

Duck Soup

Good morning everyone - and welcome to this, the 21st edition of Shark's Pointers online.

As most of you know, these online presentations are a continuation of the regular Friday morning talks I gave for several years at Tim's face-to-face bridge club in Westwood. Those of you who have been participating in these for awhile may remember that a couple years ago I showed you a video of the famous Marx Brothers' schtick, "Why A Duck". In it, Chico and Groucho went back and forth with Groucho talking about a viaduct, and Chico, impersonating an Italian immigrant, instead of saying "viaduct" kept saying "why a duck?". Actually, it's somewhat appropriate to refer to the Marx Brothers in a talk about bridge because, as a matter of fact, the Marx Brothers were actually avid bridge players and scenes from bridge games appeared in many of their movies. Groucho, in fact, played rubber bridge every day well into his late 80's.

In my talk that day at the Westwood Bridge Club, which I called "Why A Duck?", I went over a number of hands in which it was important to duck a trick - and others in which it was important to win the trick right away and not duck. We reviewed examples in which it was important to hold up on an ace in a long suit that otherwise had no entries, important to not cover an honor thus creating an entry, winning a trick early to preserve an entry in partner's hand, and a few other somewhat common, recurring situations.

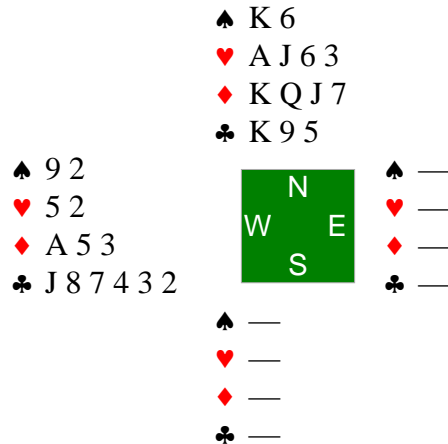
This morning, thanks to a hand that was featured in this month's ACBL Bulletin, we are going to highlight another reason "why a duck" may be very important. In previous Shark's Pointers Online, we talked about "Be Prepared", and "Hurry Up or Wait?" and "What's It All About, Alfie?" It's not uncommon for themes to overlap.

Today we are going to mix some ingredients from these various themes with "Why A Duck", and in deference to the 1933 Marx Brothers' movie title, we are going to call this morning's talk, "Duck Soup".

Duck Soup

Dlr: West
 Vul: N-S
 IMPs

Opening Lead 9 of ♠



West	North	East	South
<i>Jim Jacoby</i>	<i>Peter Weichsel</i>	<i>Bobby Wolff</i>	<i>Tom Smith</i>
Pass	1 ♣	1 ♠	1 NT
Pass	2 NT	Pass	3 NT
All pass			

3 NT by South

The above deal was featured in the Sept 2020 edition of the ACBL Bulletin. It's from 50 years ago - the exciting finals of the Spingold 1970 Boston Nationals - and it is a classic! An upstart team of young pros were hired by billionaire CC Wei to use the new Precision System that he had recently invented. The unheralded Precision Team actually went on to win the entire event, along the way beating the 4 top teams of the day by convincing margins. Today's deal helped them defeat the defending Spingold champs and the undisputed best team at that time -the Aces.

North's 1C was artificial and showed 17+ HCP. The rest of the auction was natural, with North's 2 NT suggesting a balanced 17-19 HCP. You're tempted to lead a club, but leading partner's suit can never get you in too much hot water, so you lead the 9 of spades and see this dummy.

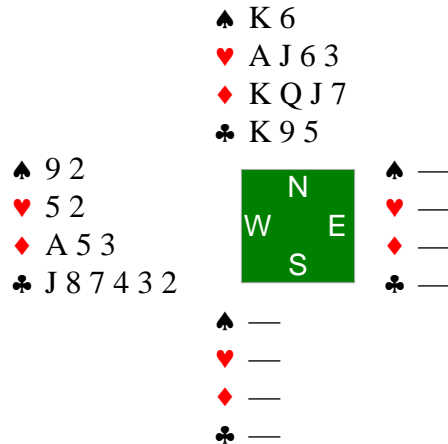
Declarer was Tom Smith, a New Englander from Stamford, CT and Bennington, VT. I actually played on some teams in NE regionals with Tom in the years just prior to his passing in 2010. He was a very low key, very quiet, very nice guy - and a superb bridge player and teammate.

