

Wearing "The Blinders"

Matchpoints

West Deals

None Vul

♠ 9 7 6
♥ Q 8 2
♦ K 10 4
♣ Q 10 3 2



♠ A Q J 3
♥ 7 3
♦ Q 6 3 2
♣ J 7 5

Opening Lead 6 of ♣

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

2 ♠ by South

Good morning, Ladies and Gentlemen!

Welcome to this, the 34th session of "Shark's Pointers Online"! Before starting with today's topic, which I have entitled, "Removing The Blinders", I wanted to point out that Tim's Westwood Club and our weekly sessions just got a little plug in the December ACBL Bulletin that is just coming out. You may recall that I told you recently that Shome and I were asked to bid some hands for "It's Your Call". Well, those hands are in this issue along with a short bio of both Shome and me. So, I invite you to check that out, and now, let's get back to today's topic.

The other day, I was declarer in a 2 spade contract, after East opened the bidding 1 NT, and I made a very aggressive 2 ♦ bid, which in our agreements, showed diamonds and a major. My partner bid 2 ♥, which asked me to pass or correct to 2 ♠, if that was my major suit.

I got the opening lead of the 6 of ♣, which looked like a doubleton to me, so I put in the 10 from dummy to give the appearance that the 6 was from some holding like J 9 7 6 4. East won the K and shifted to the 8 of ♦, which West won with the Ace, and he now shifted to the K of ♥. So, now, I know a lot about the hand. Having shown up with the A of ♦, and the K of ♥, West couldn't possibly have many more high cards, and East was marked with the K of ♠, the AJ of ♥, and the AK of ♣. It's possible that West might have the J of ♦ as well, but that was about it. Furthermore, it seems likely that the missing hearts were divided 4-4. West continued with the 10 of ♥, which I covered to induce a heart continuation, which I did receive as I ruffed small in hand to achieve this position....

Wearing "The Blinders"

Matchpoints
West Deals
None vul

♠ 9 7 6
♥ —
♦ K 10
♣ Q 3 2



♠ A Q J
♥ —
♦ Q 6 3
♣ J 7

Opening Lead 6 of ♣

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

2 ♠ by South

So, now I crossed to the K of ♦, and played a spade to my J which held the trick. And now, I played the Q of ♦ - happy to see West follow low, and East play the J. I then proceeded to play the 7 of clubs to West's 4 and dummy's Q, and when a club came back, I expected West to ruff, and then he would be endplayed into allowing me to score the last 4 tricks for down 1.

But, as it turns out, West followed with the 9 of clubs! So stuck in my hand, I had to surrender I more trick for down 1 instead of making my contract!. Here was the full deal....

Wearing "The Blinders"

Matchpoints

West Deals

None Vul

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

Opening Lead 6 of ♣

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

2 ♠ by South

From the opening lead, I had the misconception in my mind that West started with 6 4 doubleton of clubs. Perhaps being married to an equestrian for nearly 38 years has forged in my mind the thought of horses wearing blinders as they race down the track, or as they may be used to carry a wagon. The blinders are worn to help sharpen the focus of the horse and remove distractions. In fact, the blinders are a tool to help reduce some of the problems we encounter by things that are in or near our blind spots that can only reduce our concentration. To succeed we are going to have to start "wearing the blinders". Today, we are going to look at a few examples like this of my own and my expert partner's blind spots. And then, I am going to try to provide some practical pointers that might help us to start wearing our "blinders".

By the way, we were in such a great matchpoint spot, that -50 was worth 89% of the matchpoints on this deal. Not making 2S due to my blind spot, didn't cost us very much. OK, no big deal.

Unfortunately, a blind spot similar to this one resulted in huge disasters on the other examples we will look at today.

Here was another hand, I (mis)played....

Wearing "The Blinders"

IMPs

West Deals

N-S Vul

♠ Q 9 4
♥ Q J 6
♦ J 5 2
♣ A Q J 6



♠ K J 8
♥ K 9 7 5 4
♦ K 10
♣ 10 4 2

Opening Lead 9 of ♣

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

3 ♥ by South

First, a few words about the bidding. East-West were playing a system known as XYZ. That means that if there are 3 different bids made at the 1 level - in this case, 1 ♣, 1 ♠, and 1 NT the three different bids are given the algebraic description of X, Y, and Z. Now, 2 ♣ is a relay to 2 ♦, which might be passed, or followed by a bid like 2 ♥ or 2 ♠ to show an invitational hand. A bid of 2 ♦ after XYZ is an artificial game forcing bid saying nothing about diamonds.

When 2 ♦ was passed around to me, I balanced with 2 ♥ - even though I was at unfavorable at IMPs. My somewhat aggressive call prodded my partner's rather aggressive raise to 3 ♥. (My own advice would be to not "hang" partner for balancing. With both opps bidding, it is highly unlikely we have the requisite 26 points for game. Your clubs and hearts are great, but your pointed suits are rather anemic. Just pass 2 ♥, and decide whether or not to raise if the auction comes back to you.)

