Once A King

Good morning, Ladies and Gentlemen!!

Welcome to this, the 20th session of "Shark's Pointers Online"!

There's an old saying "Once a King always a King..."

Today we'll focus our attention on hand evaluation.

Our learning objective will be to be able to better judge the true value of your high cards. We'll learn how, in fact, a king may be more or less than a king. We'll learn how to better differentiate between aces, kings, queens, jacks - and even 10's and 9's. I'll introduce you to the concept of losing trick count.

There are several aspects to this, but rather than give what would probably become a very boring lecture, my aim will be to drive some points home with the use of looking at a variety of hand diagrams. So without further ado, let's get started.

Several years ago, some of you may have been present when I gave my very first "face-to-face" Shark's Pointers talk at Tim's club in Westwood. You may recall that I showed you the following suit combination....

A Q

```
    N
W       E
    S
```

— — —

J 10

I asked what were the odds of winning 2 tricks in this suit as compared to winning just 1.

Most said half the time, we'll win 1 trick and half the time 2, so the odds are 50:50.

I then asked, if we played this 10 times, how frequently would we expect to win 2 tricks and the answer I got was a resounding "5"!

So I threw out a proposition. We'll play this out 10 times. Each time playing a card from the South hand to North's Q. Each time the Q wins, I will give you $10, each time it loses, you only have to give me $8. Any takers?

This sounded like a trick so nobody took me up on my offer, but I said. OK. No money at stake, but let's try a little experiment. Now I opened a fresh deck of cards. I removed the spade suit, and put the AQ in one hand and the J10 in his partner's hand. I now shuffled the remaining 9 spades - and put 3 in one hand and 6 in the other as follows...

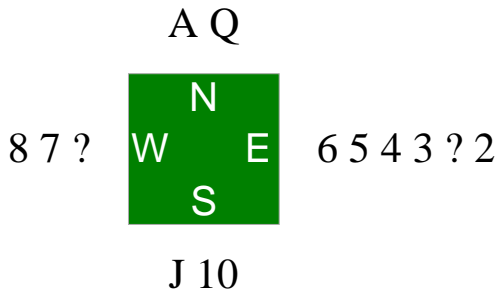A Q

6 5 4 3 ? 2 | N |
|---|
| W   E |
| S | 8 7 ?
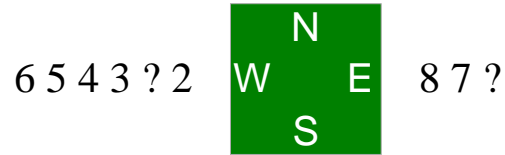
J 10

One of the Question Marks is the King. In this diagram, what are the odds of the finesse working?   6:3 or 2:1, no longer 50-50. How about in this other situation?
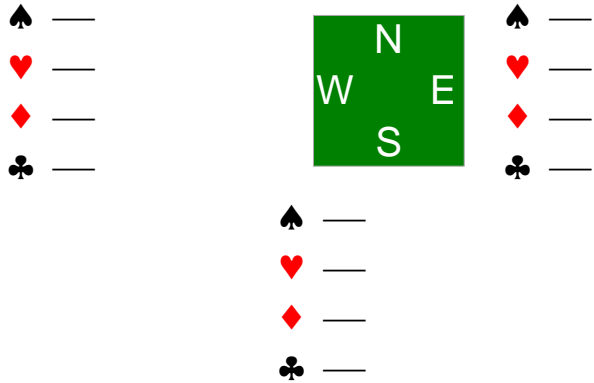
A Q

8 7 ?   W   E   6 5 4 3 ? 2

N
S

J 10

Now the odds of the finesse losing are 6:3 or 2:1, making my "generous" offer of $10 to $8 a real sucker bet - the likes of which many a casino has made fortunes over the years.

This is basic, but key to improved defense, declarer play and high card point evaluation.

Let's look at how we put this concept to work in our bidding.

