



## Ask Jerry

BY JERRY HELMS ✉ [askjerry@jerryhelms.com](mailto:askjerry@jerryhelms.com) 💻 [jerryhelms.com](http://jerryhelms.com)

Dear Jerry,

**I am an intermediate player. I read your column in each Bridge Bulletin, and I really enjoy and appreciate your comments. My question relates to a bad bridge day where every decision I make seems to be the wrong one, where I misinterpret signals, choose improper bids, have “brain cramps” and just plain play very poorly. I feel bad, and I feel I am letting my partner down. Life Master players tell me it happens to everybody. So what do you recommend when those days occur, and how can one recover from it more quickly? I am tempted to stop playing for a while when such a day happens.**

**J.C.**

Dear J.C.,

Based on the number of master-points, I am considered more than an intermediate player, but despite this, I sometimes must fight off the same malady you are experiencing. There are

sessions where it seems that if there is a choice of opening leads, I always pick the wrong one. Facing a two-way finesse, I take it the wrong way. After such a session, it seems easy to question one’s own intellect and abilities. In reality, you need to simply get over it and fight your way through the fog.

To make a sports analogy, you will hear, on occasion, of a basketball player who averages 12 points per game, but then scores over 30 in a single outing. The player explains it by saying, “The basket looked as big as the ocean.” This reflects his feelings as to why all the shots were going in.

Some days at the table, I simply know what’s going on. I analytically or intuitively strike the best opening leads. Without peeking into opponents’ hands, I never misguess a queen. In short, the basket on this day seems “as big as the ocean.” This is the balance that makes the bad days disappear.

Michael Jordan was arguably the greatest basketball player who ever

lived. As hard as it is to believe, he had bad games. Not many, but some. Peruse the results of world championships over the years. Take note of the egregious errors made by top players. When you feel you are playing poorly and sinking into an abyss, maybe it just isn’t your deal, your round or, perhaps, your day. Focus on reality. You have, at some point, achieved some measure of success, or you would be doing something else instead of wasting your time playing bridge. Play through the negative by appreciating each deal for its own individual opportunity.

My assistant, Penelope, groaned that some of my comments were a bit sappy as she was “forced” to type up this reply. Hmmm ...

“Win one for the Gipper!”

“Remember the Alamo!”

“I will return!”

Were these sappy? Perhaps so – but my comments sure would have made a great halftime locker room speech to rally the troops! Hang in there! ■