

USER'S GUIDE TO SHUFFLEBOARD ABUSE

By Robert Hoffman

You are frustrated at your lack of shuffleboard success. You are even more frustrated that you see other players getting away with misconduct which helps them win.

You attended last year's true round robin where at least one player was loudly chewed out for ineptitude in throwing a match as agreed. Another reportedly offered to throw games to others for \$100.

You recall that the outcome of matches often is decided in advance. Indeed, one pro, after becoming lubricated, admitted to me without shame that his opponent threw a match to him in a singles tournament. The two players in the match routinely split their prizes and determine in advance who will win when their games. I was nonplussed because I was the purchaser of the opponent's Calcutta.

Now, you are a more or less honest person. You might omit some income from your return and dally a bit when on the road, but you seldom walk a bar tab or insult anyone to his face. Indeed, you are honored by a plurality of players as a good ole boy.

So you decide to fight fire with fire.

You become analogous to the new Christian in theologian C.S. Lewis' 1942 classic *The Screwtape Letters*. There as you recall, the senior demon Screwtape mentored his nephew Wormwood in the art of turning new believers from the faith.

Screwtape taught that "The safest path to hell is the gradual one." He sees a demon's primary goal is to befuddle, confuse, and eventually corrupt a person rather than to tempt. For a better description of this great book, see:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Screwtape_Letters



So you become so desirous of winning and showing up these abusers that you are willing to assume the morals of a Texan. Texans, of course, are the miscreants in almost all shuffleboard abuse.

You decide to outdo them for their own good. And you intend to use the money thus obtained for eleemosynary purposes. You'll pick up your markers and even buy a round.

As you ponder this, you listen to Vern Gosdin's hit *If You're Gonna Do Me Wrong, Do It Right*: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ed3VsTBwfCk> and decide to follow the exact behavior pattern Vern suggested to his putative wife.

So you decide to go for it.

But you are a quandary. You, like a majority of even the pros, have never read the TSA rules.

Still, you know that to learn how to do something that you know you ought not to do, you need legal counsel.

So you take the sophomore course in misconduct by reading this article.

You learn that if you want to abuse the rules you first must learn them.

Because this is not an advanced discussion, you decide, for openers to limit yourself to four basic types of misconduct: (1) Slow Play, (2) Constant Talking (3) Illegal Dusting and (4) Walking Down the Board as Your Opponent Shoots.

First you learn that the first page of the rules, the "Code of Ethics" contains high sounding language but no enforcement mechanism or penalties.

So you rejoice that the maxim "a rule which is not enforced is not a rule" applies and conclude that the Code of Ethics is surplusage because it applies only to players who already are ethical.

You conclude that the true rule is that you can get away with just about anything you are big enough to do.

Here is how you do it:

Slow Play and Constant Talking:

Slow play is the most effective technique because it not only irritates your current opponent, it also irritates your future opponents.

Generally it takes 5 or 6 shots to upset an opponent who does not know you.

But, when you play someone who has observed you mistreating your last opponent, he often comes unglued the first time you purposefully dawdle before you shoot.

You memorize rule 9.1:

“More than 30 seconds between shots, or more than five minutes between games once the match has started shall constitute slow play. **Penalty: One warning, one-point penalty per infraction thereafter.**”

You remember that 30 seconds is a long time. Most players shoot well before 10 seconds has elapsed.

So you just stand around talking for 20 seconds or so while your opponent fumes. Then you take the normal time to line up and shoot with about 5 seconds left.

If you don't know the opponent, it is usually effective to remark that Obama is our nation's greatest president or that Al-Qaeda is getting a bad rap. Act surprised when your opponent snarls and try to elaborate before you shoot.

If your opponent is female, you can wrinkle your nose when you meet her, pull out a piece of paper and take your time as you write down the name of a local dentist. Hand it to her and tell her that he does a great job of cleaning teeth.

You should display an attitude of extreme friendliness and hilarity. Indeed, if you forget your checklist of 20 second talking points, you always can hug other players and loudly tell them how much you love them.

Then you finally shoot. Afterwards you stand at the board for a while because your weight may still be spinning. You can explain that it is hard to tell exactly when spinning stops and that you don't want your opponent to inadvertently violate rule 10.2 which prohibits shooting at spinning weights.

Then you step in the direction of your opponent so he has to walk around you to get to the board.

After 5 or 6 shots, your opponent will complain. Smile and tell him to try to control himself. Tell him this is just a game and that you play only for fun and a chance to socialize. Tell him he is one of your favorite players and that his reputation for an excessive temper is exaggerated.

