


The Alcatraz Coup

A coup is normally defined as a highly successful stroke, act, or move. In the bridge community, the word coup is a term applied to any strategic play. However, an Alcatraz Coup, even though it is a successful move or clever action, is totally unethical and can carry huge penalties once discovered by the victims.

	♠ A J 10			
	♥ 8 6 4			
	♦ 5 3 2			
	♣ K J 3 2			
				
	♠ K 5			
	♥ A 7 3			
	♦ A 8 6 4			
	♣ A Q 7 4			
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>	
	Pass	Pass	1 NT	
Pass	2 NT	Pass	3 NT	
All pass				
Lead: ♦ K				

In this deal, declarer must make three spade tricks in order to fulfill his contract. Should he finesse by playing a small card from his hand and hope that West has the queen? Or should he lead the jack from dummy and let it ride, hoping East has the queen?

Since the declarer has no information from the auction and no information from the play as to the location of the queen, the declarer decides to use the Alcatraz Coup.

Declarer calls for the jack of spades from the dummy. East plays low, and the declarer fails to follow suit. The Alcatraz Coup has just occurred. Declarer has not followed suit. He has committed an infraction by revoking, but he waits to correct the revoke until West plays to the trick.

If West produces the queen, declarer will “discover” his revoke and replace the played card with the king, apologizing profusely that he pulled the incorrect card. West is allowed to change his play to a low card, but declarer has already located the queen and, of course, successfully finesses against West.

If West does not produce the queen, declarer will again “discover” his mistake and replace the played card with the five, again apologizing profusely that he pulled the incorrect card.

And, in this manner, the declarer has made three spade tricks, which was his goal.

Declarer revoked, but the *Laws of Duplicate Bridge* state that the declarer is not subject to penalty for exposing a card, and no card of declarer's or dummy's hand ever becomes a penalty card. Furthermore, a revoke is correctable until the revoking side has played a card to the next trick. So, by applying the Alcatraz Coup, the declarer is not penalized.

However, the laws state:

- The director may award an adjusted score for the exposure of retracted cards by damaged side.
- The director may award an adjusted score under director's discretionary powers
- The declarer may be charged with unethical conduct.
- The declarer may be charged with intentional deception.