


Last Week's Featured Hand

South Deals
None Vul

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

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			2 NT
Pass	4 ♣	Pass	4 ♠
Pass	5 ♣	Pass	5 ♠
Pass	7 NT	All pass	

7 NT by South

Good morning, Ladies and Gentlemen!

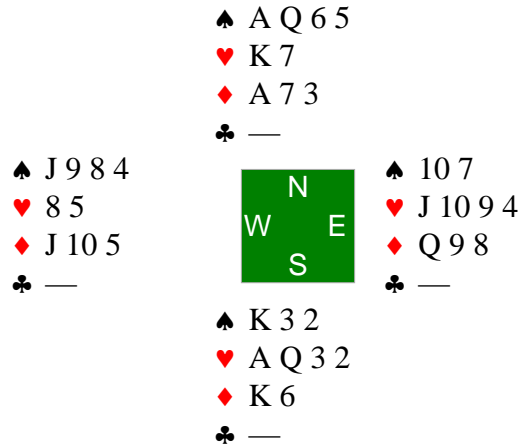
Thanks for taking the time to join us for the 3rd edition of Shark's Pointers Online.

The theme for this morning's presentation will be about thinking ahead. To help with this, I'm taking the liberty to borrow my title from the oft-quoted line from arguably the most successful hockey player of all time, Wayne Gretzky. When asked the secret of his success, the Great Gretzky said, "I skate to where the puck is going, not where it has been." This is certainly great advice with lots of relevance to the game of bridge - and, for that matter, to the whole world as we are trying to transition to a "new normal" in light of all the uncertainties associated with the deadly COVID-19 pandemic.

We're going to start with a review last week's featured deal, shown above, and address some questions that I have received. Then, we are going to transition to a great hand from the 2015 Spring NABC that had very special significance for me. We're going to close with some very important lessons from that hand. Every hand we show today highlights the importance of thinking ahead. So, let's get started!

Those of you who were with us last week will remember this hand in which the contract is 7 NT and there are 12 certain tricks - 3 spades, 3 hearts, 2 diamonds, and 4 clubs. We got the opening lead of the 10 of clubs and started by playing 4 top clubs, pitching a small diamond and a small heart from dummy.

Position After 4 Rounds of Clubs (H)



<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			2 NT
Pass	4 ♣	Pass	4 ♠
Pass	5 ♣	Pass	5 ♠
Pass	7 NT	All pass	

7 NT by South

At this point, we proceeded to play 3 top spades.

The question I received was why did we play 3 spades now instead of 3 hearts. After all, either suit could split 3-3 (each only about 36% of the time, by the way!).

The answer is that by playing spades first, we can follow from both hands without having to guess whether to pitch a spade or a diamond from dummy - each of which would represent a potential threat to become our 13th trick. If we played hearts first, we would have a total guess.

Our desire to hold onto our threats is the "H" in our mnemonic "S-H-A-R-K", to help us remember the 5 key elements of a squeeze.

S-H-A-R-K

The elements of a successful squeeze

- S** - See the ending
- H**- Hold onto all your threats
- A** - Always play **All** your winners
- R** - Rectify the count
- K** - Keep "**K**ommunications" open

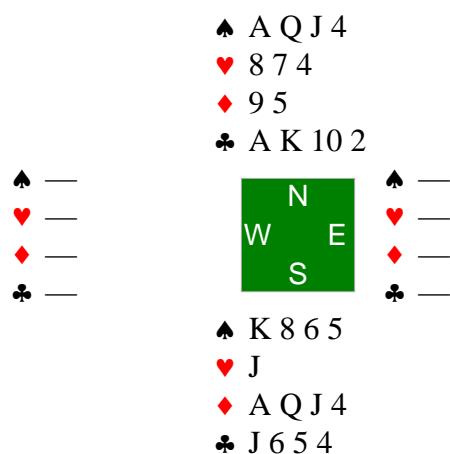
The sequence of plays is key to every squeeze hand. "Seeing the ending" ties in directly with our theme of "skating to where the puck is going.."

To rectify the count means that we safely lose, if possible, sufficient number of tricks that will enable us to get to exactly 1 fewer winner than the number of tricks available. To do this safely, we also have to ensure that we still can retain the extra threat card in a suit that may prove to develop into a crucial extra trick. On the example hand, we started with a properly rectified count. We needed 13 tricks to succeed in our contract - and we started with what a mathematician would refer to "n-1" or 12 tricks.

