Ted Muller
Collection of Various Coups
The term "coup" is defined by *The Encyclopedia of Bridge* as "a special maneuver by declarer in the play of the hand". Bath Coup, Trump Coup, Deschapelles Coup, Crocodile Coup, Merrimac Coup, Scissors Coup, Morton's Fork Coup — most have read about plays such as these, and some even know how to execute them!

That definition, however, is doubly inadequate. Firstly, there is no prohibition against the defenders' usage of such plays; their opportunities merely arise less frequently. Secondly, not only are there many other coups related to the play of the cards, but there are those applicable to the bidding or even the postmortem! These gambits tend not to be mentioned in publications such as the milquetoast ACBL Bulletin. They are detailed here, however, because somebody has to do it, and the truth is sacrosanct on this website.

Not all coups are good things for the perpetrator, as we shall see. Many coups are "regional" in nature; that is, they tend to be utilized only by certain clubs or groups of players; some are primarily the domain of specific individuals. The following listing details the more popular strategies employed at Dante's Infernal, and perhaps elsewhere. You would do well to master them all; otherwise, you risk being non-competitive and branded as a maverick. Be aware, though, that these tactics are considered appropriate only on the local scene. At higher levels of play most of them would not be tolerated.

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**OSTRICH COUP**

*Play as if your head is in the sand.*

Ely Culbertson coined this all-purpose term to describe someone who acts as suggested. Even though ostriches do not actually engage in such a practice, the analogy is clear. The coup manifests itself in many forms: failure to count trumps, forgetting the bidding, ignoring partner's signals, making no-win plays, etcetera. Many of the following devices are variants of the *Ostrich Coup*.

**DONKEY COUP**

*Shorten your trumps early, so as to ensure loss of control of the hand.*

This one is indirectly named after my favorite partner, and 'nuff said about that. In any case, it is common practice for some declarers to take an unnecessary ruff or two early in the play. Perhaps, in absence of a plan, they are trying something that they know how to do — ruff a loser. A variation of this ploy is to play off a key stopper unnecessarily, enabling the defenders to force you in that suit.
WRONG STUFF COUP

Play whatever is best for the opponents, rather than what is best for yourself.

How many times have you observed declarer attempting to steal a trick by leading a singleton toward a king in dummy, only to suffer a ruff or loss of control? How many declarers have taken out a key entry prematurely, for no good reason? How many insist upon playing to the opponents instead of developing their own side suit? This coup has many exciting variations.

COMPRESSION COUP

Force partner to ruff declarer's loser with a natural trump trick.

Also known as the Larry Coup in deference to a former local player's favorite defensive strategy, this error results from an inordinate passion for "giving partner a ruff", without considering the consequences. One example of this is underleading a winner for partner to ruff, to his disadvantage. Another illustration would be for declarer's RHO to lead into dummy's long side suit, letting partner ruff with her QJTx of trumps; dummy follows low, saving that suit's winner for later.

SACRAMENTO COUP

When holding AQx(x) of a suit on defense, and a king-jack combination is known or suspected to be on the player's left: grab the ace and quickly return the suit.

Often, declarer — possibly fearful of an impending ruff on the third round — rejects what would have been a winning finesse against the missing queen. This play has become so commonplace that it shouldn't work anymore, but it seems still to be effective against weaker players. Versus a savvy declarer, one might have better luck with:

BACKWARDS SACRAMENTO COUP (a.k.a. RIO LINDA COUP)

Holding Ax(x) of a suit, take the ace and immediately lead back a low card in the suit.

This applies to situations where a defender would normally be expected to duck the first lead of the key suit. It is an exercise in reverse psychology — an attempt to fool declarer into thinking that you are perpetrating the real Sacramento Coup, holding the queen.

SADIST COUP

As opening leader, refuse to try partner's suit, in defiance of his directional overcall.

This defensive equivalent of the Wrong Stuff Coup is easily the most popular play at the club. Short of leading a trump from Qxx, some players will go to any lengths to avoid doing as partner suggested. In desperation, some of those frustrated folk have resorted to:
**MASOCHIST COUP**

Overcall your non-values, hoping that partner will hit your real stuff on the opening lead.

Of course, this partial remedy merely treats symptoms. If players would stop overcalling with jack-high suits, then their partners would stop being burned by leading from Kx, and some cooperation might be restored.

  Said the masochist, "Hit me." Said the sadist, "No."

**RUBIN COUP**

On defense, lead low from Kx or Qx of a suit.

This little-known, yet surprisingly effective, defensive maneuver was the favorite play of our recently departed friend, Helen Rubin. Doubtless there are other opponents awaiting a chance to use it on you!

**ECLIPSE COUP**

Keep everyone — especially partner — in the dark.

A common maneuver with many variations, this move is available during both the bidding and the defense!

