

## Christ, You Know It Ain't Easy

Good Morning, Ladies and Gentlemen!

Welcome to this - our 53rd session of Shark's Pointers Online!

Last week, Grace Charron raised a compelling question, and I don't think I gave her a great answer. You may recall that she mentioned how hard it was to keep track of so much.

I'm going to dedicate this entire session to following up on Grace's question.

First of all, we need to recognize that there are many expert plays and coups that we don't see every day - and if even if we did, we might not recognize them. This is why coaching is such an important aspect of anyone's hope for improving skills at bridge. Today's Shark's Pointers theme is the familiar refrain from the Ballad of John and Yoko - "Christ, You Know It Ain't Easy". We're going to walk you thru one somewhat rare expert play that occurred this week to provide some familiarity with this somewhat rare situation - and devote the rest of the session to situations in which we might help make our burden a little lighter as we confront complicated and challenging decisions down the road.

Here's a hand that came up the other day...

## Christ, You Know It Ain't Easy

East Deals  
N-S Vul



♠ K  
♥ J 6  
♦ K Q J 10 9 8  
♣ A K Q 2

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		2 ♠	3 ♦
3 ♠	Pass	Pass	4 ♣
Pass	4 ♦	All pass	

Opening Lead 8 of ♠

4 ♦ by South

East opened the bidding 2S, and my 3D bid was easy and straightforward. I certainly don't want to double and hear my partner bid hearts. My hand has 19 HCP but game is very unlikely.

To the point that Grace was making, thinking ahead my next bid over partner's hypothetical 3H bid was perplexing. Would 3S now by me be asking for a partial spade stopper? Or would it show a big hand in support of hearts. I tend to think the latter.

I don't have to decide if I should recklessly gamble with 3N over 3H or bid 4C. Right now I can wait. When 3S comes around to me, I could bid 4D, but I thought I would take a chance and introduce my strong 4 card club suit. Pass did not occur to me, and X seemed suicidal as it would likely bring a 4H bid from partner that could be disastrous.

As it turns out, West bid 3S which was passed around to me. I don't know what you would do with this hand. 4D didn't seem to give the hand justice. 3NT was now completely out of the question. I decided 4C would be pushy, but would suggest my shape as well as my extra values. If partner now bid 4H, I would be comfortable passing as I have probably denied as many as 3 hearts by my not doubling 3S for takeout. Partner actually bid 4D which was passed out.

Here was the full hand....

## Christ, You Know It Ain't Easy

East Deals  
N-S Vul

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

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
3 ♠	Pass	2 ♠	3 ♦
Pass	4 ♦	Pass	4 ♣
		All pass	

Opening Lead 8 of ♠

4 ♦ by South

West led the 8 of spades. I inserted the 10 in the hope that this would be covered by the J and I would steal my singleton K. East alertly rose with his Ace, but he fell from grace my returning his club - which was clearly a singleton. This afforded me an opportunity to ditch one of my heart winners, but I had to be careful as a club ruff was still sure to set me.

The significance of West's lead of the 8 of spades did not escape me. This clearly appeared to be top of nothing. So, before touching trumps, I played a third round of spades from dummy at trick 4 and when East played the 7, I pitched my J of hearts. East won and returned a heart, but I was able to ruff. Now I played the Q of diamonds from my hand. If West did hold Ax, I was dead if he won the A and gave his partner a club ruff. Unlikely this would work, but I had to hope he might duck with Ax, or he held Axx, or his partner held the A. I was thrilled to see East win the Ace of diamonds, because I was now cold!.


The key lesson here is to recognize that pitching a heart loser on the spade 4 was essential to prevent West from ever being able to gain the lead and give his partner a club ruff.

This play - of severing communication between the opponents - is known as a "Scissors Coup". It's pretty spiffy. It doesn't occur very often. I point it out so you might think about it should the situation ever arise. These spiffy, expert plays are all great, but even though it will take a long time to learn these, it will take no time for you to get great results on many, many other hands that will occur every day.

Let's look at the following hand...