Once A King

```
              ♠ K J 5
              ♥ A J 7
              ♦ 10 8 5
              ♣ 7 5 4 3
♠ —                              ♠ —
♥ —           N                  ♥ —
♦ —       W       E              ♦ —
♣ —           S                  ♣ —
              ♠ —
              ♥ —
              ♦ —
              ♣ —
```
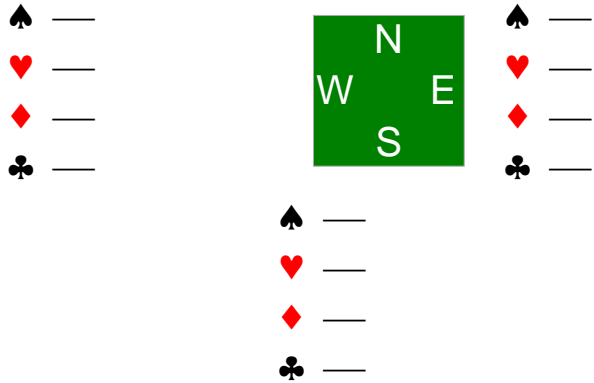
West	North	East	South
			1 NT
Pass	2 ♣	Pass	2 ♦
Pass	?		

You are playing that the only way you can invite is to go thru stayman. What do you do after partner's 2 ♦ bid? I imagine most will bid 2 NT.   Let's change the auction a bit...

Once A King

♠ K J 5
♥ A J 7
♦ 10 8 5
♣ 7 5 4 3

♠ —   ♠ —
♥ —   ♥ —
♦ —   ♦ —
♣ —   ♣ —

♠ —
♥ —
♦ —
♣ —

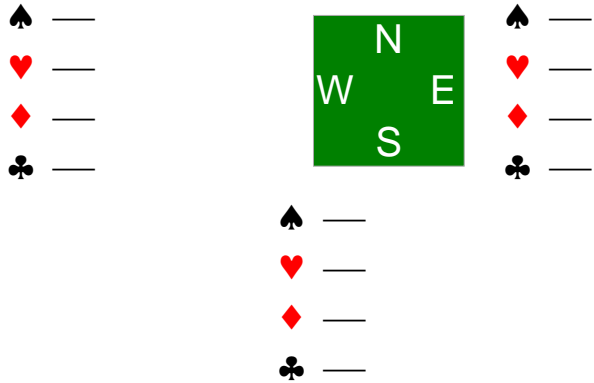| West	North	East	South
			1 NT
2 ♠	?		

You are playing that the only way you can invite is to go thru stayman. How do you like your hand now? How about we change the auction again...

Once A King

♠ K J 5
♥ A J 7
♦ 10 8 5
♣ 7 5 4 3

♠ —   ♠ —
♥ —   ♥ —
♦ —   ♦ —
♣ —   ♣ —

```
        N
    W       E
        S
```

♠ —
♥ —
♦ —
♣ —

| West	North	East	South
			1 NT
Pass	2 ♣	2 ♠	Pass
Pass	?		

Now how do you like your hand?

Ok. Suffice it to say, your hand is a lot stronger if you are sitting North with the spade bid on your right than it is with the spade bid on your left.

Looking at it a different way, your KJ5 of spades is likely to score 2 tricks in one example, 1 trick in another, and 0 tricks in the third. The same number of high cards, but 3 different trick - taking potentials.

Let's go back to our earlier discussion for a second...

A Q

```
                N
6 5 4 3 ? 2   W     E    8 7 ?
                S
```

J 10
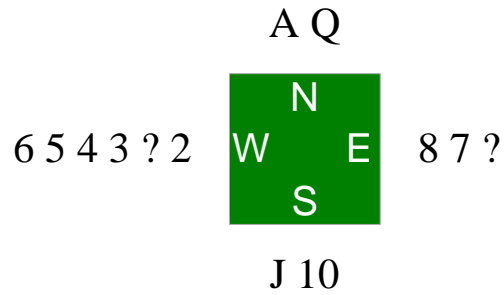
In this situation with the King being twice as likely to be with West than with East, North's Queen is twice as likely to be worth a trick than when the E-W distributions are reversed.

So, the broader takeaway from this is that a K or more that matter a Q is not always a K or a Q. Using the standard Milton Work point count A=4, K=3, Q=2, J=1, a K, or a Q is worth more or less depending upon distribution and positional relationship to higher honors.

In both cases, the Queen is said to be worth 2 high card points, but in this case, it is worth a lot more than in the other.

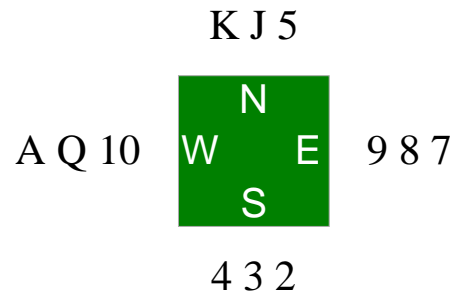I think you are starting to get it. Let's move on....

