

The #1 Most Important Convention - Stamina

Good morning, everyone!

Welcome to the 17th session of Shark's Pointers Online! Wow! Can you believe it??? 17 and counting... Will we ever play face to face bridge again??

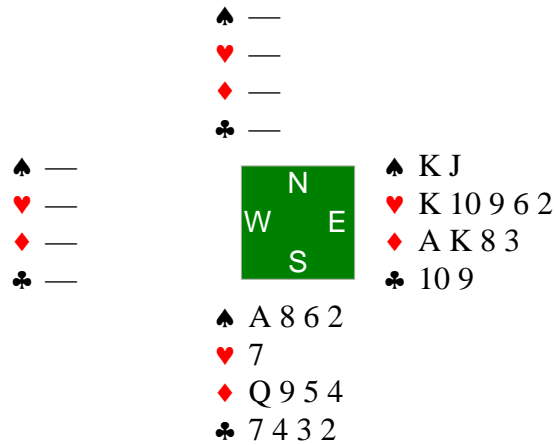
A number of weeks ago, Tim Hill posted a copy of the talk I gave in Hyannis back in 2014 entitled, "The Inner Game of Bridge". I hope you all have had a chance to read that by now. Even though it goes back more than 6 years, I believe much of the advice given in that presentation is timeless.

You may recall that I stated at that time that the most important convention was not Blackwood - not Stayman, but something that sounds quite a lot like Staymen . The # 1 most important convention by far is - "Stamina". Our biggest mistakes are usually caused just because we are tired, or have lost our focus. These occurs most frequently occur on the first - and last boards of a session, and quite typically at trick 1.

Today, without saying who did what, I am going to share a number of disasters my partners and I have had over the years. While my best advice is to forgive and forget, the truth is that it is very very difficult to do this - and the inability to do so is a further impediment to maximum performance. As time allows, I'll try to engage you all in some discussion around ways to help improve your stamina. I'll also talk about things we can all try to do to help minimize these unforced errors and how to immediately improve our results.

The #1 Most Important Convention - Stamina

IMPs
Dlr West
None Vul



Opening lead 10 of ♠

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1 ♣	Pass	1 ♥	Pass
3 ♣	Pass	3 ♦	Pass
3 ♥	Pass	4 ♣	Pass
4 ♥	Pass	4 NT	Pass
5 ♣	All pass		

5 ♣ by West

Here was a hand from a recent top level online IMP Pairs game. The auction was as shown and partner led the 10 of spades.

Declarer surprised you by playing the spade K at trick 1. You win the Ace. Plan your defense.

A heart seems obvious but do you see the trap? West has shown 3 keycards - so he has to have the AK of clubs and the A of hearts. A heart back may pick up the suit. So, after some thought - some discussion with your inner demons, so to speak, you passively returned a spade.

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IMPs

West Deals

None Vul

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

Opening lead 10 of ♠

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1 ♣	Pass	1 ♥	Pass
3 ♣	Pass	3 ♦	Pass
3 ♥	Pass	4 ♣	Pass
4 ♥	Pass	4 NT	Pass
5 ♣	All pass		

5 ♣ by West

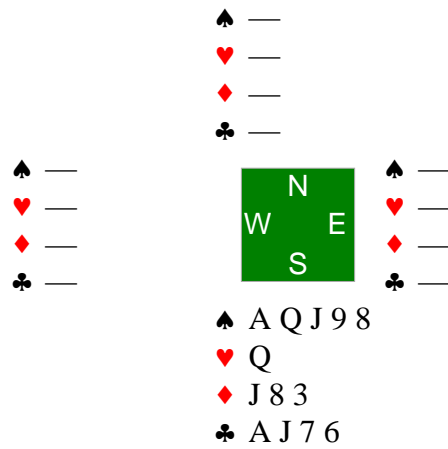
Here was the full deal. Note that declarer is cold for SIX CLUBS if he makes the normal play of the spade J at trick one. But never look a gift horse in the face and

If the distribution was different, passively returning a spade might have been the winning play. How do you solve this dilemma?