Well, back to our problem at hand. What should we make of the opening club bidder's lead of the 9 of clubs? Is there any holding from which he would lead the 9, holding the K? Not bloody likely, but I couldn't see how I could make the hand with the club finesse losing, so I played low from dummy and lost to East's K.

Here was the full deal...

Wearing "The Blinders"

IMPs
West Deals
N-S Vul

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

Opening Lead 9 of ♣

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

3 ♥ by South

Oh boy! Despite my false-carding with my 10 of clubs, East returned the 10 of spades to his partner's Ace, and a club came back which he ruffed. A diamond to West's Ace and another club ruff. I still had to lose the Ace of trumps, so I ended up going down 2 vulnerable.

Had I rose with the club Ace at trick one, and played a heart, EW would score 3 Aces and a club ruff - +140 instead of -200. We lost 7 IMPs, and we would have won 5 - a huge 12 IMP swing!

During the same set, I picked up this hand...

Wearing "The Blinders"

NS Vul
South Deals
IMPs

♠ 10 8 7
♥ K 10 8
♦ Q 8 7 4 3
♣ 8 6

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

4 ♥ by South

Opening Lead A of ♣

I was sitting North. My partner opened the bidding 1 ♥, West doubled, and I bid 2 ♥, which I alerted was our weakest raise - showing 5-6 HCP. (2 ♣, 2 ♦, and 2 NT would also be heart raises with various strengths, 7-8 HCP 9-10 and 10+)

My partner's 3 ♦ was a game try with a second suit. I knew it was aggressive, and I would have preferred that my K of ♥ was the Q, and the Q of ♦ was the K, but I "bid what I hoped we would make" - 4 ♥!

West led the Ace of clubs and this was my partner's hand...

Wearing "The Blinders"

IMPs
 South Deals
 N-S Vul

♠ 10 8 7
 ♥ K 10 8
 ♦ Q 8 7 4 3
 ♣ 8 6



♠ K Q
 ♥ A Q 5 4 2
 ♦ A J 6 5
 ♣ J 3

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

4 ♥ by South

Opening Lead A of ♣

With 2 sure club losers and 1 spade loser, things didn't look great. We had to avoid a trump loser and we needed the ♦ K onside - not a high likelihood considering the takeout double by West.

West continued with a low club to his partner's Q and the 9 of spades went to declarer's K and West's Ace. West returned a spade and declarer played A of hearts and a heart - both opps following.

Here was the full deal...

Wearing "The Blinders"

IMPs

South Deals

N-S Vul

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

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

4 ♥ by South

Opening Lead A of ♣

Well, this looks great! Diamonds were 2-2 with the K onside after all. +620 would have been worth 13 IMPs our way.

But Oh no!!!

Partner - a well known top expert was so blinded by the assumption that the King of diamond was in the West hand, that he played Ace and a diamond - down 1, to lose 3.3 IMPs. What a huge swing!

Then there was this final example...

Wearing "The Blinders"

IMPs
 South Deals
 Both Vul

♠ Q 6
 ♥ K 10 7
 ♦ A K 8 5 3
 ♣ J 9 5



♠ A 10 7 3
 ♥ Q J 5 3 2
 ♦ 7 6 2
 ♣ A

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

Opening Lead Q of ♦

4 ♥ by South

Now this one looks easy. We have to lose a spade, a heart and a diamond. Seems likely spade K is with the overcaller, and if not, we might be able to bring home the diamonds. But it really isn't as easy as it may look. If West started with QJ10x of diamonds, we could get the D K ruffed out and go down, for example. Also, it's hard to count to 10 tricks if East started with 4 diamonds. We have 4 trumps, 1 club, 2 top diamonds, and 1 or 2 spades. Getting back and forth to ruff a spade might be problematic and we could get tapped out.

So, it would make sense to play a club to our Ace and lead a spade towards dummy's Q. If West rises with the Q, it looks like we should be in control.

Here was the full hand...

Wearing "The Blinders"

IMPs
 South Deals
 Both Vul

♠ K 9 8 2	♠ Q 6	♠ J 5 4	
♥ A 9	♥ K 10 7	♥ 8 6 4	
♦ Q	♦ A K 8 5 3	♦ J 10 9 4	
♣ K Q 7 6 4 2	♣ J 9 5	♣ 10 8 3	
	<div style="background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> N W E S </div>		
	♠ A 10 7 3		
	♥ Q J 5 3 2		
	♦ 7 6 2		
	♣ A		
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1 ♥
2 ♣	3 ♣	Pass	3 ♥
Pass	4 ♥	All pass	
Opening Lead Q of ♦			
4 ♥ by South			

What happened in practice was declarer immediately went after trumps. West won and returned the K of clubs. Now declarer played 2 more rounds of trumps and instead of playing a spade now, he had his blinders on, assuming that diamonds were 3-2. When he returned a diamond in the following position, he was doomed...

