

Count, Count and Count Again

Good morning, Ladies and Gentlemen!

Welcome to this - the 39th session of Shark's Pointers Online.

Last week, we took some time to go thru each of the presentations we have given since this terrible pandemic forced our face to face games to come to a screeching halt. We started with a hand I actually featured in one of my very first Shark's Pointers newspaper columns way back in 1975 that highlighted the importance of counting.

Over the course of the year, we covered a variety of TV themes such as "Who Do You Trust", "What Would You Do?", "I've Got A Secret", "Door #1 or Door #2" from "Let's Make A Deal". Some of our other themes included, "Hurry Up or Wait?", "Wearing Blinders", and "What's It All About, Alfie?". We explored "The Inner Game of Bridge" and we asked each of us to stop to recognize what our major weaknesses were so that we might focus on them - we referred to them, as you may recall, as our "Achilles Heels". I talked about some of my great mentors and how mentoring can help fast track all of our progress.

As bridge players, we frequently have to play the role of detective and problem-solver. We have to understand basic probabilities to determine which of multiple possible lines of play or or defense will give us the best chance for success. To this end, there are usually several good clues in the bidding and the play to help us. We have to be good communicators and we have to keep an eye open for any inferences we can find.

I think the most frequent - and usually most helpful - approach involves counting.

Today's hand will go back to the beginning. We're going to revisit the 70's and we are going to revisit the timelessly important topic of counting.

Whether as a defender or a declarer, there are many things we have to count on a given hand. We always have to count our tricks. We have to count our losers. We have to count our high card points - as well as the high card points in the hands we can not see. We have to count the opponents' winners.

We're aptly calling today's talk "Count, Count, and Triple Count" !

Now, with this as a backdrop, let's take a look at today's hand...

Count Count and Triple Count

South Deals
None Vul

♠ Q 6 3
♥ 10 9 7 5 3
♦ Q 4
♣ A 9 4

♠ —
♥ J 6 2
♦ A K 9 8 7 3
♣ 7 6 5 3



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

5 ♠× by South

You're on lead against 5 ♠X after a rather spirited auction with partner making a preemptive jump shift to 4C. You start with a high diamond and see the following dummy.

Partner follows with the 2 of diamonds, and declarer the 5.

How do you proceed?

Count Count and Triple Count

South Deals
None Vul

♠ Q 6 3
♥ 10 9 7 5 3
♦ Q 4
♣ A 9 4

♠ —
♥ J 6 2
♦ A K 9 8 7 3
♣ 7 6 5 3



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

5 ♠× by South

Let me ask you, based upon the auction as shown, what do you think South's distribution is?

Do you think it is more likely that partner has a singleton diamond or three diamonds?

Do you think declarer really is 6-3-4-0?

One thing is certain, since your partner's 4C bid is - per your agreement - a weak jump shift in competition. That is close to 100% certainty that declarer is indeed void in clubs.

It's possible, I suppose, that South has 3 good hearts and is cuebidding, but there is another possibility based upon the play of partner's 2 of diamonds.

He most likely has 3 diamonds - not 1.

Now that would give declarer 2 diamonds and 0 clubs, and his bidding 4H may be based upon his having a 5 card heart suit along with 6 spades. If that's the case partner will have started with a heart void.

This may be the full layout....

Count Count and Triple Count

South Deals
None Vul

♠ —	♠ Q 6 3	♠ 9 8 4 2									
♥ J 6 2	♥ 10 9 7 5 3	♥ —									
♦ A K 9 8 7 3	♦ Q 4	♦ J 10 2									
♣ 7 6 5 3	♣ A 9 4	♣ K Q J 10 8 2									
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	N										
W		E									
	S										
	♠ A K J 10 7 5										
	♥ A K Q 8 4										
	♦ 6 5										
	♣ —										

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

5 ♠ × by South

Now, if this is partner's hand, I really think he would "dive" in a cold 6C contract, don't you?

Well, since North doubled 5C, I suppose it's possible he could have this hand, so whether or not you are in the best contract is immaterial. How do you defend, double-dummy?

Looks like a heart shift at trick 2 for partner to ruff, a diamond back and a second heart will beat this 2 tricks for a pretty decent score - even though you are "cold" for 12 tricks as the cards lie.

Are there any other possible hands?

Are we missing any clues?

Let's listen to the bidding again. If you had the South hand, wouldn't you pull the double of 5C to 5H - not 5S?

So what does that suggest now?

Count Count and Triple Count

South Deals
None Vul

♠ Q 6 3
♥ 10 9 7 5 3
♦ Q 4
♣ A 9 4

♠ —
♥ J 6 2
♦ A K 9 8 7 3
♣ 7 6 5 3



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

5 ♠× by South

If we assume that Declarer has started with 2 diamonds and 0 clubs, and therefore 11 major suit cards, this auction would suggest that South started with 7-4-2-0 distribution, not 6-5-2-0.

If that's the case, partner's distribution will be 3-1-3-6. 3 spades, 1 heart, 3 diamonds, and 6 clubs.

If this is the case, to have doubled, he must have a high spade honor - either the Ace, or more likely due to his preempt, the K.

Count Count and Triple Count

South Deals
None Vul

♠ Q 6 3
♥ 10 9 7 5 3
♦ Q 4
♣ A 9 4

♠ —
♥ J 6 2
♦ A K 9 8 7 3
♣ 7 6 5 3



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

5 ♠× by South

So we are assuming declarer to be 7-4-2-0, and partner to be 3-1-3-6. We're also assuming partner started with Kxx of spades for his double.

How do we continue?