Once A King

K J 5

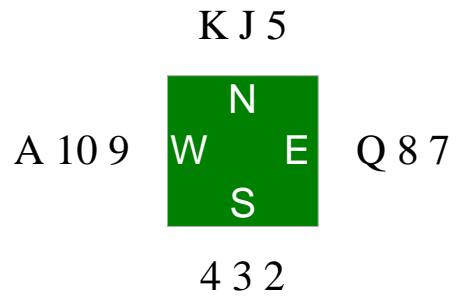```
        N
9 8 7   W   E   A Q 10
        S
```

4 3 2

In this situation, NS will probably score no tricks (unless they can get East to lead this suit, of course)

Once A King

K J 5

```
      N
A Q 10 W   E 9 8 7
      S
```
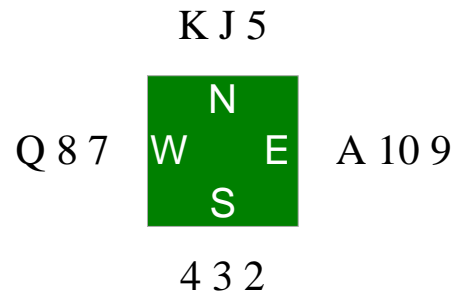
4 3 2

Switch the East West hands, and now, assuming there are plenty of entries, and South can lead towards the North hand twice,  N-S could score 2 tricks.

Once A King

K J 5

```
        N
A 10 9  W    E   Q 8 7
        S
```

4 3 2

In this situation NS can score 1 trick - just as in the next slide...
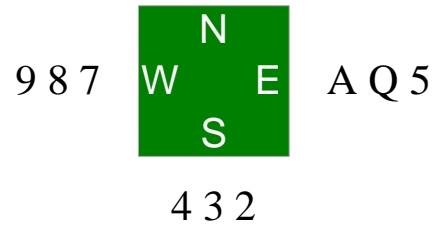
K J 5

N

Q 8 7 W   E   A 10 9

S

4 3 2

Low to either the K or the J in either of these past two examples, then low to the other other will always win 1 trick.

Now let's beef up the North holding just a smidgen by adding the 10...
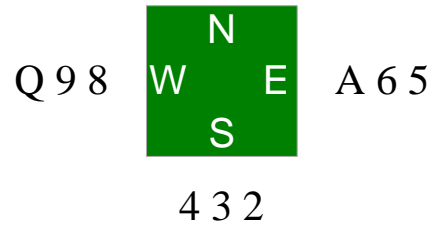
Once A King

K J 10

```
        N
9 8 7   W   E   A Q 5
        S
```

4 3 2

Now he will always win 1 trick in this layout....

Once A King

K J 10

```
       N
Q 9 8  W   E   A 6 5
       S
```

4 3 2

And any time the Q is onside, regardless of the location of the Ace, you will always win 2 tricks.

Now let's look at some different situations.

With this suit holding, we will lose 1 trick one half the time and lose 2 tricks one half the time. We often suggest there are no more than 3 losers in any suit, so in this case, the suit holding of KJ10 is said to possess 1.5 losers.

J 9 8

```
      N
—  W     E  —
      S
```

5 4 3

In "round figures", how many tricks do you expect to take with this combined holding?

Well, if you guessed "0", you'd be right.   J98 is said to be a " 3 loser " holding.

How about this suit holding?

4 3 2

```
      N
   W     E
      S
```

— W E —

Q 10 7

How about this suit holding? Well, your chances of winning a trick aren't great. You'll need to guess right and find the AK, the AJ, or the KJ in the East hand. If the AKJ are all onside, you will always get a trick if you can lead up to the South hand.

Here are the possibilities:

WEST	EAST
AKJ	xxx
AKx	Jxx
Axx	**KJx**
Kxx	**AJx**
Jxx	**AKx**
xxx	**AKJ**
AJx	Kxx
KJx	Axx

So there are four chances in 8 of winning 1 trick, and four chances in 8 of winning 0 tricks.

Q107 is said to be a "2.5 loser" holding.

Note what occurs when you combine the last suit combination that had 0 tricks with this holding that yields essentially one half of a trick.

J 9 8

