

Be Prepared

Good morning, Ladies and Gentlemen and welcome to the 18th session of Shark's Pointers Online.

This is a special anniversary for me. 50 years ago this month, I earned my very first masterpoints. I'm very proud of the more than 13,000 masterpoints I have earned over that period of time. But I am much more proud of the fact that when I was growing up in Oxford, MA, I once earned 13 of the required 21 merit badges to become an Eagle Scout - in just one month!

By the time I was 13, I became an Eagle Scout, an accomplishment that would probably be impossible today because of the Eagle project that became a requirement some years ago.

Fast forward about 40 years, and I'm at the MIT Sloan School listening to a tremendous MBA recruiting speech by Bob MacDonald, who at that time was the Chief Operating Officer at Procter and Gamble. His speech was called "Values Based Leadership", and he was trying to convince graduating MBAs to pursue a career in marketing at P&G. He talked about how his various life experiences - church, Boy Scouting, West Point, and military service - all helped to shape his values as a leader. He said that P&G's slogan was "Improving Life, Improving Lives" and he showed some great examples how products like pur water helped improve lives in 3rd world countries. He said the Boy Scout motto was "Help other people at all times" , and this dovetailed nicely with the corporate goals.

After the speech, I was introduced to Mr. MacDonald because I worked at Gillette, and I was an MIT alum helping to coordinate a special project with the Sloan School at that time. Although it was a little awkward, I felt compelled to correct my company's COO. "The Boy Scout motto is actually "Be Prepared", I said. "I know this because I am an Eagle Scout". Somewhat taken aback, Mr. MacDonald politely thanked me and told me he would look into it. About a week later, I got an email from Mr. MacDonald. He said he looked into it, and I was correct. Then he went on to state that while he accomplished much in his life (he later became CEO of P&G, then Secretary of Veterans' Affairs under President Obama.) the one big disappointment he had was he had never become an Eagle Scout. He didn't know how to swim, and by the time he learned he was 18 and had to quit the scouts.

TODAY'S SHARK'S POINTER IS THE BOY SCOUT MOTTO - "BE PREPARED"! Over the next 30-45 minutes I am going to explore a number of situations in which you must be prepared in order to achieve your best results at the table.

Let's start with one of the hands I highlighted several weeks ago.

What's It All About, Alfie?

Matchpoints
North Deals
None Vul

♠ 9 6	♠ Q J 5 2	♠ 8 3
♥ A K 10 7 5 2	♥ J 9	♥ 6 4 3
♦ 7 5 2	♦ A Q 10	♦ J 9 8 6
♣ K 5	♣ J 9 6 2	♣ Q 10 8 3
	♠ A K 10 7 4	
	♥ Q 8	
	♦ K 4 3	
	♣ A 7 4	

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
2 ♥	Pass	Pass	1 ♠
All pass	3 ♥	Pass	4 ♠
4 ♠ by South			

Some of you may remember this hand from my June 12th lecture entitled "What's It All About, Alfie?"

South opened the bidding 1 ♠, West overcalled 2 ♥, North made a limit raise in spades by bidding 3 ♥, and after a pass by East, South closed out the bidding by bidding 4 ♠. West started with the A and K of ♥, shifted to a low diamond, North rose with the A, and immediately played a ♣ to her Ace.

Did you see what West needed to do? That's right. West needed to unblock the K of clubs under the Ace. Not an easy play, but being "at the table", you foresaw the need to do make this great play! If he didn't make this great play, South would draw trumps, clear diamonds and exit with a club, and West would be down to all hearts yielding a game going extra trick via a ruff and a sluff.

West had to be prepared to unblock his K of clubs. He could easily foresee his being endplayed into providing a ruff and a sluff. One of the things we have to do as bridge players is think a little ahead. This will make tough plays like this a lot easier.

Be Prepared

But "being prepared" starts before even touching a card. Before showing some more hands, let's take a few minutes to brainstorm some of the various ways we can be better prepared.

Any thoughts?

Plenty of rest and exercise

Staying focussed at the start of play

No distracting table talk or banter

Take a few cleansing breaths

Don't get too high or too low when things go well or bad.

Stay focused at the end of the session - especially on the last hand.

Think before playing to trick one.

If you see an important play coming up later in the hand, practice in your mind how you will play in order to make the winning play in tempo for the best effect.

Now let's look at some variations on this theme that come up time and again.

Let's start with bidding. How many times have you passed when you should have bid, bid when you should have passed, doubled when you shouldn't have and didn't double when you should?

I do it all the time. What's the reason. I'm not prepared. Let's look at a couple of examples...