Count Count and Triple Count

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



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

5 ♠× by South

If you do cash the 2nd diamond, and partner follows with the 10.

You know he started with J102. We have discussed this situation in an earlier session. With 3 cards, your first card (in this case the 2, is a suit preference signal), and the 2nd card of the remaining 2 (assuming you won't be giving up a trick somehow by your play) will be suit preference. So partner is suggesting you play a club. OK, you return a club now and this is the full deal...

Count Count and Triple Count

South Deals
None Vul

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

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

5 ♠ × by South

OK. Let's reconstruct our available clues. Declarer is presumed to be 7-4-2-0, and partner is 3-1-3-6 with Kxx of spades.

After cashing two diamonds, if you return a club, or you return a low heart and partner's singleton is a low heart, declarer will win the heart return in dummy so as to finesse partner's trump K and score 11 tricks.

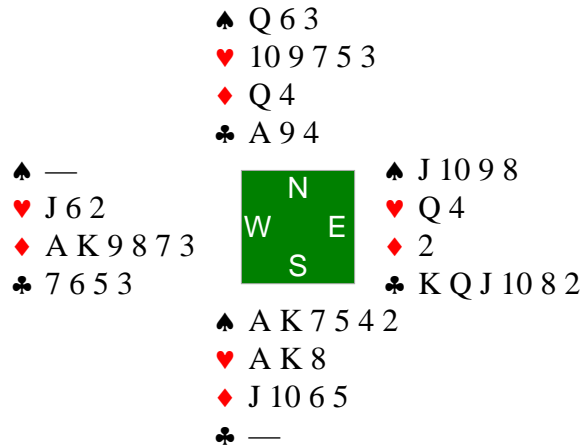
But, look what happens if you were to return the J of hearts! Declarer has to win the trick in hand, and with no clubs, he can't get to dummy to finesse the spade. He has to play spades out of hand losing the spade K to partner.

Hold on.... not so fast!! Do we have a blind spot?

We have to count, count, and count again!

Count Count and Triple Count

South Deals
None Vul



<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1 ♠
2 ♦	2 ♠	4 ♣	4 ♥
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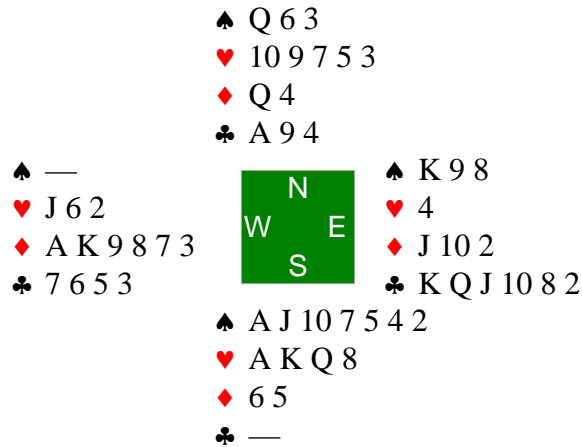
5 ♠ × by South

This is a possible lay of the cards, as you can see, if this is the actual layout, you will defeat this at least one trick - **unless you specifically shift to the J of ♥ at trick 2.**

Should you shift to the J of ♥ at trick 2, declarer will cash his other high heart, and play 4 rounds of spades - pitching dummy's two small clubs. Left with only clubs, your partner will have to dummy's Ace of clubs and the 3 good hearts for you to pitch all your diamond losers!

Count Count and Triple Count

South Deals
None Vul



West	North	East	South
<i>Captain Shark</i>		<i>Charlie Coon</i>	
			1 ♠
2 ♦	2 ♠	4 ♣	4 ♥
5 ♣	Dbl	Pass	5 ♠
Pass	Pass	Dbl	All pass

5 ♠× by South

This was the famous hand I told you about that was played in 1977 just before I got out of the Army and was reported in what at that time was the extremely prestigious New York Times bridge column written by Alan Truscott, who many of you may have heard of.


Years later, when asked to put together a brief autobiography while playing in the US Team Trials in White Plains, NY, I wrote that "I got in the NY Times too early in my career and would have won a lot more than I have if I hadn't tried so hard to make brilliant bids and plays to get me back in there again!"

My partner truly was my greatest mentor and truly a great player, the late Charles Coon of Gloucester, who won several major North American championships - including the Blue Ribbon Pairs and the Vanderbilt. He finished 2nd Overall in the World Championships in 1962 against the Italian Blue Team (Giorgio Belladonna, Benito Garozzo, Walter Averilli, and Pietro Forquet), and again a whole generation later in 1990 to a German team that the USA was heavily favored to beat. I truly believe that if he had won that match, he would be in the Hall of Fame today. I still remember receiving a post card from Geneva, Switzerland that read "I just blew a World Championship!"

I shifted to the J of hearts at trick 2! As a result, we were able to set the contract 2 tricks. The K of diamonds, the K of spades, the A of diamonds, and now to add insult to injury - a heart ruff!

Count Count and Triple Count

South Deals
None Vul

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

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1 ♠
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5 ♣	Dbl	Pass	5 ♠
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5 ♠ × by South

Right or wrong, I will leave it up to you to decide if I defended prudently, but I actually did better than shown here.

In retrospect, I think I should have cashed the second diamond before playing the J of hearts.

If the hand was as shown here, returning the J of hearts at trick 2 would have been absolutely disastrous!

So this is the key pointer today.. Count, Count, and Triple Count.

When you think you have figured "What's It All About, Alfie?", triple-check your assumptions just to make sure you don't have your "Blinders" on!

See you all next Friday for our 40th Shark's Pointer's Online.