**PINOCHLE COUP**

Cash every winner in sight at the first opportunity.

This overall losing strategy nevertheless is standard practice among novice declarers and defenders alike.

**COP-OUT COUP**

Make excuses for all errors, no matter how ridiculous they might sound.

"I was trying to hear the gossip at the next table."
"An ant bit my foot."
"My vibrating pager was turning me on."

  If possible, divert the blame to someone else.

"I played that joker to have his bid."
"The kibitzer's dress was cut too low!"
"Didn't you read my email about the system change?"
BARBARA COUP

Make a bid or play that is guaranteed to be unique — something that no other player would do.

Whether the result is good or bad is immaterial; the objective is simply to come up with an action that would not be considered by any other contestant.

KNOW-IT-ALL COUP

When an infraction occurs, speak up with seeming authority, hoping that the opponents will acquiesce to your feigned wisdom and forgo a director call. Be sure to make a ruling that is favorable to your own side.

Take it from one who does know the laws: those attempting to make their own rulings are patently lacking an understanding of them. If they did know, they would summon the director, because that's the law. Victims of this one deserve what they get.

EVANS COUP

When you are pseudo-squeezed, keep a winner in a suit that declarer could not logically hold.

Declarer runs all the trumps and other top tricks, forcing you to guess what card to retain at trick thirteen. The idea is to keep a winner in a suit that declarer still could have only if she had forgotten to ruff that loser in dummy when she had the chance.

ATHEIST COUP

Play the jack first when holding queen-jack doubleton.

The average defender seems mandated by the gods always to falsecard with the queen when following suit from queen-jack. The practice being so widespread, it is expected. The tricky move is to commit 'heresy' by playing the jack first; it has a good chance of fooling declarer — that is, unless he suspects you of being an atheist.

CHRISTMAS COUP

Exhaust the opponents of their green pass-cards, hoping to frustrate them into using red ones.

A local group of capable players utilizes a lot of mark-time and puppet-style bids. Their auctions can result in several extra rounds of bidding, with most calls being alerted. This potentially tiresome process has caused more than one opponent to react strangely. The corollary to that holiday offering can be utilized by proponents of any system:
REVERSE CHRISTMAS COUP (a.k.a. ANTI-CHRIST COUP)

Exhaust the opponents of their red double-cards, hoping to frustrate them into using green ones.

Knowing that your side is in hopeless trouble, with the doubling having begun, you and your partner begin a series of nonsensical calls, preferably in the opponents' suits. Once they have used up their complement of doubles from the bidding boxes, your adversaries just might choose to pass in the hopes of getting away from your table as quickly as possible.

BIU'S COUP

When you are about to go for a number, raise the level of the contract.

Believe it or not, this seemingly ludicrous maneuver — being similar in purpose to the Anti-Christ Coup — has worked more than once. For example, when you are doubled in four spades, and you expect a certain zero, bid five spades! Your matchpoint score can't go any lower, and you never know what will happen.

These final gems are grouped together, as they have a common theme.

HESITATION COUP

On defense, hesitate in a key situation when you have nothing legitimate to think about.

This behavior is so widespread that it hardly needs to be identified. Shuffling with a singleton is considered "automatic" by many players. When declarer leads a higher card, some consider it appropriate to hesitate when they cannot cover the card. The fact that they are cheating doesn't seem to matter.

Don't bother calling the director regarding this illegal behavior, however; the player will simply claim that he was deciding which card to play, or was thinking about the prior hand, or some such pretext. Your only realistic recourse is to remember who are the hesitators and who are not. Once you have identified the culprits, they give themselves away.

SOMINEX COUP

As declarer, tank significantly when it is your lead, as if having something to think about.

This coup has a twofold benefit: not only does it suggest some sort of nonexistent problem in the play, but it has the effect of lulling the opponents to sleep — or at least into a state of cerebral lethargy — as they await your next move.

Of course, pulling this stunt is improper, but it also is extremely difficult to prosecute the criminal. At least one local "top" player employs the tactic frequently; moreover, this gimmick is not limited to the play. Similar misbegotten gains can be achieved in the bidding by:
INTIMIDATION COUP

Hesitate during the bidding when there is nothing to think about.

A typical strategy here is to attempt to suppress the opponents when you don't want them to balance or compete further. Example: 1♥ – P – 2♥ – P – ???. Holding a balanced minimum, opener stares at her hand for a few seconds beyond a normal tempo before passing, thereby suggesting that a game-try was being contemplated with extra values, and that balancing would therefore be more dangerous.

NOTE: These three flagrantly unethical ploys are clear-cut attempts to convey misinformation via one's mannerisms — and misleading information at that; yet they occur anyway, and no one tends to call the offenders on their stuff. At Dante's Infernal, summoning a director in these situations generally is futile; however, at major tournaments, actions such as these are routinely censured by directors and appeals committees.