

Notes on adjudicating claims

Law 68A tells us that:

Any statement by declarer or a defender to the effect that a side will win a specific number of tricks is a claim of those tricks. A player also claims when he suggests that play be curtailed, or when he shows his cards (unless he demonstrably did not intend to claim - for example, if declarer faces his cards after an opening lead out of turn Law 54, not this Law, will apply).

Note that any one of those three conditions is sufficient for a claim to have been made, so if a player is suggesting that play be curtailed while showing his cards, he may well be deemed to have made a claim even if he says he is not claiming.

However, Law 68B2 says:

Regardless of B1, if a defender attempts to concede one or more tricks and his partner immediately objects; neither a concession nor a claim has occurred. Unauthorized information may exist, so the Director should be summoned immediately. Play continues. Any card that has been exposed by a defender in these circumstances is not a penalty card but Law 16C applies to information arising from its exposure and the information may not be used by the partner of the defender who has exposed it.

Law 69 tells us that:

Agreement is established when a side assents to an opponent's claim or concession, and raises no objection to it before making a call on a subsequent board or before the round ends, whichever occurs first. The board is scored as though the tricks claimed or conceded had been won or lost in play.

Note that it is still possible for agreement to be withdrawn after it has been established, in certain circumstances under this Law 69.

It is also possible for a concession to be cancelled after it has been agreed, but this is done under Law 71.

Before agreement has been reached, if a claim or concession is contested we use Law 70.

Law 68D tells us that:

After any claim or concession, play is suspended.

1. *If the claim or concession is agreed, Law 69 applies.*
2. *If it is doubted by any player (dummy included); either*
 - (a) *the Director may immediately be summoned and no action should be taken pending his arrival, Law 70 applies; or*
 - (b) *upon the request of the non-claiming or non-conceding side, play may continue subject to the following:*
 - (i) *all four players must concur; otherwise the Director is summoned, who then proceeds as in (a) above.*
 - (ii) *the prior claim or concession is void and not subject to adjudication. Laws 16 and 50 do not apply, and the score subsequently obtained shall stand.*

Note that if the director has been called, Law 70 must be applied. The option of playing on is not something that should be offered to the players: this Law simply tells you what to do (nothing!) if they have already played on. If you encounter this, do take care to check that all four players agreed and that it was the non-claiming side who suggested playing on.

Law 70E1 says:

The Director shall not accept from claimer any unstated line of play the success of which depends upon finding one opponent rather than the other with a particular card, unless an opponent failed to follow to the suit of that card before the claim was made, or would subsequently fail to follow to that suit on any normal line of play.*

** For the purposes of Laws 70 and 71, "normal" includes play that would be careless or inferior for the class of player involved.*

This is often incorrectly paraphrased as saying that the claimer "can't take a finesse". What the law actually says is that they can't make a **successful** play that depends on a card being in one hand or the other, so if both finessing and playing for the drop are normal plays in a given case, we give them the score they would get from adopting the wrong one.

♠ 7 4 2		♠ A K J
♥ A K J T 5	7NT W	♥ Q 9 8 6 2
♦ A K Q		♦ J T 8
♣ A Q		♣ K 5

In 7NT West wins the spade lead with the Ace in dummy, and claims 13 tricks, having not bothered to count them faced with so many high cards between the two hands. There are two normal lines here – to play the other top spade or to finesse. Only if both of them work, ie the ♠Qx is onside, do we allow declarer a thirteenth trick. If the queen is not doubleton we impose the line of playing for the drop, and if the ♠Qx is offside we assume declarer would take the losing finesse.

Claims may not be “weighted” since we are not awarding an adjusted score. We must assess a whole number of tricks, bearing in mind the next point.

We are told that any doubtful points should be ruled against the claimer, which is a very high standard indeed. So if you aren’t sure, you rule against the claimer.

