

## Relaxed Concentration

Good morning, Ladies and Gentlemen!

Welcome to this, the 29th episode of "Shark's Pointers Online"!

In the talk I gave in Hyannis in May, 2014 which I entitled "The Inner Game of Bridge", I spoke about what I considered to be the master skill needed for success at bridge - achieving the state of "relaxed concentration." Tim posted a copy of this presentation on his website, and I invite you all to go back and read this again if you have already read it before, or if you have never read it, to make sure to read it now. There's a lot of good, common sense guidance in their on how all of us can improve our results at bridge - regardless of our present skill levels.

I made some real bonehead mistakes over the past few days, and some incredibly reckless bids. My results have been horrendous. As I was thinking about these various disasters, it occurred to me that in each and every case, had I been more focused, and been in a state of relaxed concentration, I most certainly would have avoided every mistake.

But I also watched - and played with and against - a number of great players who also did some really dumb things during the past few days. Seems to me, that "relaxed concentration" is a goal everyone needs - regardless of skill level or past accomplishments in the game.

Today, I am going to share with you a number of examples of hands in which "relaxed concentration" probably would have led to winning decisions. Some of these are easy, some are quite complex. What they all have in common is that they all represent clearly avoidable disastrous results.

The objective today is to open your eyes to the opportunity to minimize your own unforced errors and help yourself to achieve "relaxed concentration".

## Relaxed Concentration

IMPs  
North Deals  
Both Vul

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



♠ A K 5  
♥ A Q 10 3 2  
♦ K 4 2  
♣ K 10

Opening lead J of ♥

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	Pass	Pass	2 NT
Pass	3 ♣	Pass	3 ♥
Pass	4 ♥	All pass	

4 ♥ by South

The first hand is typical of so many mistakes I make - probably we all make. I frequently don't stop to count my tricks - or, in some cases, count my losers.

I am declarer in 4H and get the lead of the J of hearts. If I count my tricks, I should see 5 hearts in my hand, 3 spades, and 1 diamond - for sure. What I missed is that if I can pitch 2 of dummy's diamonds from dummy, I should be able to score my 10th trick by ruffing a diamond in dummy with the K of ♥.

Here's the full deal...

Relaxed Concentration

IMPs  
North Deals  
Both Vul

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

♠ A K 5	<table border="1" style="background-color: #006400; color: white; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: 0 auto;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W     E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W     E	S	♠ A Q 10 3 2
N					
W     E					
S					
♥ A Q 10 3 2		♥ K 4 2			
♦ K 4 2		♣ K 10			

Opening lead J of ♥

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	Pass	Pass	2 NT
Pass	3 ♣	Pass	3 ♥
Pass	4 ♥	All pass	

4 ♥ by South

In practice, I rose with the K of hearts and immediately played a club to my K. This lost, a trump came back, and when I eventually lost the Ace of diamonds, a third round of trumps sealed my fate.

But look what happens, if after my counting my tricks, I set out to ruff a diamond in dummy.

I win the heart in hand, and play a spade to the Q. Now Q of ♦ off dummy. I will let you study the hand for a couple of minutes.

Trust me, that on this lie of the cards, it doesn't matter how EW defend from here.

When I regain the lead, I cash the K of ♦, pitch dummy's remaining 2 diamonds on my top spades, and ruff my small diamond in dummy with the heart K.

Making 4. Let's move on....

## Relaxed Concentration

West Deals  
None Vul

♠ A K  
♥ Q 9 8 4  
♦ 9 4  
♣ 10 9 8 6 4



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

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1 ♦	Pass	1 NT	2 ♠
All pass			

2 ♠ by South

Here's another example along the same lines. Between us, we have 21 HCP and the opps have opened the bidding and responded, so they have 11-13 opposite 6-8 HCP. The opening lead is the A of ♦, followed by a trump shift, to which East plays the 10! (They are playing upside down count and attitude, which means they play low from an even number - kind of the opposite of "normal" carding.) Looks like East has 10xx, 10x, or Q10x or Q10. If Q10x, probably East is signaling suit preference for a heart shift.