## Christ, You Know It Ain't Easy

IMPs  
North Deals  
None Vul

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

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	Pass	Pass	1 ♦
Pass	1 ♠	2 ♣	Dbl
3 ♠	4 ♠	Pass	Pass
5 ♣	Pass	Pass	Dbl
All pass			

Opening Lead 2 of ♣

5 ♣× by East

Here's a hand that came up the other night. I was playing with an expert player against an expert pair and the bidding was as shown. My double of 2 ♣ was a support double showing a spade raise with 3 card support. West's 3S bid was a splinter in support of clubs. North's pass of 5C was forcing, inviting me to bid 5S. With my hand, double was easy. Knowing dummy would be short in spades, I got off to a trump lead. Dummy played the 6 and partner discarded the 8 of spades. (We were playing upside down count and attitude). Declarer won in hand and immediately played the 4 of diamonds to dummy. I rose with the A as partner followed with the 3. The 2 was missing. It looked like partner started with 3 diamonds, but I wasn't sure. I decided to return the Q of diamonds in case partner started with a doubleton and declarer had a slow diamond pitch on a heart. I truly had no idea what was right. This was one of those hands that Grace was talking about. A lot of things are swirling around in my head, but tough to sort it all out.

Here was the full deal...

## Christ, You Know It Ain't Easy

North Deals  
None Vul

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

Opening Lead 2 of ♣

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	Pass	Pass	1 ♦
Pass	1 ♠	2 ♣	Dbl
3 ♠	4 ♠	Pass	Pass
5 ♣	Pass	Pass	Dbl
All pass			

5 ♣× by East

The good news is that the double dummy analysis shows that 4S can be defeated. The bad news is that having gotten off to the killing trump lead, I needed to follow up with A and a trump. My diamond return made declarer's job easy. He was able to play a spade to his ace and ruff a spade. Now he could ruff a diamond to hand and ruff his last spade in dummy. Now he just needed to drive out the trumps and lose the A of trumps and a heart trick for down only 1.

I was really kicking myself after my failure to return A and a club. There were many clues to suggest that declarer's distribution was 3-2-2-6 and returning clubs could at worst break even and would have certainly stopped the ruff of a spade in dummy. Down 1 earned us 1.8 IMPS, down 2 would have been more than a 7 IMP gain!

After the session, I looked at the double dummy analysis of this hand and what I learned from this was probably the best lesson I could have gained!

## Christ, You Know It Ain't Easy

North Deals  
None Vul

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

NS 3♠; EW 4♣; S 2♥; EW 1N; NS 2♦; N 1♥; Par -100; NS 4♠×-1

Opening Lead 2 of ♣

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	Pass	Pass	1 ♦
Pass	1 ♠	2 ♣	Dbl
3 ♠	4 ♠	Pass	Pass
5 ♣	Pass	Pass	Dbl
All pass			

5 ♣× by East

You may notice that the double dummy analysis suggests that 4 ♣ is actually cold for EW!

Once again, Deep Finesse is never wrong - but it assumes double dummy play and defense.

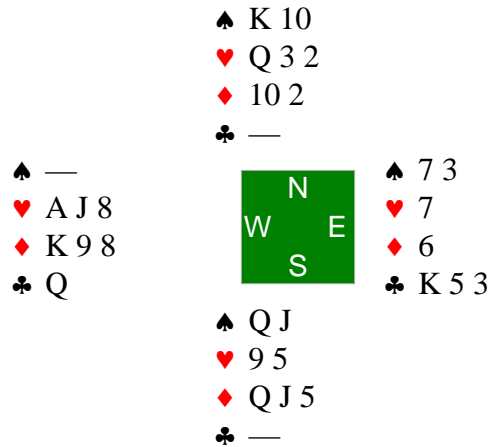
The good news is that the double dummy analysis shows that 4S can be defeated. The bad news is that having gotten off to the killing trump lead, I needed to follow up with A and a trump. My diamond return made declarer's job easy. He was able to play a spade to his ace and ruff a spade. Now he could ruff a diamond to hand and ruff his last spade in dummy. Now he just needed to drive out the trumps and lose the A of trumps and a heart trick for down only 1.

He still might have gone down 2 tricks, but regardless, I shouldn't have wasted a lot of energy beating myself up for not finding the best defense.

In truth, our declarer should go down only one, but the play is extremely intriguing after South shifts to A and a trump. East must win in hand and immediately run the 10 of hearts. North will win and return a spade, which declarer wins in hand.

Here's the position after the first six tricks...