Tom allowed the opening lead to ride to partner's J and his ace, and he immediately led the 10 of diamonds out of hand. Your play?

Duck Soup

Dlr: West
 Vul: N-S
 IMPs

Opening Lead 9 of ♠



West	North	East	South
<i>Jim Jacoby</i>	<i>Peter Weichsel</i>	<i>Bobby Wolff</i>	<i>Tom Smith</i>
Pass	1 ♣	1 ♠	1 NT
Pass	2 NT	Pass	3 NT
All pass			

3 NT by South

WAIT! I hope you didn't play to trick 2 before you had already made up your mind what you would do if and when declarer played a diamond.

What do we know about declarer's hand and about partner's hand? First, it's clear that declarer has the A and 10 of spades. We know your partner has QJxxx or QJxxxx, so declarer has A10xx or A10xx. My first guess would be A10xx - in part because partner might have preempted with QJxxxx - even with moderate strength since partner was a passed hand.

Why is this so important? On a vast number of hands, it is important to win a trick as soon as possible in order to knock out a stopper while preserving partner's entry. This situation is quite different, however, because if declarer started with A10xx, he will still have the suit stopped after the K is knocked out. It's really time to stop and think. "What's It All About, Alfie?" is to use this one and only opportunity to lead either thru the ♣ K or the ♥ A to save partner from being endplayed.

My first Shark's Pointer today is **After making the opening lead, don't play to the next trick until you have taken as much time as you need to think about the hand.** Not enough is written about the opening leader to stop and think about the whole hand before playing to trick 2.

Duck Soup

Dlr: West
 Vul: N-S
 IMPs
 Opening Lead 9 of ♠
 West Deals
 E-W Vul

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

West	North	East	South
<i>Jim Jacoby</i>	<i>Peter Weichsel</i>	<i>Bobby Wolff</i>	<i>Tom Smith</i>
Pass	1 ♣	1 ♠	1 NT
Pass	2 NT	Pass	3 NT
All pass			

3 NT by South

Let's move on. As we said, the key here has to be to use this opportunity to lead either thru the A of ♥, or the K of ♣. But which one to play and how can we know?

Let's create a couple of hands that may allow us to set this contract....

There's this one depicted above...

Duck Soup

Dir: West
 Vul: N-S
 IMPs
 Opening Lead 9 of ♠
 West Deals
 E-W Vul

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

♠ A 10 4 3	♠ A 10 4 3
♥ 10 8 7 4	♥ 10 8 7 4
♦ 10 9 6	♦ 10 9 6
♣ Q 10	♣ Q 10



West	North	East	South
<i>Jim Jacoby</i>	<i>Peter Weichsel</i>	<i>Bobby Wolff</i>	<i>Tom Smith</i>
Pass	1 ♣	1 ♠	1 NT
Pass	2 NT	Pass	3 NT
All pass			

3 NT by South

...or this one.

Now why did we give South 4 hearts in each example? It's not 100%, but we assumed that with 5-4 in the majors, East may have doubled rather than bid 1 ♠. Bridge is a game of logical assumptions. Usually - but not always - if you look at available clues and follow the logic- you will prevail.

OK. We seem to have a logical idea of the distribution. Now you have to ask yourself if either or both of the available options is even possible - or if they would work.

In both cases, East started with 12 HCP and South only 6. Is this consistent with the bidding?

North is showing 17-19 balanced. So, assuming South's 1 NT bid was not forcing, he probably is showing 6-9 HCP with spades stopped. It's possible with a double spade stopper, South might very well make an aggressive attempt for a vulnerable game with each of the hypothetical hands. Because of the double spade stopper, and his shortness in clubs, he might be more likely to bid 1 NT than to make a negative double. So, now let's look at each option to see if an immediate shift by West will set the contract. Let's look at the above shown hypothetical lie of the cards with West winning the diamond Ace and returning a heart....