Be Prepared - To Bid

IMPS
South Deals
E-W Vul

♠ A 4 3 2	♠ K J	♠ Q 10 9 6 5
♥ J 8 5	♥ 6 4 3	♥ 10
♦ A 8 7 3	♦ J 10 5 2	♦ 6
♣ 7 5	♣ Q 10 9 3	♣ A K 8 6 4 2
	<div style="display: inline-block; background-color: green; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; margin: 5px;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ 8 7	
	♥ A K Q 9 7 2	
	♦ K Q 9 4	
	♣ J	

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
Pass	2 ♥	?	1 ♥

You hold the East hand, and the auction goes as shown, what is your plan?
What's It All About, Alfie?

Looks like we might make a lot of tricks in spades or clubs and opps may make a lot in either red suit, does't it?

Even before North bids, you should be thinking.. You should ask yourself whether you should start with a takeout double, or bid spades, or bid clubs? My own preference would be to bid my longest and strongest suit - clubs. Later, when opps continue to compete in hearts, I will come in with my spades. This should get partner off to the right lead if opps play the hand, and it should get us to the proper contract if we play.

In practice, East did the worst possible - he tanked after North bid 2H - and then passed. I would bid 3C and when opps compete in hearts - at either the 3 or 4 level, I would show my spades. As you can see, EW are cold for 4S, but instead they passively defended 4H - which can be defeated with a diamond ruff - or a spade misguess. What a disaster!

Be Prepared - To Not Bid

North Deals
None Vul

♠ A 10 4			
♥ Q J 10 5			
♦ K 10 2			
♣ A J 6			
♠ K 5	<div style="display: inline-block; background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; border: 1px solid black;"> N W E S </div>	♠ J 8 3 2	
♥ 9 8 6 3		♥ K 7 4	
♦ 5 4 3		♦ A 9 8	
♣ K Q 8 2		♣ 10 7 3	
♠ Q 9 7 6			
♥ A 2			
♦ Q J 7 6			
♣ 9 5 4			

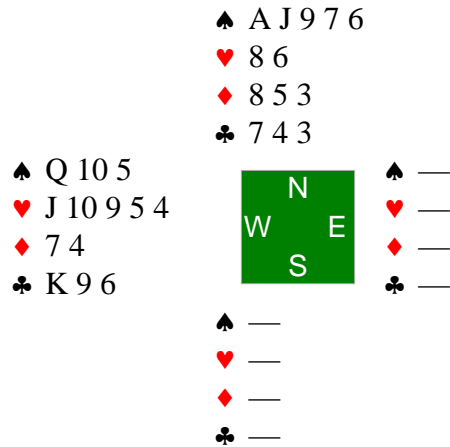
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
?	1 NT	Pass	2 ♣

Here's a very common situation. Sitting West, I made the "genius bid" of doubling 2C - knowing full well my suit wasn't long enough or strong enough for the call. Everyone else passed with my hand, of course, and the opps quietly settled in 2 NT. At my table, my double increased the value of North's J of clubs and he happily accepted his partner's invite. Game was cold, of course.

The lesson here is to be prepared - to make the normal bid or play!

Now let's look at a couple of common "automatic" defensive plays that we need to be on the lookout for....

Be Prepared - To Cut Communications



<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			2 NT
Pass	3 ♥	Pass	3 ♠
Pass	3 NT	All pass	

3 NT by South

Here's a fairly common situation. You lead the J of hearts against 3 NT, South wins and plays a low spade at trick 2. Your play?

Well, it should be obvious to rise with your Q. Assuming South has 2 spades as this auction indicates, the play of the Q will limit declarer to at most 1 spade trick.

If you carelessly play low, declarer will most certainly put in dummy's 9. Here's the full deal.

Be Prepared - To Cut Communications

South Deals
None Vul

	♠ A J 9 7 6		
	♥ 8 6		
	♦ 8 5 3		
	♣ 7 4 3		
♠ Q 10 5	<div style="display: inline-block; background-color: green; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> N W E S </div>	♠ K 4 2	
♥ J 10 9 5 4		♥ 7 3 2	
♦ 7 4		♦ A 10 9 2	
♣ K 9 6		♣ J 8 5	
	♠ 8 3		
	♥ A K Q		
	♦ K Q J 6		
	♣ A Q 10 2		

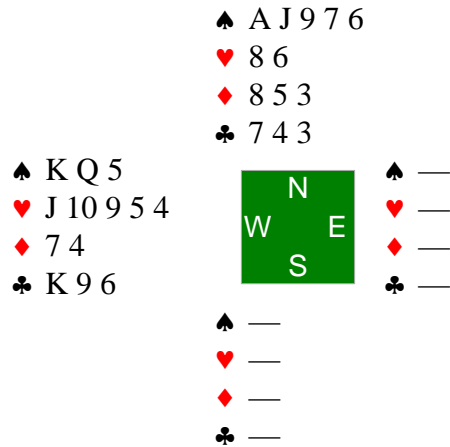
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			2 NT
Pass	3 ♥	Pass	3 ♠
Pass	3 NT	All pass	

3 NT by South

If you make the proper play of the Spade Q at trick 2, declarer will surely go down. If you carelessly play low, declarer will insert dummy's 9 and now your partner must duck! If he win's the K, declarer will get back in and return a spade to dummy's J and eventually score 4 spade tricks making the hand easily.