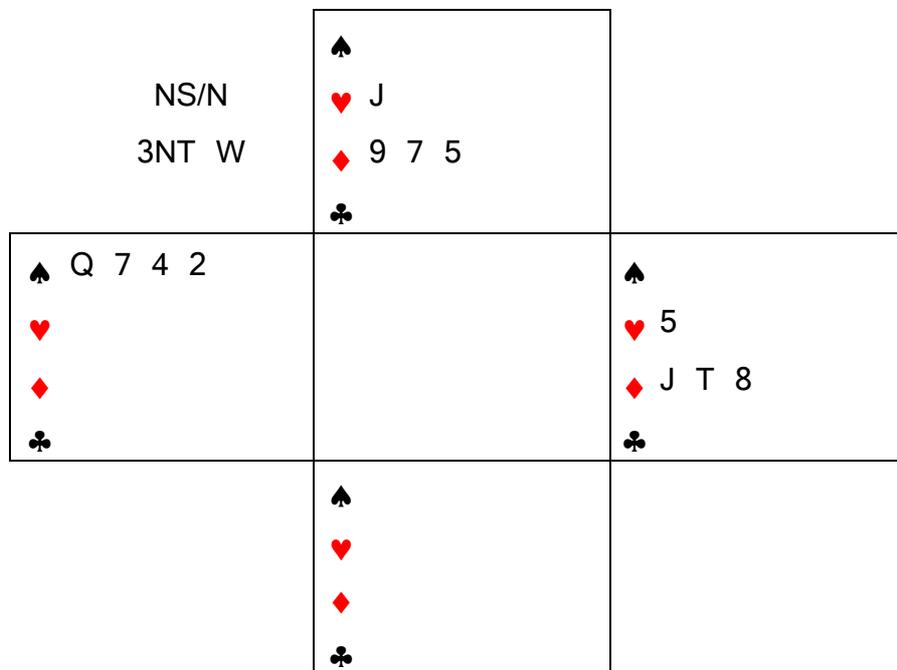
Adjudicating claims involves judgement, so unless it is very straightforward or the four players end up agreeing what should happen, you should consult before ruling. It will usually help to write down the position on a claim diagram form and to find out the order of play leading up to the claim.

Sometimes a claim statement is imperfect because it requires the claimer to make an infraction such as a revoke or to lead from the wrong hand, or involves another irregularity such as trying to ruff with a suit which is not trumps. In these cases, we follow the claim statement as far as we can, but when the stated line breaks down we consider all normal lines from that point.

If a claimer states which tricks they are taking, eg “four hearts, three spades and a diamond”, it does not necessarily follow that the intention is for the tricks to be taken in that order. However, slightly different wording, eg “four hearts then three spades and a diamond” does suggest an order of play. Each case needs to be considered on its own merit, taking into account what has been stated, what has happened thus far in the play and therefore what lines might be considered normal.

Often we need to understand what the claimer was thinking when making the imperfect claim in order to rule on it.

Conversely we do not need to know what the other side were intending to do – the claim stands or falls on its own merit, not on whether or not the opponents might have been about to play imperfectly.



In 3NT West was about to lead from dummy when North claimed two tricks. West initially agreed to this, but dummy immediately pointed out that if declarer led the heart from dummy she would get three tricks. The first thing to note is that after a claim is made dummy is explicitly allowed to object to it under Law 68D.

The second thing is that under Law 70, to which we are directed, declarer’s intentions are not relevant. It does not matter whether or not she was about to lead the heart, but simply what are the normal lines from the claimer’s perspective, and the claimer would have no counter to being end-played to lead away from the diamonds.

It is often said that we should rule according to what would likely have happened if the hand had been played out, but there are a couple of problems with this:

That is not what the law says: note what it says about “doubtful points”, as indicated above.

In many cases we cannot know what might happen, since the reason people claim is often that they have so many lines they think are good that they don't decide which one to take – they just claim.

If you think the claimer's intention is clear but it was badly expressed, you should allow the claim – but advise them to be clearer in future!

The claim laws make use of the concept of “normal lines of play”, and tell us that “normal” includes play that would be careless or inferior for the class of player involved. Note that “class” of player is considered to be wider than just “standard” of player, and might include things like propensity to aggression or caution as well as current state of mind as evidenced by play earlier in the hand.

If a player thinks that all their cards are good, it is normal for them to play their suits in any order and so we usually rule the most disadvantageous order of play.

Having once started to play a suit by cashing winners, it is normal to continue that suit until it is exhausted before switching to another suit.

If a player is conceding a trick as part of the claim, unless it has been otherwise specified in the claim it is normal for the player to either play to lose the trick immediately or at the end of play, so once again we rule according to the more disadvantageous of the two. It is not normal to play some winners and then attempt to concede the trick in the middle of the play.