Wearing "The Blinders"

IMPs

	♠ Q 6		
	♥ —		
	♦ K 8 5 3		
	♣ J 9		
♠ K 9 8 2	<div style="background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> N W E S </div>	♠ J 5 4	
♥ —		♥ —	
♦ —		♦ J 10 9	
♣ Q 7 6 4		♣ 10 8	
	♠ A 10 7 3		
	♥ J 5		
	♦ 7 6		
	♣ —		
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1 ♥
2 ♣	3 ♣	Pass	3 ♥
Pass	4 ♥	All pass	
	4 ♥ by South		

Opening Lead Q of ♦

What happened in practice was declarer immediately went after trumps. Declarer won the diamond Ace and played the 10 of hearts from dummy. West won and returned the K of clubs. Now declarer played 2 more rounds of trumps and instead of playing a spade now, he had his blinders on, assuming that diamonds were 3-2. When he returned a diamond in the following position, he was doomed...

He had lost 1 trick, and he needed 6 more to score his game.

He ducked a diamond, and East returned a club. Ruffing wouldn't help, so South pitched a spade. West won and returned a club. South still had to lose a spade. Down 1.

So what can we do to remove our blinders?

Let's go back and take a look at each of the previous hands and see if we can come up with some ideas that will help us all moving forward.

Wearing "The Blinders"

Matchpoints

West Deals

None Vul

	♠ 9 7 6										
	♥ Q 8 2										
	♦ K 10 4										
	♣ Q 10 3 2										
♠ 10 8 5	<table style="border: 1px solid black; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: auto; text-align: center; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ K 4 2
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ K 10 6 4		♥ A J 9 5									
♦ A 9 5		♦ J 8 7									
♣ 9 6 4		♣ A K 8									
	♠ A Q J 3										
	♥ 7 3										
	♦ Q 6 3 2										
	♣ J 7 5										

Opening Lead 6 of ♣

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

2 ♠ by South

Here was the first hand.

We had a blind spot that clubs were splitting 4-2. But as the play progressed, it should have been clear that they were not. When West won the Ace of diamonds, he surely would have returned a club had he started with a doubleton.

That alone should have steered us in the right direction, but in the endgame, after cashing 3 diamonds, it should have been clear that West had to be 3-4-3-3 or if West had started with only two clubs, 4-4-2-3. If the latter, we had to lose 2 tricks. Finally, even if we aren't doing due diligence and counting the hand, playing the J of clubs is at worst a break even play. It can never cost.

Wearing "The Blinders"

IMPs
West Deals
N-S Vul

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

Opening Lead 9 of ♣

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

3 ♥ by South

Here was the 2nd hand.

If West had made a less informative lead of a small club, I could have been forgiven for going wrong. As it was, there was no excuse.

The opening lead of the 9 of clubs should have steered us in the right direction.

The rule here is if it looks like the top of nothing, and it smells like the top of nothing, and it tastes like the top of nothing - it's the top of nothing!

Wearing "The Blinders"

IMPs

South Deals

N-S Vul

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

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

4 ♥ by South

Opening Lead A of ♣

Our third hand provided us lots of clues. First of all, the only lie of clubs that would allow us to make the hand would be East holding the singleton or doubleton diamond K, or West holding the singleton K of diamonds. Who would double 1 heart with a singleton diamond? So, winning the third trump in dummy and playing a diamond to the J is the only logical play.

But there are other clues as well...

If West had started with something like AJxx xx Kxx Axxx and East started with 9xxx Jxx x KQxxx, my guess is East would have bid 2 spades or 3 clubs, not passed. And if West had the AK of clubs, why would he underlead the K looking at the A of spade and the K of diamonds? He would have the hand set. This was IMPs.

Declarer should have wondered what kind of lead the unsupported Ace of clubs would be instead of a more likely passive trump lead.

All logical thought processes should lead to making this hand. When the odds are overwhelmingly supporting one option over another, one must go with the odds.

Wearing "The Blinders"

IMPs
South Deals
Both Vul

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

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

Opening Lead Q of ♦

4 ♥ by South

The last hand we looked at was definitely the most difficult. But the key here again is remembering the bidding, and developing a good model of the distribution based upon the opening lead and the subsequent defense. It should be clear that West probably has 6 clubs to the KQ, and the Ace of hearts. After the actual first 3 tricks, this is no longer even an assumption - it is a proven fact. So what does this tell us about the opening lead of the Q of ♦? It must be a singleton! Who would lead a diamond from QJx holding KQxxxx of clubs and the Ace of trumps? So, our declarer should play a diamond from hand once having won the Ace of clubs - or possibly a spade. West cannot ruff the second round of diamonds to his advantage. Declarer could win the diamond ruff a club and now play a spade toward the K. As long as he plays for trumps to be 3-2, and spades 4-3, he can find a way to ten tricks.

So today's Shark's Pointer is to watch out for getting locked in to certain assumptions and being blind to other logical options. Always check and double check your assumptions as the play progresses and go with the odds when they overwhelmingly favor a play - even if it violates your preconceived assumptions. Think about the distribution and listen to the bidding. Being a good detective will serve you well. We've covered many of these same ideas in earlier Shark's Pointers such as "Don't Listen to the Demons", "What's It All About, Alfie?" and "Relaxed Concentration". The themes overlap, but the bottom line is the same. We all can cut down on our unforced errors with a little more effort and a little more discipline.

Good luck! I hope you will be playing in the ACBL's Online NABC Pair games this weekend!

See you next Friday!