But even you brilliant partner can't save you on this hand if declarer win's the spade 9 and play's a club to his 10. He'll eventually score 3 clubs, 3 hearts, 2 diamonds and 2 spades. Now let's alter the hand slightly....

Be Prepared - To Cut Communications



<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			2 NT
Pass	3 ♥	Pass	3 ♠
Pass	3 NT	All pass	

3 NT by South

Same auction. You lead the J of hearts against 3 NT, South wins and plays a low spade at trick 2. Now what is your play?

I think it should be clear you must play the 5 of spades in tempo. Don't hesitate. Don't hitch, just play the 5 as if you really weren't paying too much attention. Now declarer will finesse the 9 and lose to your partner's 10 and go down. But here you have to mentally prepare yourself to play the 5 without hesitation. If you hitch, a shrewd declarer just might read you for holding the KQ5 - insert the J and still come to 9 or 10 tricks. After all, if you had anything to think about - holding Kxx or Qxx, wouldn't you have played the K or Q of spades - not the 5?

You have to mentally prepare yourself for a spade play just as soon as you see the dummy. If you are not ready, in the "good old days" you wouldn't have to turn over your card after trick 1 until you were ready. Now, we don't have that luxury any longer with online bridge.

So my Shark's Pointer is when sitting 3rd in hand at trick 1 - in this case in the East hand, take a few extra seconds before playing to trick 1. Simply say, "I have no problem, I am just thinking about the whole hand." Then think about the hand. Also, in the process, allow your partner a few extra seconds to also think about the hand - and better prepare him or herself to make the right play, in the right tempo, at the right time. Once again, the full hand...

Be Prepared - To Cut Communications

South Deals
None Vul

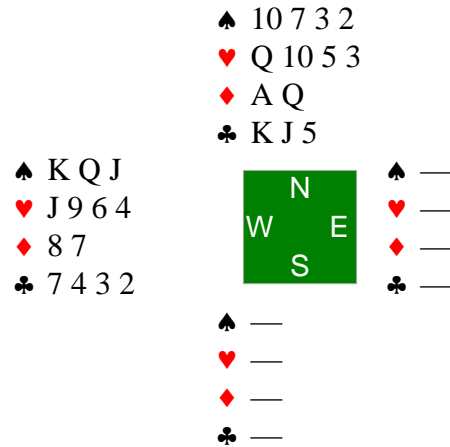
♠ K Q 5 ♥ J 10 9 5 4 ♦ 7 4 ♣ K 9 6	♠ A J 9 7 6 ♥ 8 6 ♦ 8 5 3 ♣ 7 4 3	<div style="text-align: center; border: 1px solid black; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: 0 auto; background-color: #008000; color: white; display: flex; flex-direction: column; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> N W E S </div>	♠ 10 4 2 ♥ 7 3 2 ♦ A 10 9 2 ♣ J 8 5
	♠ 8 3 ♥ A K Q ♦ K Q J 6 ♣ A Q 10 2		

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			2 NT
Pass	3 ♥	Pass	3 ♠
Pass	3 NT	All pass	

3 NT by South

If declarer suspect's you had a problem because you hitched before playing the 5, he can insert dummy's J and when this holds the trick play a club to his 10.

Be Prepared - To Falsecard



<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
Pass	2 ♣	Pass	1 NT
Pass	4 ♥	All pass	2 ♥

4 ♥ by South

Ok, here's a fairly common situation. Against 4H, your side takes the first 3 tricks. After winning the third spade, your partner shifts to a diamond, which declarer wins in dummy. Now declarer, plays the 3 of hearts to his Ace, partner following with the deuce. Your play?

If you play low, declarer will probably continue with his K.

You need to play the 9! Declarer will think you might have started with a singleton and now play a low heart to his Q as he can pick up Jxxx in partner's hand by playing this way. Here's the complete deal...

Be Prepared - To Falsecard

East Deals
Both Vul

	♠ 10 7 3 2		
	♥ Q 10 5 3		
	♦ A Q		
	♣ K J 5		
♠ K Q J	<div style="display: inline-block; background-color: green; color: white; padding: 5px; border: 1px solid black;"> N W E S </div>	♠ A 9 8	
♥ J 9 6 4		♥ 2	
♦ 8 7		♦ 10 9 4 3 2	
♣ 7 4 3 2		♣ 10 9 8 6	
	♠ 6 5 4		
	♥ A K 8 7		
	♦ K J 6 5		
	♣ A Q		

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		Pass	1 NT
Pass	2 ♣	Pass	2 ♥
Pass	4 ♥	All pass	

4 ♥ by South

If you played the 9, declarer will go down 1. Here's the hand he is playing you to have...