The key here is the key on a vast number of hands. You need to develop a picture of the most likely distribution declarer has. This one is tough, but it looks like declarer has 6 or 7 solid clubs, and Ax of hearts. If he has 7 clubs, with the 4 red winners, there will be no defense, so we must play him to hold 6 solid clubs. Must have less than 4 diamonds on this bidding, so 3-2-6-2 or 2-2-6-3 are possible. Once again if declarer has AQ doubleton of hearts, there is no defense, and if you return a heart and he started with AJ doubleton, the hand is over, but there are a lot more Ax doubletons than AJ doubletons, so returning a heart has to be best percentage play.

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Matchpoints
Neither Vul



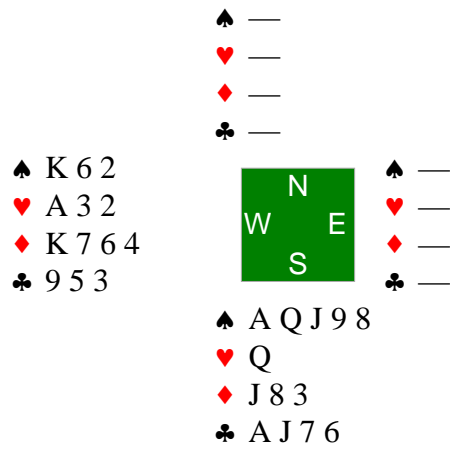
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1 ♠
Pass	Pass	2 ♥	Dbl
3 ♥	Dbl	All pass	

3 ♥× by East

Here's another hand. This one is from a top level matchpoint game. You and your partner have been having a great session and this was your hand on the very last board. What do you lead?

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Matchpoints
Neither Vul

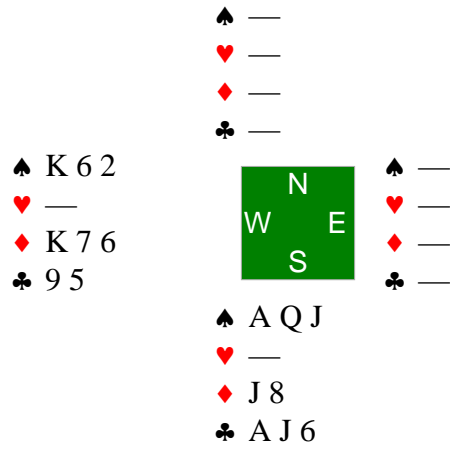


Opening Lead 3 of ♦

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
Pass	Pass	2 ♥	1 ♠
3 ♥	Dbl	All pass	Dbl
3 ♥× by East			

In practice, you led the 3 of diamonds, and the play went 4, Q, A.
 Now declarer proceeded to draw 4 rounds of trumps, your partner following with the 4, 5, 7, and 9. You discarded the 9 and 8 of spades and the 7 of clubs.

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

3 ♥× by East

Declarer now played a low spade out of hand towards dummy in the 7 card ending. How do you defend?

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South Deals
None Vul

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

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

3 ♥ × by East

Here was the full deal...

If you led the spade A, and returned the Q, partner would ruff and play the 2 of clubs to your J. Now J of spades, and a spade. If declarer is sleepy, he will ruff with the A, and immediately play a heart to his J and your Q - you'll cash a club and declarer will score the rest - down 2.

But if he is awake, he will realize that if you had started with the AKJx of clubs, your opening lead would have been a high clubs. So your partner is marked with x ?xxx Qxxx Kxxx. If he had the Q of hearts he wouldn't have passed 1S, with 7 points he would have bid 1 NT. So with the actual lead of a low diamond, if you ducked the spade lead, declarer would win and return a spade to your Q. Now a low club to partner's K would drop declarer's Q, and another club would tap him. He'd still get one more diamond trick, but all tolled will score 5 hearts, 1 spade, and 2 diamonds - still down 1.

Unfortunately, South wasn't paying attention and was very tired. He rose with the A of spades and returned the Q. Now declarer was in control and merely returned a third round of spades, establishing his spade 10 for his 9th trick!.

This hand highlights a common miscue. Players often give up on defenses. Count declarer's tricks, take your time and even if you dont find the killing lead, you still may have success.

