

Take Care of the Little Things!



♠ 10 8 6 4

♥ 8 5

♦ 9 3 2

♣ J 7 6 4

I can't tell you how often I hear bridge players bemoan the fact they haven't gotten many high cards. Truth is, unless you are playing for money, it shouldn't matter. But, even playing in matchpoint events or team games, it is difficult to maintain your concentration when you don't get many high cards. Furthermore, as difficult as it is to declare hands, it truly is a lot harder to defend than it is to declare. So, it is especially challenging on one's focus and concentration when one gets a lot of yarboroughs. What is especially horrifying is when you have gone hand after hand with lousy cards and you sloppily pitch a trick letting declarer win a trick with his 6 spot instead of holding on to your 7 which would have been the setting trick! We've all done this, I am sure. I know I have.

On rare occasions, you'll end up being the declarer even though you have a terribly weak hand. As I was thinking about one of the earlier "Shark's Pointers Online" presentations, I was reminded of a hand that has haunted me for almost 40 years! I held this pitiful 1 count in the 1981 Spingold Master Knockout Team Championships at the Boston Summer North American Championships. Believe it or not, I was the declarer in a 6♠ contract with this hand!

Mark Lair sat West, Mike Passell was East. While I can remember this hand, I am embarrassed to tell you I don't remember any of my teammates, but I know our team was one of the lowest seeds, so we got to play a group of superstars - to include the youthful Jeff Meckstroth and Eric Rodwell. I also remember we sat in a crowded room with about 30 kibitzers. We were doing surprisingly well and a huge upset looked like it might be in the making when this hand occurred.

I'm going to let you know in advance. I had a tough decision to make. I went down in the slam, and I might have made it! That's probably why I have remembered this hand as vividly as if it occurred last week. Only while preparing this talk has it occurred to me how and why I should have gotten it right!

Take Care of the Little Things!

♠ A K J 7 3
 ♥ A K 10 3 2
 ♦ A
 ♣ A 5



♠ 10 8 6 4
 ♥ 8 5
 ♦ 9 3 2
 ♣ J 7 6 4

West	North	East	South
<i>Mark Lair</i>		<i>Mike Passell</i>	<i>Mark Aquino</i>
		Pass	Pass
3 ♦	4 ♦	Pass	4 ♠
Pass	6 ♠	All pass	

6 ♠ by South
 Lead: ♣ 2

Here is the dummy and the auction. The opening lead was the 2 of ♣. You all know you need to count losers and winners and establish a logical line of play before even playing a card from dummy at trick 1. Often, as in this case, the bidding will give big clues as to the distribution. The other thing we need to do is to assume a plausible distribution consistent with the bidding that will make it possible for the contract to succeed. On this hand, we know we have a club loser. We also know we can't afford to lose a trump trick. So, we need to ask ourselves, how can this occur? The answer is either one opponent holds a singleton Q - OR the suit splits 2-2. Now, we mentioned earlier that when missing an even number of cards (in this case 4), the missing cards are most likely to split unevenly. So, a 3-1 trump split is more likely. I'll go thru the actual %'s in a second. If the trumps do split 3-1, how likely is it that the Q is singleton? You may also recall that we said that if one hand is longer in a suit holding, it is also more likely to hold a specific card in that suit. After we factor things together, even though we don't have the benefit of percentage tables and a calculator, we have to make an educated guess as to the highest percentage line - and go with it. My gut feeling is it is more likely that there will be Qx in either hand than singleton Q.

So, let's assume that West started with 7 diamonds and 2 spades. This means we assume West started with 4 cards in clubs and hearts. So, which is it? Are clubs 6-1 and hearts 3-3, or are clubs 3-4, and hearts 1-5? Before answering, let me share with you some pertinent mathematical probabilities. The six missing Hearts will split 4-2 or 3-3 about 84% of the time. A 5-1 split will occur 14.5%. The six missing Clubs will split 4-3 approximately 62% of the time. If the clubs do split 4-3, the club King or Queen will be in the hand with 3, a little less than half the time or approximately 30% of the time. The missing 7 clubs will split 6-1 only 6.78% of the time.

Take Care of the Little Things!

On this deal, we are missing 4 spades : the Q, 9, 5, and 2.

Here's how these 4 cards may be divided between the West and East hands:

	<u>West</u>	<u>East</u>
1)	<i>Q9</i>	<i>52</i>
2)	<i>Q5</i>	<i>92</i>
3)	<i>Q2</i>	<i>95</i>
4)	<i>52</i>	<i>Q9</i>
5)	<i>92</i>	<i>Q5</i>
6)	<i>95</i>	<i>Q2</i>
7)	2	Q95
8)	5	Q92
9)	9	Q52
10*)	Q	952
11*)	952	Q
12)	Q95	2
13)	Q92	5
14)	Q52	9
15)	Void	Q952
16)	Q952	Void

Our assumptions and our hunches were quite correct! There are 6 out of 16 cases in which the spades will split 2-2, as compared to eight 3-1 splits. But there are only 2 situations in which there will be singleton Q's. So a 2-2 split is 3X more likely than stiff Q!

Take Care of the Little Things!

East Deals
N-S Vul

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

West	North	East	South
<i>Mark Lair</i>		<i>Mike Passell</i>	<i>Mark Aquino</i>
		Pass	Pass
3 ♦	4 ♦	Pass	4 ♠
Pass	6 ♠	All pass	

6 ♠ by South
Lead: ♣ 2

This was the actual layout. As you can see, had I ducked the opening lead, I'd be able to ruff out West's Jack and score 12 tricks by was of 5 spades in dummy, 2 hearts, 1 diamond, 2 clubs, and 2 heart ruffs in my hand. I, unfortunately, rose with the A of clubs at trick 1. I was happy to find the spades were indeed 2-2, but when the hearts split 5-1, I went down a trick.

I love getting hand records and studying to see if there was something I might have missed when I get a hand wrong. Sometimes, the mistakes are obvious. Others, as in this case, it might take a long time to see where I might have gone wrong.

Today's Shark's Pointer is that you really have to learn not only probabilities, suit combinations, and advanced techniques like squeezes in order to win at bridge. You also have to know your opponents. You can't apply the same rules against beginners as you would against experts. Understanding this might be more important than all the technical factors combined!

This hand should remind you of one of the sample hands I created for my second lecture entitled "Hurry Up or Wait?" On today's hand, an inexperienced player, would, without hesitation, have led his singleton heart. But our West was a top expert and he made an attacking lead of a low club as compared to his "obvious" singleton heart lead because he listened carefully to the auction and surmised that he would find the dummy with a huge hand with lots of hearts and spades - and likely no diamond losers. I say that because partner didn't double North's 4D cue bid. There was no future in that suit. West assumed there might be a chance that his singleton 9 of hearts might be a dangerous lead as it could give declarer a free finesse if his opps' hearts were AK852 vs Q10, or the complete hand might look something like AKJxx AKQJx A Kx opposite Qxxx 10x Qxx 10xxx in which case if he didn't attack clubs right away, declarer would be able to discard losing clubs on the long hearts - so he thought it important to "hurry up"!

On the other side of the table, East might very well have preempted with 3C in first seat holding KQ10xxx. So, a very good logical could be made for ducking the club lead at trick 1 - and making an otherwise impossible slam!

Hurry Up - Or Wait? - On Opening Lead

North Deals
N-S Vul

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

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



<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1 ♣	Pass	1 ♥
Pass	4 ♦	Pass	4 NT
Pass	5 ♥	Pass	6 ♥
All pass			

6 ♥ by South