When we factor in all these logical, relaxed, assumptions, we should cash the other top spade, and play the 10 of clubs from dummy, intending to win the A, and drive out the Q of spades. We could lose 1 spade, 1 clubs, 2 diamonds and 1 heart.

Here was the full deal...

## Relaxed Concentration

West Deals  
None Vul

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

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1 ♦	Pass	1 NT	2 ♠
All pass			

2 ♠ by South

Look what happens! You drop the stiff K of club, drive out the spade Q, and eventually score up 10 tricks!

I didn't cash the second spade for some unknown reason and immediately took a club finesse losing to the stiff K. When the smoke cleared, I went down 1 in 2 spades! Uggh...

Let's move on. The next couple of hands, are examples of blind spots. The winning line of play should have been obvious, but lack of focus, and tiredness resulted in failure.

Relaxed Concentration

IMPs  
 East Deals  
 None Vul

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



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

Opening lead 4 of ♦

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

5 ♣ by South

This is a very common situation. When the dummy hits, and a hand appears that seems totally incongruous with the auction, one's ability to focus on the problem at hand is frequently obscured. It is extremely important to shut this totally out of your mind.

It's pretty obvious that West's diamond lead is a singleton.

The question is, does West have the K of clubs? And if so, can I still make it?

The question is, should I play for Kx of clubs with West or xxx of clubs?

I obviously did the wrong thing, but seems logical from what we have discussed repeatedly that the K of clubs would be with E.

Here was the full deal...

## Relaxed Concentration

IMPs  
East Deals  
None Vul

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

Opening lead 4 of ♦

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

5 ♣ by South

Win the diamond, spade to the A, club to Q, A and a third club, losing a club and a heart, pitching spade loser on established diamonds. Making 5!

The next hand is an example of losing one's concentration in the middle of a hand. I know I have done it a million times.

## Relaxed Concentration

IMPs  
North Deals  
Both Vul

♠ K Q 10 5 3  
♥ A K J  
♦ K 9  
♣ J 9 8



♠ 7 2  
♥ 8 7 6 5  
♦ A Q 10 7 5  
♣ A 7

Opening Lead 5 of ♣

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1 ♠	Pass	1 NT
Pass	2 NT	Pass	3 NT
All pass			

3 NT by South

You're declarer in 3 NT, and your first decision is what to play from dummy. You decide to play the 8, and are happy to see K appear on your right. So you win the A, and play a spade to the 9, K, and A. Now, the 3 of clubs returned, and West allowed you to win the trick in dummy. Looks like the whole hand depends on the diamond suit, but if the 9 of spades is from J9 doubleton, you have 9 tricks via 2 spades, 2 hearts, 2 clubs, and 3 diamonds. So, you cash the K of spades, and West pitches a diamonds, well, we have 8 tricks for sure and plays in diamonds and hearts for our 9th, so we play the K and a diamond, and East shows out!

Now what?

Well, it should be obvious from here. West obviously started with 5 clubs and 5 diamonds, so we need to win the diamond Ace, cross to the A an K of hearts, and throw West in with a club. His last two cards will have to be Jx of ♦, to lead into your Q10.

Easy peasy...

Here was the full deal...



### Relaxed Concentration

IMPs  
North Deals  
Both Vul

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

Opening Lead 5 of ♣

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1 ♠	Pass	1 NT
Pass	2 NT	Pass	3 NT
All pass			

3 NT by South

The actual play started with club to the K and Ace, spade to the K and A, club ducked to dummy. It didn't quite go as suggested from there, however, and we went down 1.

The key lesson here is to remember how many tricks we have, and to keep focused on the distribution.

Once again, "relaxed concentration" will result in success.

The next hand is a little complicated. It actually can always be set with double dummy defense, but I missed an opportunity to find the best deceptive chance for success....

Relaxed Concentration

IMPs  
 South Deals  
 None Vul

♠ Q J 5 4 3  
 ♥ J  
 ♦ 5 3  
 ♣ K 9 8 5 4



♠ A 8  
 ♥ K 9 7 6  
 ♦ K J 9 7  
 ♣ A Q J

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

Opening Lead 7 of ♣

3 NT by South

Defense started with club to the 9, 10, and my Q. Now I played A of spades, spade to the Q, and as opps high lowed showing they were splitting 3-3, so I continued a third round and was happy to see E win the K, as west followed. Now, all I have to do is to avoid 4 red suit losers. I pitched a diamond from hand. Q of hearts appeared on my right. I covered, West won the A, returned a heart to East's 10 and a diamond back to the A and Q on my right set me.