```
      N
  W       E
      S
```

—   —

Q 10 7

Note what occurs when you combine the last suit combination that had 0 tricks with this holding that yields essentially one half of a trick.
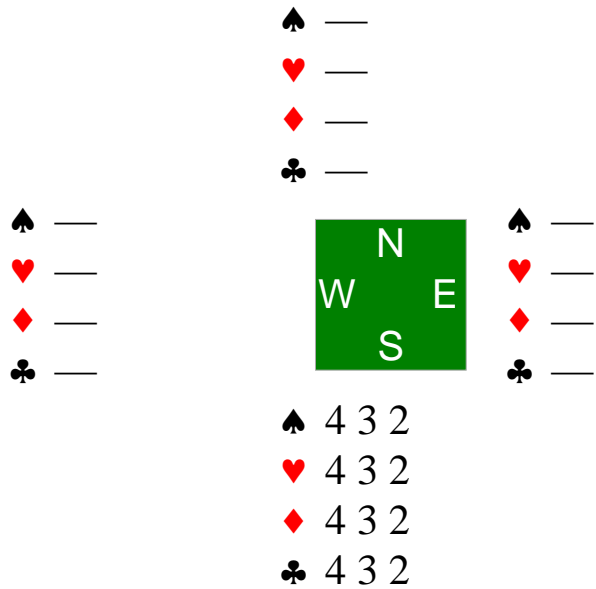
$$0 + 0.5 = 1 \ !$$

You always will win 1 trick when you combine these holdings.

So between adding a 10 to the KJx situation and combining Jxx with Q10x, you can start to see the true value of intermediate cards like J's and 10's is when they complement other honors. It's the combined suit holding that determines the overall trick taking potential.

This is a very fundamental and important principle. When you have unsupported honors they are worth a lot more when in partner's known suit than in the opponents'.

Let's take a step back. Let's look at this hypothetical 12 card suit holding:

Once A King

♠ —
♥ —
♦ —
♣ —