I don't want to belabor this point. But I need to stress that the elements of a squeeze occur in one deal out of 7! The sooner one starts becoming aware of what a squeeze entails, the sooner he/she will start winning that extra trick on a lot of hands that will spell the difference between winning or losing at bridge.

The next hand we're going to look at also requires we think ahead. Let's check it out!

"Six Steps to Winning Declarer Play" - p.144 (S)



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

4 ♠ by South

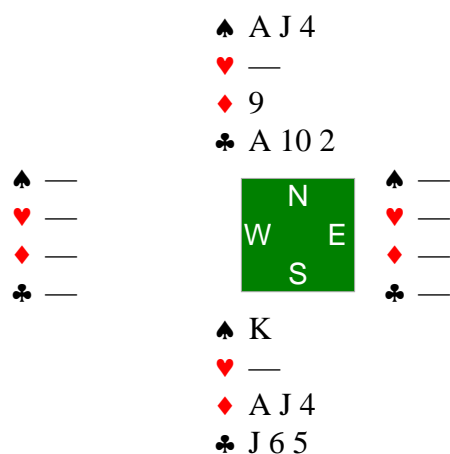
This hand is from a book my wife, Susan, has been studying entitled, "Six Steps to Winning Declarer Play." It was written a few years ago by a very accomplished Grand Life Master from the Philadelphia named Jay Apfelbaum. Jay is an administrative law judge who has won the prestigious Blue Ribbon Pairs. As we shall soon see, Jay figured prominently in a very special hand for me. But let's hold that thought and stick with this hand for now.

After bidding 4H, West started with the Ace and King of hearts against South's 4S contract. His partner showed the 9 and the 2. This shows an even number, and the bidding makes it clear that West started with 7 hearts headed by the AKQ, and West started with 2.

Shark's Pointer: **When one hand is known to be disproportionately long in one suit, the other hand will probably be longer in the other suits.** What this means, is that it is more likely that any specific card in those suits. So, without looking at any of the hands, we should start with the assumption that both the K of diamonds and the Q of clubs is more likely to be in the hand that started with 2 hearts, than with the hand that started with 7 hearts.

Last week, we mentioned that while it isn't important to memorize probabilities of suits dividing in a certain manner, it is good to know that missing an odd number of cards (3,5,7, 9 etc.) that they are most likely to split as evenly as possible (2-1, 3-2, 4-3, 5-4 respectively). Missing 9 hearts, they will split 5-4 58.9% of the time. They will split 7-2, as in this case, only 8.6% of the time. In our trump suit here (spades), we are also missing an odd number. The 5 missing spades will split 3-2 some 68% of the time, as compared to splitting 4-1 only 28%. However, once again, when one suit splits abnormally, the percentages will shift, so on this hand, we shouldn't be terribly surprised if spades prove to be 4-1.

South leads King of Spades, West Follows (A)



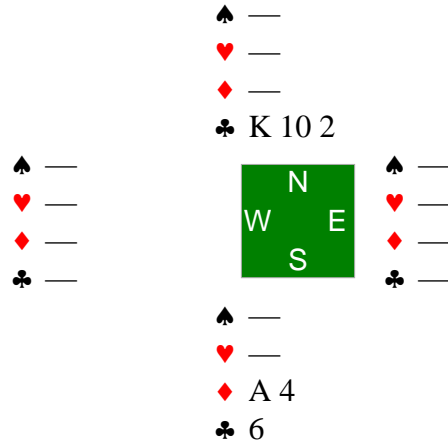
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1 ♣	Pass	1 ♠
4 ♥	4 ♠	All pass	

4 ♠ by South

We played a club to the K at trick 2, and immediately played a diamond to the Q. Note: we don't play the J. The less info we give to our opponents the better. If we play the J, it's possible a shrewd West might duck, but he will never duck if you play a diamond to the Q. Once the diamond Q wins, now we play a low trump to the dummy to ruff dummy's 3rd heart. We timed it this way so as to keep our K of spades in hand. If we had played our spade K earlier, West would ruff in and win a trick. With the K, we can just overruff. OK. East discarded a diamond and we ruffed low. Now, when we play our K of spades, West follows. We thought trumps might be splitting 4-1, but now, confident they are splitting 3-2, we overtake with dummy's Ace. East follows, so we draw the last trump with dummy's J, being careful to pitch a club - not a diamond. Why? We know our A and J of diamonds will be winners if we finesse again. Our little diamond poses as a threat. (Remember the "H" in "SHARK"?) We can pitch a club with absolutely no risk. OK. So far, so good. Let's take a second to count our tricks. We have 2 heart ruffs in hand. 4 more trump tricks in dummy. 2 sure clubs, and 3 sure diamonds with another finesse. That adds up to 11 sure tricks. We lost the opening trick. So, in the above 7 card ending, assuming the diamond finesse will win again. We have 6 sure winners - 3 spades, 2 diamonds and 1 club. Our count is Rectified!! Are you Starting to See what I See?