Duck Soup

Dir: West
 Vul: N-S
 IMPs
 Opening Lead 9 of ♠
 West Deals
 E-W Vul

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

West	North	East	South
<i>Jim Jacoby</i>	<i>Peter Weichsel</i>	<i>Bobby Wolff</i>	<i>Tom Smith</i>
Pass	1 ♣	1 ♠	1 NT
Pass	2 NT	Pass	3 NT
All pass			

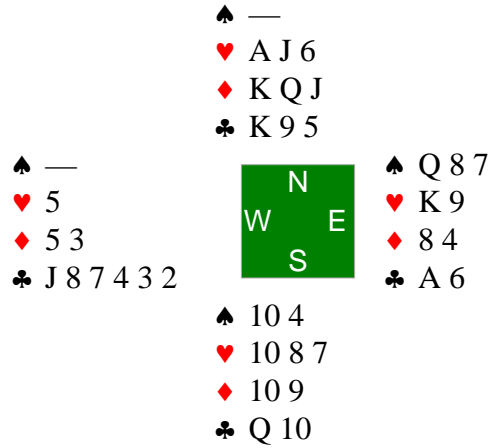
3 NT by South

Let's have West win the Ace of diamonds and return a heart...

South will have to duck and East will now drive out the spade K...

Duck Soup

Dir: West
 Vul: N-S
 IMPs
 Opening Lead 9 of ♠



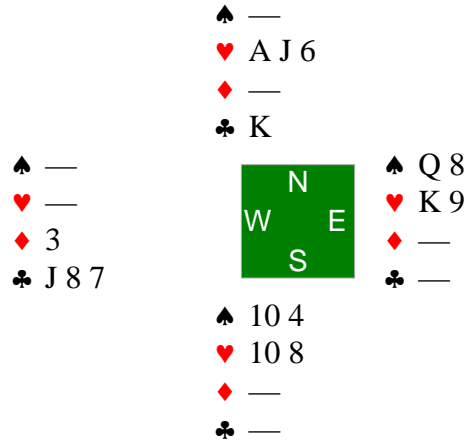
West	North	East	South
<i>Jim Jacoby</i>	<i>Peter Weichsel</i>	<i>Bobby Wolff</i>	<i>Tom Smith</i>
Pass	1 ♣	1 ♠	1 NT
Pass	2 NT	Pass	3 NT
All pass			

3 NT by South

North can play a club, but East can just rise and return a club, avoiding an endplay. Eventually, East-West will win 1 club, 1 diamond and either 2 spades and 1 heart, or 1 spade and 2 hearts. Here is the 4 card ending..

Duck Soup

Dir: West
 Vul: N-S
 IMPs
 Opening Lead 9 of ♠



West	North	East	South
<i>Jim Jacoby</i>	<i>Peter Weichsel</i>	<i>Bobby Wolff</i>	<i>Tom Smith</i>
Pass	1 ♣	1 ♠	1 NT
Pass	2 NT	Pass	3 NT
All pass			


3 NT by South

North can cash the K of clubs, but East will just pitch the 8 of spades and win a spade and a heart in addition to the heart, diamond and club already won - for down 1.

So, yes! If this is the actual holding, then if West wins the Ace of diamonds and returns a heart, the contract will be set.

Duck Soup

Dir: West
 Vul: N-S
 IMPs
 Opening Lead 9 of ♠
 West Deals
 E-W Vul

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

West	North	East	South
<i>Jim Jacoby</i>	<i>Peter Weichsel</i>	<i>Bobby Wolff</i>	<i>Tom Smith</i>
Pass	1 ♣	1 ♠	1 NT
Pass	2 NT	Pass	3 NT
All pass			

3 NT by South

Now, let's go back and look at the other possible hand we have constructed...