```
♠ —          ┌──────────┐          ♠ —
♥ —          │    N     │          ♥ —
♦ —          │ W     E  │          ♦ —
♣ —          │    S     │          ♣ —
             └──────────┘
```

♠ 4 3 2
♥ 4 3 2
♦ 4 3 2
♣ 4 3 2

In Losing Trick Count, you start with a hypothetical 12 card hand, and assign 0-3 losers in each suit. The South hand here is the worst possible - a 12 loser hand.

The holdings we saw before KJx represent the average of all losers opposite xxx.
It will win lose 3 tricks 1/4 of the time, 1 tricks 1/4 of the time, and 2 tricks 1/2 the time. On average, this holding will lose 2 tricks, and this is called a "2 loser" suit holding. As we mentioned earlier, Jxx is 3 losers,
Q10x is 2.5 losers. When you add up all your losers in your hand, you have a pretty good way to evaluate your playing strength and decide whether to bid a lot or a little.

The rule of thumb I follow is whenever I hold 7 losers and 2 quick tricks, I will open the bidding. Here's a few examples of hands that qualify as opening bids per this definition.

Once A King

North Deals
None Vul

♠ A Q 9 7 5
♥ A 8 7 6 3
♦ J 7
♣ 5

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

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 10
♥ 4 2
♦ K Q 10 5 4 3 2
♣ A 10 9

The standard rule of thumb is any 7 loser hand with 2 Quick tricks or any 6 loser hand meets the minimum requirements for an opening bid.

West has 3 spade losers, 1 heart loser , 0 diamond losers and 1 club loser - only 5 losers and 1 Quick Trick (the KQ of clubs).

North has 1.5 spade losers, 2 heart losers, 2 diamond losers, and 1 club loser - 6.5 losers and 2 Quick Tricks - the major suit aces.

East has 1 spade loser, 1 heart loser, 2 diamond losers, and 2 club losers - 6 losers and 1 QT (KQ of hearts)

South has 1 spade loser, 2 heart losers, a little more than 1 diamond loser, and 2 club losers- a total of 6+ losers and 2 QTs (KQ of diamonds and A of clubs).

ALL FOUR HANDS MAY BE CONSIDERED OPENING HANDS USING LOSING TRICK COUNT. BUT BE CAREFUL - PARTNER WON'T BE EXPECTING YOU TO OPEN THE BIDDING WITH 6 HCPS. I'D PASS OR PREEMPT BUT BID ALOT AFTER PASSING.

LTC (Losing Trick Count, is a good way to help evaluate your hands, but it is best used as a guideline as to your offensive and defensive potential - not a hard and fast rule.)

Once A King

♠ A 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2
♥ —
♦ —
♣ —

♠ —   ♠ —
♥ —   N   ♥ A
♦ —   W   E   ♦ —
♣ A 3 2   S   ♣ —

♠ —
♥ —
♦ A 2
♣ —
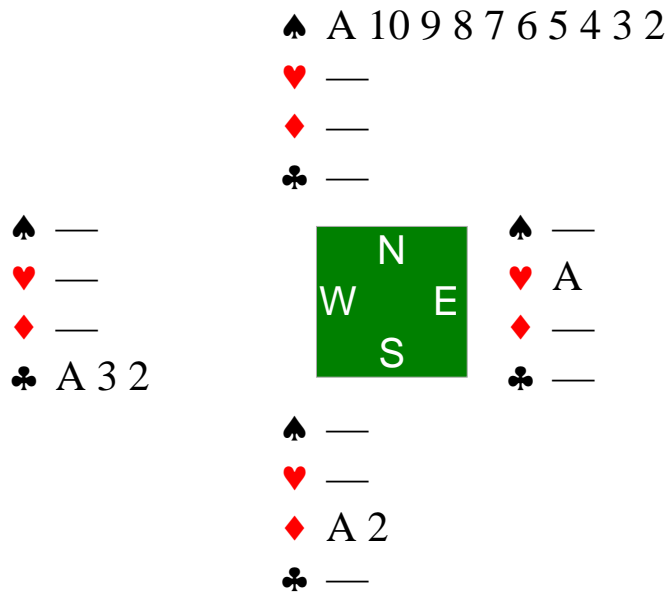
I just want to wrap up this discussion of suit strength, with a quick discussion of suit length.

If you looks at the above diagram, we show four different suit holdings including an Ace.


If you start with the East hand and go around the table, and count the losers with each of the 3 holdings opposite xxx, you can see that East, South, and West have 0, 1 and 2 losers respectively. There is no adjustment necessary. But the North hand has 10 spades!

Opposite a hypothetical xxx, the North hand would obviously 0 losers. I would adjust it up slightly to between 0 and 0.5 losers.   More importantly, since there are only 3 missing cards, there can be no more than 3 total losers, so this 4 point hand is worth about 10 tricks!

Aces are generally worth more than 4 points. The more cards in a suit with an ace, the increasingly more that Ace is worth.

Length in suits with honors make the value of the honor much stronger.   This applies not only to aces, but to any honor holdings.

Once A King

♠ K 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2
♥ —
♦ —
♣ —

♠ —   ♠ —
♥ —   N   ♥ K
♦ —   W   E   ♦ —
♣ K 3 2   S   ♣ —

♠ —
♥ —
♦ K 2
♣ —
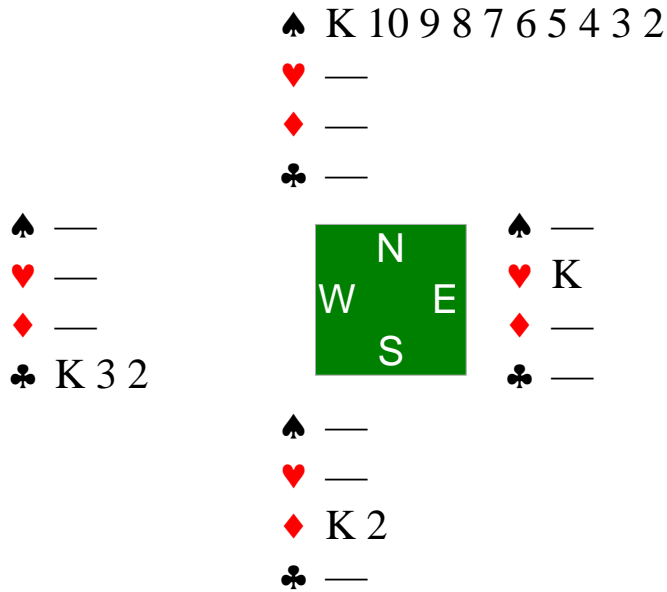
You have to make adjustments in a number of ways to properly evaluate your hand. Suit length, location of honors to your left and your right, length of suits to your left and your left all impact the value of your honors. Bridge is not an exact science, but if you apply some good tools, you can and will significantly improve your bidding, defense, and play!

So, to summarize, today's Shark's Pointer is Once A King - Is Not Always A King!