Now, remember the "A" ? Even though trumps have been drawn, play dummy's last winner now, watching what our opps discard. Once again, East discards a diamond while West pitches a heart. Now, we finesse the diamond as West follows.

South Leads Ace of Diamonds in 3 Card Ending (K)



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

4 ♠ by South

When we now cash the A of diamonds, West discards a heart.

This is the typical squeeze ending that we could "See" and carefully thought ahead to achieve. We smartly "**H**eld" on to our extra diamond and hand and extra club in dummy. We played "**A**ll" our winners, our count was "**R**ectified, and We kept "**K**ommunications" open so that we have retained a club to play up to the K in dummy. All the prerequisites for a squeeze!

We now also have a 100% count on the West hand. He started with 7 hearts, 2 spades, 2 diamonds, and therefore, 2 clubs. We pitch a club from dummy. So in this ending, we ask ourselves, "did East ever pitch a club?" If so, we play a club to dummy and our 10 will be a winner. If the answer is "no", then he has to have 2 clubs left. So, your little 4 of diamonds has to be high - even if you had no recollection of what diamonds had been played. East's last 2 cards have to be clubs!

Following the "S-H-A-R-K" guidelines, and thinking about the distribution made 12 tricks 100% certain at this point.

Squeezes literally occur all the time. Take a little time to go over these last two example hands and try to practice playing like a "S-H-A-R-K".

This hand in Jay Apelbaum's book reminded very much of a very famous hand that was written up in the May 2015 edition of the ACBL Bulletin. On this occasion, Jay was my opponent, and we were competing in the finals of the Flight A North American Pairs Championship in New Orleans, LA. My partner was New England top expert and Professor Emeritus in Mathematics at the University of Massachusetts, Dr. Shome Mukherjee.

North American Pairs "A" - New Orleans 3/2015

East Deals
Both Vul

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

West	North	East	South
<i>Dan Boye</i>	<i>Shome Mukherjee</i>	<i>Jay Apfelbaum</i>	<i>Mark Aquino</i>
Pass	2 ♣	Pass	1 NT
Pass	3 NT	Dbl	2 ♦
Pass		All pass	

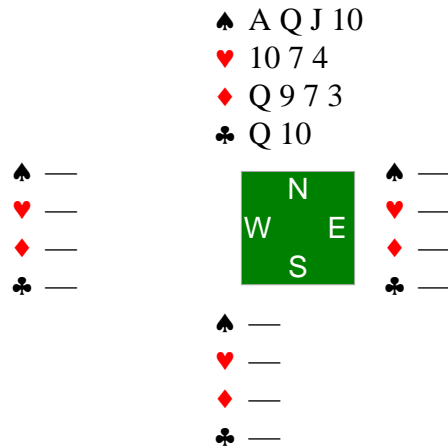
3 NT by South

Here's that famous hand! Jay Apfelbaum sat East and passed as dealer. Playing 14+ to 17 no trumps, my hand qualified on the basis of the good 5 card diamond suit, so I opened 1N and Shome bid 2 ♣ to find out if we might have a 4-4 spade fit. East doubled, and I bid 2D to show I didn't have any 4 card majors.

Shark's Pointer: When dummy hits and it is not what you had expected, never say a word or give away disappointment. Just say "thank you, partner" and move on. T

To my surprise, Jay went into the tank after I played the 10 of ♣ from dummy - and eventually played the 7! Having no idea where the puck was going, I still snatched the trick with my J in dummy, without a second thought. I couldn't foresee how this would help, but I knew I would be giving the illusion that my holding was K-J or A-J doubleton. Anything that can fool the opponents without costing a trick is always a good technique. Now I played a high diamond from my hand. Note- whether east or west started with all 4 diamonds, playing high from hand allows you to pick up the suit with no losers. Take a second to review this suit combination. Now, even with the gift at trick one, I am not home free. I have 1 ♣, 5 ♦, 1 ♥, and 1 ♠ - only 8. I ran 4 diamond winners. (Note: Playing the 5th diamond would have allowed W to unblock the clubs!). Now I took a spade finesse, and when it lost to the K, I thought my goose was cooked. Note that a low club will allow them to run the clubs and set me. But, remembering trick 1, Jay was convinced I had started with KJ doubleton of clubs, so he cashed the A. West tried to unblock the K, but since his 9 was high, a club continuation put him on play with nothing but hearts, and I won the rest of the tricks! +630 was worth 12.5/13 matchpoints and Shome and I ended up winning the event!