+300 would have been worth 99% of the matchpoints. +100 was worth 75.7% -530 was 0.7%

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IMPs

West Deals

Both Vul

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

Opening Lead 2 of ♠

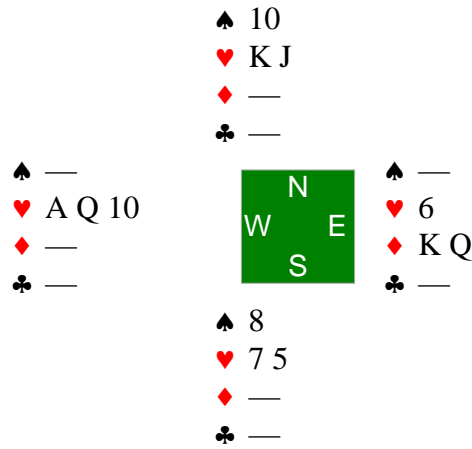
3 N by East

Some mistakes are really hard to believe - but they actually occur more frequently than you will ever know. Take this one from actual play...

South lead the 2 of spades. East won the first spade and led the 10 of diamonds which South ducked. Now a club up and South rose ace and continued spades. East won the third spade (pitching 2 hearts from dummy) and ran dummy's clubs. After cashing all of dummy's clubs Declarer led a diamond off dummy in this end position....

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IMPs
Both Vul



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

Opening Lead 2 of ♠

3 N by East

In with the Ace of diamonds, South returned a spade! These things happen more than you can imagine. The toughest part of this game is to forget braincramps like this and move on.

Both North and South knew what happened. If they dwell on it, it will only have an adverse effect on many other hands in the session. This is great advice, but sometimes very very tough to practice in real life. Oftentimes when you make a big mistake like this and let it eat at you, you will make many more mistakes in that session.

Short live it! I am going to close with a couple hands I have never completely been able to let go of. Both ended up costing me wins in NABC+ events. The first is from the LM Pairs in the 2004 Fall NABC in Orlando, FL.

This was the very last deal. My partner and I were having an incredible session. We were in that zone in which we couldn't wait to play our next hand in order to see how we would get another top board. We were 101st after the 1st day and moved all the way up to 35th after the 3rd session.

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Playing with different partners I did extremely well in two different major national pairs events in 2004 and in 2010. My partners and I finished 2nd and 3rd overall respectively. In both cases, huge blunders on the very last round were responsible for our not finishing 1st!

Staying focused thru the very last card of the very last hand is something we all have to work hard to do. Here are some pointers:

#1) Get plenty of exercise. This is probably the most important thing one can do to develop and improve stamina. Get in the habit of taking walks, going swimming, playing tennis or golf, or anything else that might help. This is so important, it can't be overemphasised. Especially today as we are locked in, this is so very important.

#2) The night before an important competition, try to get a good night's sleep! This is often easier said than done, especially in our good old days of face to face bridge tournaments. You're up later, drinking more coffee, and there's always a heightened nervousness and excitement. It's not easy. Just be mindful of this and do the best you can.

#3) Pace yourself. Try to stay on an even keel. Don't waste a lot of time talking about prior hands, or engaging in chit chat with opponents. Take a deep breath before the start of the very first hand - and in between each subsequent hand.

#4) Be a good partner. Don't express your anger or frustration when partner makes a mistake. He knows he screwed up. You don't want to make it worse. Typing in "no problem" or "np" when partner apologizes for a mistake can go a long ways to calming everyone down.

#5) Think about the shape. Almost all defensive problems can be solved if you think about the distribution on the hand. This takes extra effort when you are tired. Practice makes perfect, however.

#6) Count your tricks - and count the opponents' tricks. Probably the #1 cause for misplaying hands and misdefending.

#7) Talk to yourself! Tell yourself this is the very first hand - or the last. Tell yourself to stay focused. Tell yourself to forget your partner's huge blunder - and tell yourself to forget your own. Tell yourself to not get angry. Tell yourself there are 6 more hands to go, etc.

#8) Stay focused. Remember to keep asking yourself some of the important questions I have been bringing up in these sessions - "What's It All About, Alfie?", Should I "Hurry Up or Wait", do "I Have A Secret", "Who Do You Trust"?

#9) Don't Listen to Your Demons! - Don't let yourself get talked out of what seems to be the most logical play.

HOPE THIS HELPS!! HAVE A GREAT WEEK. "SEE" YOU ALL NEXT WEEK.