## Christ, You Know It Ain't Easy



Opening Lead 2 of ♣

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	Pass	Pass	1 ♦
Pass	1 ♠	2 ♣	Dbl
3 ♠	4 ♠	Pass	Pass
5 ♣	Pass	Pass	Dbl
All pass			

5 ♣× by East

The only way that EW can get out for down 1 is to play A of hearts and run the J! This will pin South's 9xx and whether or not North covers the J with his Q, declarer can establish an extra heart trick on which he can now pitch his 2nd spade loser which the defense prevented getting ruffed.

This is a very complex hand on bidding, play, and defense. There are so many subtleties about this that I am going to spend the rest of today's talk just on this one hand.

Let's look at the full deal again...

## Christ, You Know It Ain't Easy

North Deals  
None Vul

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

NS 3♠; EW 4♣; S 2♥; EW 1N; NS 2♦; N 1♥; Par -100; NS 4♠×-1

Opening Lead 2 of ♣

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	Pass	Pass	1 ♦
Pass	1 ♠	2 ♣	Dbl
3 ♠	4 ♠	Pass	Pass
5 ♣	Pass	Pass	Dbl
All pass			

5 ♣× by East

First of all, how many of you play what is known as "Lavinthal discards"? This is a great hand for this. What a Lavinthal discard is one pitches a suit he doesn't want led and either pitches a high card to suggest a shift to the higher ranking of available suits, or a low card to suggest a shift to the lower ranking available suit.

So on the trump lead, North would discard the 10 of hearts! This would be a clear signal for a heart shift. Now, South will have no difficulty in rising with the A of diamonds and playing A and a club.

The problem is that an expert declarer will also realize that North is showing hearts and most likely the K and Q based upon his aggressive bidding. South's distribution is marked. He is known to have 3 clubs and 3 spades from his support double. He opened the bidding 1D, so he can't have 3 diamonds and 3 clubs - or he would have opened the bidding 1C. So he is marked with 3-3-4-3 distribution! I challenge you to really work at trying to determine the distribution of the opponents' hands whether you are declarer or defender. If you like to solve puzzles, this is actually very stimulating and great fun. A good declarer will use these clues to find the double dummy winning line. Just one more pointer about this hand before we go. Let's focus on the South hand...



## Christ, You Know It Ain't Easy

North Deals  
None Vul



♠ Q J 6  
♥ 9 5 4  
♦ A Q J 5  
♣ A 4 2

NS 3♠; EW 4♣; S 2♥; EW 1N; NS 2♦; N 1♥; Par -100:  
NS 4♠×-1

Opening Lead 2 of ♣

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	Pass	Pass	1♦
Pass	1♠	2♣	Dbl
3♠	4♠	Pass	Pass
5♣	Pass	Pass	Dbl
All pass			

5♣× by East

Note that South has 14 high card points. He has to be very careful not to discard the Q of spades to suggest holding QJx. Why? Because once again, declarer can use this information to piece together the information he needs to decide how to play the hearts. He knows that South has the A of clubs and by inference the A and Q of diamonds by his rising with the Ace on the first round. If he reveals he started with QJx of spades, declarer will know that if he started with AQxx of diamonds or AQJx of diamonds then he will have been 3-3-4-3 with 13 of 14 high card points - outside of the heart suit! He can't have started with the Q or K of hearts or he would have opened the bidding 1NT! When he doesn't cover the 10 of hearts when led, it will be very obvious to an astute declarer that he must have started with three small hearts. Any expert player starting with Kxx or Qxx of hearts will cover the 10. This will pretty much confirm that his partner started with KQxx. Declarer's only hope would be if South started with 3 to the 9.

So, Grace is 100% correct. These hands can be very complicated. The biggest thing we can do is get plenty of rest before playing an important bridge event. It is extremely difficult to sort out all the various inferences that pop up from time to time. There are a few tips we can try to follow. Somethings we can pick up - like the Scissors Coup, or counting high cards, figuring out distribution. We can use signalling tools like Lavinthal discards. The other thing we should do is give ourselves a time limit - 10 or 15 seconds. That's all. After that time is up, make a decision. Make your play and right or wrong, move on to the next hand. Accept the fact that you are going to not get every one of these hands right. Accept it, short live it and move on! You'll be so much more relaxed after the end of a session if you follow this simple advice!