Here was the full deal..

Relaxed Concentration

IMPs  
 South Deals  
 None Vul

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

♠ A 8	<table border="1" style="background-color: #008000; color: white; width: 40px; height: 40px; display: inline-table; text-align: center; vertical-align: middle;"> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">W   S   E</td></tr> </table>	N	W   S   E	♠ K 9 2
N				
W   S   E				
♥ K 9 7 6		♥ Q 10 8 5 4 2		
♦ K J 9 7		♦ 10 8 6		
♣ A Q J		♣ 10		

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

Opening Lead 7 of ♣

3 NT by South

Do you see my mistake?

I guessed right to pitch a diamond, but when E returned the Q of hearts, I should have realized he probably also had the 10, and ducked!

This will probably induce East to continue his brilliant shift. That one I'll cover and now I am home free.

Relaxed Concentration

IMPs  
 South Deals  
 None Vul

♠ J 10 8 3  
 ♥ K Q 8  
 ♦ 10 8  
 ♣ K J 4 3

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



Opening Lead 5 of ♥

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

3 NT by South

One more....

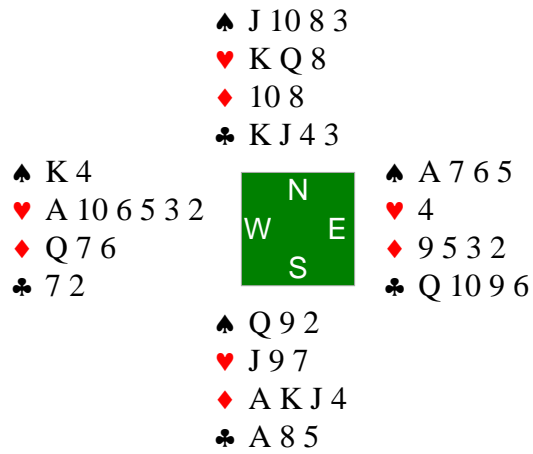
South opened a 14-16 1 NT. North raised to game after going thru Lebensohl to show a heart stopper.

You've led your fourth best heart against South's 3 NT contract. Declarer rose with dummy's K and played a spade to his 9, and your King. Your play?

This one is a very difficult defensive problem.. Since we're playing IMPs, our sole objective is to defeat this contract. We don't care about overtricks. The normal thing would be to play A and a heart, clearing that suit. Is there any risk in shifting to a diamond? You sure would feel silly if this were the complete deal...

### Relaxed Concentration

IMPs  
 South Deals  
 None Vul



Opening Lead 5 of ♥

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

3 NT by South

As you can see, Declarer only has 2 ♠, 2 ♥, 2 ♦, and 2 ♣ tricks. He's going to eventually need to take a diamond finesse into you, so if you do clear the heart suit, down he goes.

On the other hand, this certainly could be the entire deal...

## Relaxed Concentration

IMPs

South Deals

None Vul

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

Opening Lead 5 of ♥

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
2 ♥	2 NT	Pass	1 NT
Pass	3 NT	All pass	3 ♣

3 NT by South

As you can see, with this layout, you have to shift to a diamond, and your partner has to put in the 9 and underlead the Ace to keep communications open.

As it turns out, this was, in fact, the actual lie of the cards!

So, the question is, how does West know what to do?

The answer is in East's spade spot at trick 2.

He should anticipate partner's problem upon winning a spade and help by giving suit preference. If he has clubs locked up, he should play his lowest spade - the 5.

If he wants a diamond shift, he should play the highest spade he can afford - the 7.

To be alert enough to recognize partner's problem, and for his partner to be alert enough to look for this suit preference clue requires both players to have achieved relaxed concentration.

Today's Shark's Pointer is to stay physically fit, get lots of exercise and lots of sleep, and try to stay relaxed, but focused and your results will improve immediately!

See you next week for our 30th Shark's Pointer's Online!