Be Prepared - To Falsecard

East Deals
Both Vul

♠ K Q J	♠ 10 7 3 2	♠ A 9 8
♥ 9	♥ Q 10 5 3	♥ J 6 4 2
♦ 8 7 4 3 2	♦ A Q	♦ 10 9
♣ 7 4 3 2	♣ K J 5	♣ 10 9 8 6
	<div style="display: inline-block; background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; border: 1px solid black;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ 6 5 4	
	♥ A K 8 7	
	♦ K J 6 5	
	♣ A Q	

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		Pass	1 NT
Pass	2 ♣	Pass	2 ♥
Pass	4 ♥	All pass	

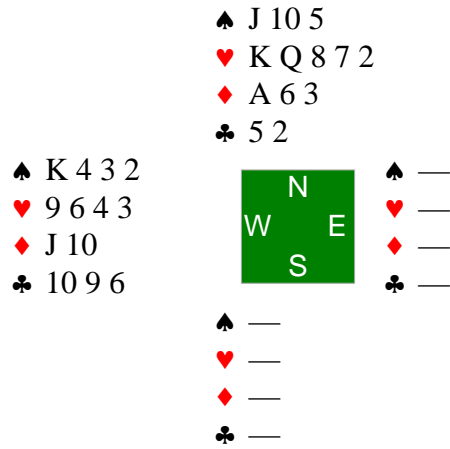
4 ♥ by South

On this lie of the cards, the 7 of hearts to dummy's Q will allow declarer to finesse against Jxxx in the East hand and score up the game.

Did you find the 9 of hearts play from J9xx? This is called an "automatic falsecard". If you are mentally prepared, the play of the 9 will come naturally - and once again, in tempo. If you think a while and then play the 9 of hearts, declarer may not be fooled.

Be Prepared - To Duck Smoothly

Dealer North
 Vul NS
 Matchpoints



Opening Lead J of ♦

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	Pass	3 ♦	Dbl
Pass	4 ♥	Pass	4 NT
Pass	5 ♠	Pass	7 NT
All pass			

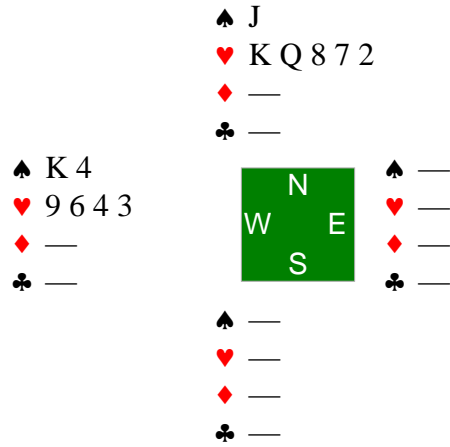
7 NT by South

Against South's 7 NT contract, you lead the J of diamonds. Declarer wins the Ace in dummy, partner follows with the 2 and declarer follows. Now declarer plays A,K and Q of clubs pitching a diamond from dummy as partner discards the K of diamonds. What are your thoughts?

Declarer obviously has the A of hearts and the Ace of spades. If he scores 5 heart tricks he is home free. He runs all his clubs and reaches this end position....

Be Prepared - To Duck Smoothly

Dealer North
 Vul NS
 Matchpoints



Opening Lead J of ♦

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
Pass	Pass	3 ♦	Dbl
Pass	4 ♥	Pass	4 NT
Pass	5 ♠	Pass	7 NT
All pass			


7 NT by South

He now plays the heart 10 to dummy, dropping partner's J and scores up the grand slam by way of a finesse of your 9.

Now let's change the hand ever so slightly...

Be Prepared - To Duck Smoothly

North Deals
None Vul

♠ K 4 3 2 ♥ J 9 4 3 ♦ J 10 ♣ 10 9 6	♠ J 10 5 ♥ K Q 8 7 2 ♦ A 6 3 ♣ 5 2		♠ Q 9 6 ♥ 6 ♦ K Q 9 7 5 4 2 ♣ 4 3
♠ A 8 7 ♥ A 10 5 ♦ 8 ♣ A K Q J 8 7			

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	Pass	3 ♦	Dbl
Pass	4 ♥	Pass	4 NT
Pass	5 ♠	Pass	7 NT
All pass			

7 NT by South

Are you prepared to play low in tempo - just as if you started with 9643 of hearts when declarer plays the 10 from his hand in the end position?

If you condition yourself into thinking you hold 9643 throughout the hand and follow just as you did in the prior example, most of the time declarer will rise K. Any time hearts were 3-2 to begin with or anytime partner started with still 9 or stiff J, he is home free.

So today's Shark's Pointer is BE PREPARED!!