and is appropriate, based on repeated violations of the timer and not just on being late once.

Third, show the players you are interested in the timing of the game by getting started on time. Try to get the boards in front of the last table as soon as possible, and start the timer as soon as the boards are laid out. This shows you're going to be conscientious about the timing of the game. The players really do pick up on it. Also, call the round with a minute or two on the timer, not when it hits zero. This gives you time to isolate trouble spots. It also gives the players time to move to the next round and to start with (or ahead of) the round timer.

ACBL recommends 7 1/2 minutes per board, with the realization that the more boards there are per round, the less time needs to be given. Most boards don't take that long to play. The rest of the time is taken up by the mechanics of scorekeeping, moving, and discussing the boards. The less moving between board sets, the less time needed. Normally, directors give 15 minutes for two-board rounds, 20-21 minutes for three-board rounds, 26 minutes for four-board rounds, and 30 for five-board rounds. (This is for pairs games. Swiss teams operate differently.)

The players, as I said, can help, as well. First, they shouldn't spend time between boards discussing them, de-

spite their overwhelming tendency to do so. It's a practice which slows down the game, in addition to increasing the chance that players at surrounding tables can overhear and find out something about boards they haven't yet played. For many reasons, it's better to finish all of the boards from the round, then leave the table to discuss, if time permits. Second, if the round has been called, the players can help things immensely by passing their completed boards to the next table, even if they are not finished playing one of their boards. Encourage players to have dummy pass completed boards as soon as the round is called. Third, players should not start a new board after the move has been called without the permission of the director. Finally, if players are behind, then they should wait to do their personal bookkeeping until they've moved to the next table.

Curing chronic slow play isn't easy, but making the effort to address it will be appreciated by your players. Dealing with it effectively requires the constant attention of the director using a gentle but firm approach. As important as anything is getting the chronically slow players to realize the inconvenience and irritation they cause others. I always admired the way our late TD friend and colleague Jean Molnar used to try to accomplish that. When dealing with slow players who didn't seem to appreciate the effect they were having on others, she always said with a pleasant smile on her face, "You are taking time that belongs to others, and I'm not supposed to let you do that." ■