Where's the Puck Going? - What if Stayman is Doubled?



<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		Pass	1 NT
Pass	2 ♣	Dbl	Pass
Pass	Rdbl		

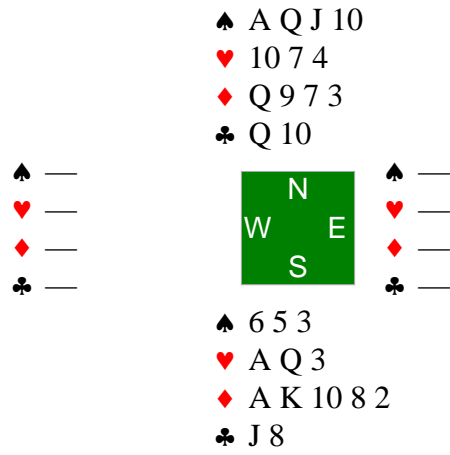
The write-up of this amazing deal was published in the May, 2015 ACBL Bulletin. You can find that article by going to acbl.org, clicking on "My ACBL", and the clicking on BULLETIN and "Archives". The article erroneously suggested that my immediate bid showed a club stopper. The truth is that as much as Shome and I had played together, we obviously never ever had such an agreement.

Is this something you have discussed with your favorite partner? Adam and Zach Grossack told me about methods that they have successfully adopted to address this specific issue. I have since modified their approach slightly, but our methods are very close. Since this is such a common auction, I would like to share with you the way this works. The key is to avoid playing a contract from the wrong side, if at all possible.

After 1N-P-2C-X, the NT opener will only bid if he has a club stopper - regardless of his distribution. So, pass says "Partner I don't have a club stopper" - and it should be alerted. Now the notrump opener's partner can still ask about the major suit holdings - and ensure the contract is played from his side. This can be very crucial! A lead thru Kxx may generate a ruff, or just enable an extra trick one way or another.

In these methods, the responder redoubles any time he/she wants partner to show his major suit holdings - but still get the hand played from the correct side. It essentially initiates a transfer sequence, so that the 1 NT opener bids the suit below his 4 card major. That is, after the auction, 1N-P-2C-X-P*(No club stopper) -P-XX*(Repeats stayman)- P The NT opener now bids 2D* to show 4 hearts, 2H* to show 4S, 2S* to show no 4 card majors, and 2N* to show both 4H and 4S. (Note asterick (*) indicates that all these bids must be alerted!). I'm providing a few examples in this and the next few slides to illustrate how this system works with the different hands.

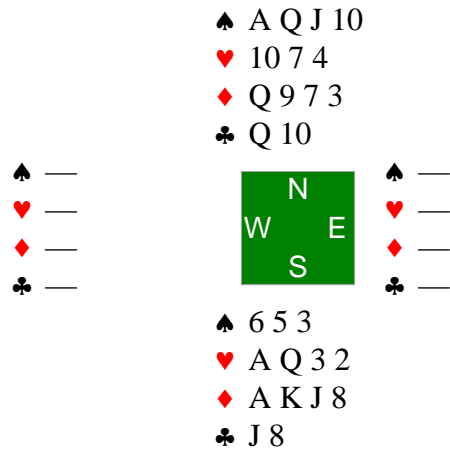
1 NT Opener Has No Club Stopper & No 4 Card Major