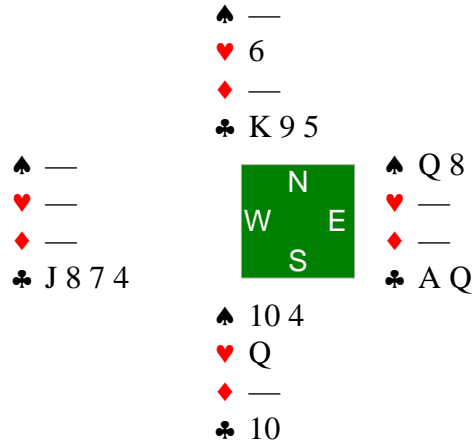
Let's see what would happen if West were to capture the 10♦ with his Ace and return the 5♥ -or for that matter the 2♠.

In the first case, East will win the K and return a spade to dummy's K. If West returns a spade, South will win, strip the hands of diamond exits and now play Ace and a heart. If East had started with Kx of hearts, he would have been immediately endplayed. As it is, East will have to win the K and his only safe exit is a heart.

In fact, what happened 50 years ago, was this was the actual layout and Jim Jacoby immediately won the Ace of ♦ and returned a ♠. As reported by Peter Weichsel in this month's bulletin, this is how Tom Smith took advantage of this defense. Tom won the ♠ K, cashed two top diamonds and played Ace of ♥ and a low ♥, and Bobby Wolff indeed did the best he could by winning the K and exiting with his third heart.

Duck Soup

Dir: West
 Vul: N-S
 IMPs
 Opening Lead 9 of ♠



West	North	East	South
<i>Jim Jacoby</i>	<i>Peter Weichsel</i>	<i>Bobby Wolff</i>	<i>Tom Smith</i>
Pass	1 ♣	1 ♠	1 NT
Pass	2 NT	Pass	3 NT
All pass			

3 NT by South


South won the Jack of hearts in dummy, and cashed the K of diamonds, pitching a club from his hand. Now, when he played the 6 of ♥ to his Q, East was squeezed. If he pitched a spade, declarer would lead a spade and he'd be endplayed to lead away from the Ace of clubs. If he pitched the Q of clubs, he'd lead a club and East would have to lead from the Q8 of spades into declarer's 104. The situation would be exactly the same had East shifted to a heart. In either situation, East cannot cash the established spade Q now, or it will give South his 9th trick - (3 ♠, 3 ♥, and 3 ♦). So how can West know what to do?

Today's Shark's Pointer is that whenever you hold a winner, keep in mind several of the themes we have introduced over these past 5 months...**BE PREPARED** mentally to decide whether you should **HURRY UP OR WAIT** to win the trick as soon as possible or to duck. Whatever you choose, you have to have a good reason. You have to stop and ask yourself "**WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT, ALFIE?**"

A common reason for ducking is to cut communications, but when there are obvious entries, the obvious reasons to duck are to get some kind of a clue as to what to do. It is very, very important in a case such as this, that not only West duck the 10 of diamonds as there is no hurry to win, but also for East to **BE PREPARED** to give his partner a clue as to how to proceed.

Duck Soup

Dir: West
 Vul: N-S
 IMPs
 Opening Lead 9 of ♠
 West Deals
 E-W Vul

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

West	North	East	South
<i>Jim Jacoby</i>	<i>Peter Weichsel</i>	<i>Bobby Wolff</i>	<i>Tom Smith</i>
Pass	1 ♣	1 ♠	1 NT
Pass	2 NT	Pass	3 NT
All pass			

3 NT by South

In the actual layout, it is obvious to East that after his partner wins the Ace of diamonds, he would like him to shift to a club - not waste his entry by continuing a spade.

The key play here is that, not knowing what to play upon winning the Ace of diamonds, West has to duck in order to allow his partner to give him a suit preference signal to tell him how to proceed.

Both players have to "BE PREPARED" and understand "What's It All About, Alfie?".

The way East tells partner to play a club is to play the 2 of diamonds on the first play. If he wanted a heart shift, he should play his highest diamond (the eight).

Now just one important caveat. All too frequently, I have seen even among expert players a very unethical situation. West thinks a long, long time before ducking the 10 of diamonds and East thinks an equally long, long time before playing the deuce. Everyone is entitled to think, but all bids and plays need to be made in tempo. East can not essentially say, "partner, pay attention, please. I am making a suit preference signal!"