

Shuffleboard Tips by Earl Ball

THE CHASE BLOCK

If you are going to chase a cover block forward and try to remove your opponents scored disc and you have a choice to use your disc or his do you know which one to use? If you're just trying to get it out, use yours so if you do hit it and it sticks, it'll be your disc that is now the scored disc. If you need to get it out and into the kitchen use his disc so if you miss but still get the kitchen because you are shooting kitchen speed, he'll be the one in the kitchen.

WATCH OUT FOR THE SUCKER HIDE

If it looks too good to be true, maybe it is. Maybe you can't get in and they know it or maybe they need you on the board somehow. I remember being at 68 with the hammer from the foot against Lary Faris in my early years and he put up a poor Tampa for himself but I cleared it; the next one was even poorer, kind of on the point, but I cleared it; the next one was a perfect one for me, I thought how can this guy be so far off, I hid leaving just a fraction open, well you know what happened, in I went! Watch Out, not everything is as it appears!!

WHAT ABOUT THE HIGH 10 TO STEAL YOUR OPPONENT'S HAMMER!

You'll hear me say it's the wrong shot almost every time. High 10's have a way of being low 10's and that translates into a block and a half for the other team. Remember when you are trying to steal the opponent's hammer there are a lot of lines to get next to and they don't all run across the court. In fact, if I were telling you how to steal your opponent's hammer I'd probably tell you to try to get to the outside edge of the 8 or the 7, giving your opponent the chance to hit the angle line also.

YOU'RE ABOUT TO LOSE! WHAT DO YOU DO?

Your opponent is about to win, but you have one shot left and a clear board. What do you do? Almost everyone will say shoot a high 10; a few will say a high 8. Wrong, get the block on the board, the other guy is nervous, he's trying hard, often he will roll off the scoring surface. If you've been the player doing the shooting you know that's true! Now if a 10 will give you the game point, then by all means shoot a 10 but forget high, just get it on there, he can't leave you there and will be really nervous.

DON'T TAKE A HIDE YOU DON'T NEED

We've all seen it or had it happen to us. You need one block to win, you have a big lead, and the other team has the hammer, yet you decide to take a hide and wind up in the open. The opponent shoots you in the kitchen and the game turns around. Resist the temptation, wait for your hammer.

PLACE THE BLOCK PROPERLY

How many times have you tried to play kitchen by going out on the board only to hit the 7/8 line and have the opponent cover the block with a hide of their own. Be careful to go on the board close to the centerline on your side or away from the centerline on the opposite side of the board. That way if they cover your block, you will have a hide, not them.

WHEN TO RUN THE ALLEY

Ever notice how when someone runs the alley and is successful it seems to turn the momentum of the game around! Dale Williams was so good at it in his prime that players blocked the alley on him in respect. It can be the difference between winning a Championship and not winning. A few years ago, I won the Summer National Singles by using it in a critical situation in the deciding game. Don Clovis had played a great tournament and we were playing under the lights before a big crowd. He cleared my hide and rolled a St Pete hide for himself, I needed an extra block to have a chance to win so I saved his St. Pete for later use by going out on the board and forcing him to clear. On my last shot I ran the alley and made it; it was the key shot leading to the Championship. I wish I could say that it always works but let me tell you the other side. Another time I was playing Mel Erb for the Florida State Singles Championship and I had the same situation only when I went on the board to save the St. Pete for later use, wouldn't you know it, he shot me in the kitchen, and I couldn't get out. Mel's not known as a kitchen player, but he was that time and won the Championship, I never got to run the alley! You do need to learn to run the alley because you will need it and it may give you your only chance when you most need it.

WHEN TO SHOOT A 10

When your opponents are 68 and you are at the head with 55, 56, 57, 58 you have to try to position yourself to shoot a 10

if you can't get two blocks. At 55 or 56 you need 10 from both ends. At 57 or 58 you need to shoot the 10 from the head because the opponent will block the 10 from the foot. Go out on the board with your 3rd shot and your opponent will take you off leaving the 10 open (at 57 you need to be on the 8). If the opponent stays on the board take your free kitchen shot and if you don't make it then your partner will have to find a way to win, but otherwise you must shoot a 10. Don't worry that you might miss it because if you don't take it, you will lose. If you're at the foot and have 65 or 66 and the opponent has 68 you have to find a way to get two blocks or shoot a 10. If you get a shot at the 10 you must take it, just do it!

WHEN NOT TO SHOOT A 10!!

I'm sure all of you know this but just in case! If the opponent has 49, 50 or 51 and the hammer and you shot a 10 and it goes deep the opponent has a chance to get the equivalent of two blocks because if he holds the 10, he'll only be two blocks from winning instead of three and it's especially bad if you do it from the foot. It's not a good idea to do if the opponent has 45 or 46 because that gives them the potential to be two blocks from winning albeit two big blocks.

WHEN TO COVER THE KITCHEN

I hear players say never cover a kitchen, baloney! If you are way behind and you need a kitchen so bad to keep the game alive that you're out there on the board at every opportunity and you get the opponent in the kitchen you'd better cover it, or you will lose and I think you will deserve to lose!

WHAT IF YOU LOSE YOUR CONFIDENCE!!

I got trashed the other day. That day belonged to my opponent; he reversed shot after shot, drifted around blocks and canned me like he owned the board, made every double and drained my confidence right away. My partner was great, he made enough shots to carry us to victory and therein lies the lesson. When you're getting trashed maybe the best thing to do is stay out of the way and let your partner take care of things. Sometimes you can win that way. If you both play poorly or run into a hot team you're gone. If one of you is playing well or having his way you can still win and when you're both hot no one can stop you. Never give up but do recognize when it's not your day or it really is your opponent's day. Sometimes you walk away feeling like you played poorly and let your partner down, but sometimes that's not really the case; give your opponent his due!

THE BLOCK YOU DON'T NEED

If you're in the 70's and your opponents have very little score but do have the hammer you have to be very careful because at some point they are going to try and shoot your hide block into the kitchen, they have no choice. If the board's clear and you have your last shot before they shoot their hammer what do you do with it. Some consider it bad sportsmanship to just push the block off the board and are very vocal about it. For that reason, some players act as if they are putting up a St. Pete but come up short so the block will be taken off the board, some just shoot it off the board anyway. I have personally lost tournaments by being a good sport and allowing the opponent to be a bad sport by shooting my block, which I've pushed off to the side, into the kitchen. Now I keep the other guy from being a bad sport by pushing the block off the board and I suggest you do the same!

THINK

In a match we had 66 and they had 67 and the hammer from the head. Somehow my partner had a 7 about 8 inches below the 7/8 line and one shot left. He knew he had to put another 7 on so we would have 80 and the opponent would have to take him off. He put a 7 on the other side. I remembered that in Lake Worth during my first year Jay Goldman had the same situation against me and snuggled his own block so I had to take him off and couldn't score. In the "Masters" that same year I had Mike Vassalotti beat he needed two blocks and I needed one with the hammer. He snuggled his own eight and I didn't have room to score, he kept one and scored the next hammer and won. I wish my partner had had those experiences because I know he would have remembered. As it was though, the opponent took him off and scored. His partner scored his hammer and they won! "Learn from your experiences".

NO TAMPA

If you need one block you have no business being in the middle of the board on the opponent's hammer. Use a St. Pete, a little wide and high enough that you can see the whole side behind the hide. If the opponent shoots it for the kitchen and goes long, shoot the next one through, you know what he is going to try to do, don't let him.

Earl Ball