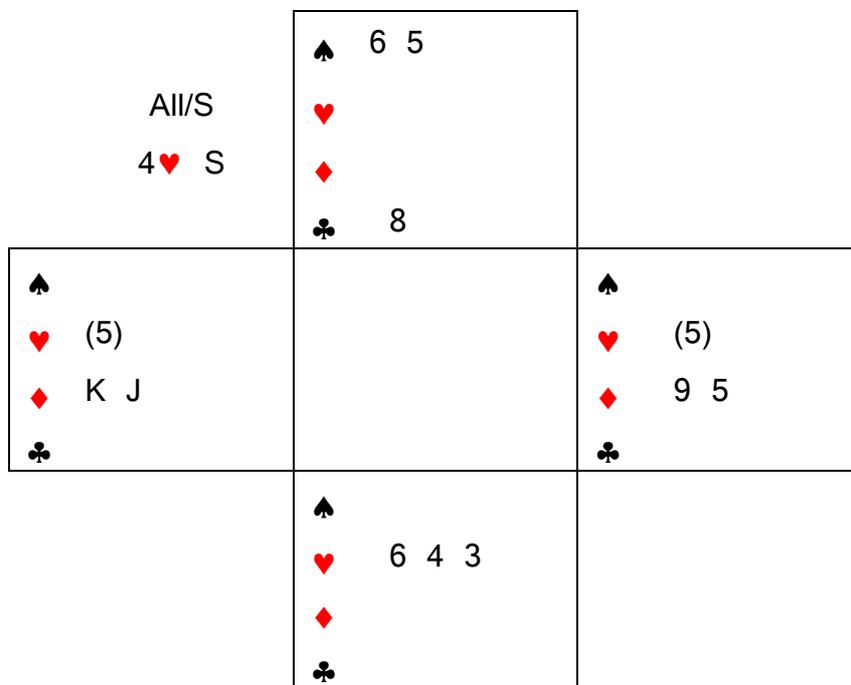
The most common normal order in which to play cards within a suit is from the top down, but in the case of several small cards the claimer might play them in any order. The White Book says:

8.70.5 Top down?

A declarer who states that they are cashing a suit is normally assumed to cash them from the top, especially if there is some solidity. However, each individual case should be considered.

Example Suppose declarer claims three tricks with AK5 opposite 42, forgetting the jack has not gone. It would be normal to give them three tricks since it might be considered not ‘normal’ to play the 5 first. However, with 754 opposite void it may be considered ‘careless’ to lose a trick to a singleton six.

When ruffing, believing all trumps to have been taken out, it is normal to ruff low. Having done so, with only small trumps in hand a player might then play them in any order, as above.



With the lead in dummy, declarer claimed the rest of the tricks since he was unaware of the outstanding trump. It does not matter who actually holds the ♥5, the defence will be awarded a trump: if West holds the card he can over-trump South, and if East holds it, it would be a normal line for South to ruff low and then play a low trump, believing both his trumps to be winners and therefore of equal value. Although it can never gain for South to play this way, it is no worse than careless.

If any trumps are outstanding and have not been mentioned in the claim, it does not necessarily follow that the claimer is unaware of them, as in these examples:

	NS/S 4♣ W	♠ A J T 4 3 2 ♥ 2 ♦ Q T 8 4 ♣ T 4	
♠ Q 6 ♥ A 7 ♦ 6 3 ♣ K J 9 8 6 5 3			♠ 8 7 ♥ Q J T 5 4 3 ♦ J 7 ♣ A Q 2
		♠ K 9 5 ♥ K 9 8 6 ♦ A K 9 5 2 ♣ 7	

In 4♣ by West the defenders cashed two top diamonds, two top spades, and then North exited with a heart. At that point declarer showed his hand to claim, without stating a line. The defenders objected that he hadn't mentioned the outstanding trumps, but it was clear that declarer was not unaware of these trumps since this was the first opportunity he had to draw them and there was no placement of the outstanding trumps that could cause him a problem. Consequently, the claim was allowed.

A player in 7♠ held ♠ A K Q 7 6 5 4 opposite ♠ 8 3. The lead was a trump, declarer called for a small card from dummy and claimed without a statement when his RHO followed. Clearly he was not unaware of the outstanding trumps – he was just checking that there wasn't a 4-0 break (the only holding that could defeat the contract) before making his claim.