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

3 ♦ by North

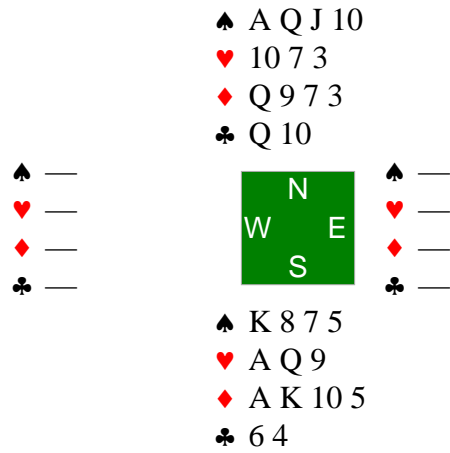
1 NT Opener No Club Stopper & 4H



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

2 ♥ by North

1 NT Opener No Club Stopper & 4 Spades



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

4 ♠ by North

1 NT Opener No Stopper Both Majors

♠ A Q 10 9
 ♥ Q J 7
 ♦ Q 9 7 3
 ♣ K 10

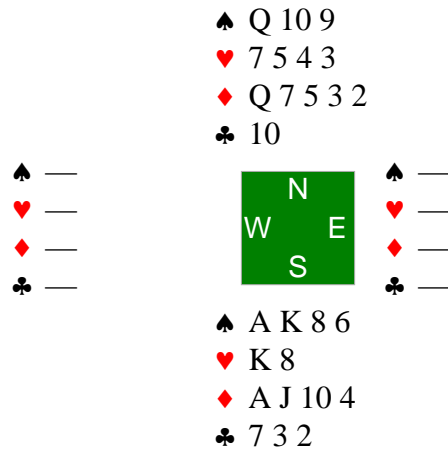


♠ K 8 6 5
 ♥ A K 8 6
 ♦ A K 5
 ♣ 7 3

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		Pass	1 NT
Pass	2 ♣	Dbl	Pass
Pass	Rdbl	Pass	2 NT
Pass	4 ♠	All pass	

4 ♠ by North

1 NT Opener No Stopper Garbage Stayman 4+D



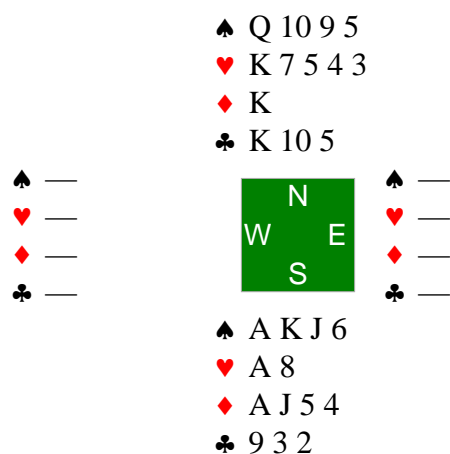
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		Pass	1 NT
Pass	2 ♣	Dbl	Pass
Pass	2 ♦	All pass	

2 ♦ by North

The question was asked about bidding stayman showing at least 8 hcp. This is generally correct and a good rule to follow - except there are some very weak hands in which it is generally safer to play in 2 of a suit. The above hand is such an example. The North hand will be happy to play in 2 of any suit - including diamonds! - to which partner will respond after the stayman inquiry.

This system suggests that after partner passes 2Cx to show no club stopper, the responder bids 2D to show a so-called "Garbage Stayman" hand with 4 or more diamonds, and 2H to show as little as 4-4 in the majors with fewer than 4 diamonds. The NT bidder will now either pass 2H or correct to 2S, depending upon his hand. He will never pass 2H with a doubleton.

Smolen



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

4 ♠ by North

The Smolen convention is used to show game forcing values and 5-4 in the majors opposite a strong 1 NT opener. It starts with stayman, and after a 2 ♦ response, responder jumps to 3 of his 4 card major so as to enable the NT opener to be declarer in 4 ♥, 4 ♠, or 3 NT depending upon his major suit holdings. Since the NT opener has denied a club stopper, you can see how on a hand such as depicted here, it is extremely important to get the contract played from the North hand. The solution is for the 2 ♣ bidder to jump to the suit in which he holds the 5 card major. Now, opener will raise with 3+ hearts, or bid 3 NT with only 3 spades and 2 hearts. He hasn't suddenly found a club stopper, so the responder will only pass 3N if he has a solid club stopper and is willing to play the contract there knowing he is getting a club lead. Here's the twist. What if, as is shown here, the NT opener has 4 of the other major? How does he get to play in the partnership's known 4-4 fit - and still get to play it from the right side? The answer, as shown here, is for the NT opener to Q-bid 4 ♣* to show 4 of the other major and allow partner to be the declarer! Pretty spiffy!

Thanks to the more than 40 people who joined us today. Hope you have enjoyed today's "Shark's Pointers Online". This morning, we used the Great Getsky's frequently quoted "I skate to where the puck is going, not where it was" to show how thinking ahead is so important in the game of bridge. We reviewed the "S-H-A-R-K" mnemonic and showed a couple of squeeze hands to highlight how thinking ahead factors into these frequent hands. I showed a famous hand in which I thought ahead - at trick 1 - that reaped a huge reward. And finally, I went into great detail about an innovative approach to deal with a fairly common auction that most players - even experts - haven't thought ahead to avoid a disastrous result! See you all next week. Same time, same zoom ID as shown on Tim Hill's Westwood website. Invite your friends!