Then start exceeding the 30 second limit.

Your opponent probably will not summon the director the first few times.

If the director finally comes over, you need to take the offensive.

You almost certainly by then can accuse your opponent of violating the more serious rule 1.2:

“A player shall not exhibit physical or verbal harassment; **Penalty: No warning, two-point penalty infraction may be given, if continued, forfeiture of game.”**

Remember, you have been messing with your opponent for the better part of an hour and he almost certainly is at least yelling at you by now. Indeed, when he has been carping at you when you strictly comply with rule 9.1 and shoot after only 25 seconds or so, he probably is guilty of harassment.

Look concerned and pitiful. Thank the director for coming over. Argue that you feel violated and that your opponent is a known trouble maker.

Point out that it took well over 30 seconds for the director to arrive so your opponent broke rule 9.1 when he did not shoot during the interim.

Demand that he and not you be penalized.

But do all this in a loving voice. Let your opponent do the screaming.

The director has too many duties anyway and he almost certainly will not time your shots but will say something like “you children be nice to each other in the sand pile.”

Remember, the director probably has not read 9.1 anyway.

If the director decides to do anything, he will, at most, give the rule 9.1 warning. If he does so he probably will warn both of you. That will further upset your opponent.

Note that rule 9.1 does not say whether the warning must be given by the director. While I think that the opponent should be able to give the warning and then assess the penalty after the second offense, I am in the minority. Most players think the director must do the honors.

Rejoice that the ambiguities in rule 9.1 render it difficult to enforce even if the director were inclined to enforce it.

Besides, you will deny that you have broken any rules and the director almost certainly will not invoke a penalty when he did not personally observe the conduct.

While it is theoretically possible that you will be assessed a penalty, I have never seen that done and the mental advantage you have thus obtained exceeds that one point.

Resist the temptation to yell back at the opponent. Tell him that you admire him and want to be friends. Try to high five him each time he hits a weight. Ask if buying him a beer will help him stop acting like your penultimate wife.

Remember too that when he is yelling and you are not, some of the observers will take your side.

Now, to paraphrase Mark Twain: "if that don't work, then I don't know Texas."

Illegal dusting:

Here is the rule:

2.7 A player may lightly powder dry spots up to the near foul line on the end the player is shooting, and only before it is that players shot. Powdering by a player shall conform to methods designated by tournaments officials. All other powdering during a match shall be done at the discretion of tournament officials. If any player in the game thinks their play will be affected by the additional powder, they may ask a tournament official for a ruling. The official shall determine what action should be taken. "

“2.8 A player may not touch, or cause powder to be removed from the playing surface, or add any substance to the playing surface. **Penalty: one warning, one point for each additional infraction**“

You should make a practice of throwing dust on the board after each shot. While that violates rule 2.7, there is no penalty for that violation. Screwtape teaches that rules for which there are no penalties are not rules; they are invitations.

This also gives you an additional excuse to stand around and delay your opponent.

If your partner will have the hammer coming back, then reach out at the end of your shot and remove a little dust with your belly. This is especially easy for those of us who are not nutritionally challenged.

If you have the hammer, then, particularly toward the end of the game, stand there and toss dust high into the air several times as you pretend to ponder before you shoot. You want the board to be slick as ice when your opponent lags back from the other end of the board. If you are confused about how to do this, go to North Texas and observe the better players.

If your opponent objects, consider consenting to a redusting of the board. But first walk down the board with him and try calmly to discuss all the problem areas on the board. The delay will further irritate him and he now must lag on a board which is considerably faster than the board to which he has become accustomed.

Remind your opponent of the language “Powdering by a player shall conform to methods designated by tournaments officials.” Because there is almost no chance that the officials will have designated anything, this can give rise to a fruitful discussion of what the officials would have done if they had thought about it.

Remember that rule 2.8 invites you to remove dust at least once with your hand as you shoot. Because your opponent probably won't know to warn you or summon an official to do so, you probably can continue to do so throughout the game.

Walking Down the Board:

Again, you need to know the rule:

10.6 A player shall stand behind their opponent and out of view, when possible, while their opponent is shooting. **Penalty: one warning and one point per infraction thereafter.**

At a recent major Texas tournament, one Texas pro repeatedly walked and danced down the board to high five and regale his partner during each the frame.

His opponent took umbrage and complained. The board man told him that this was not his responsibility. So a waitress unsuccessfully tried three times to get him to settle down.

The opponent steamed and offending pro rebounded from a huge deficit to win the match.

Yelling and pushing erupted at the end of the match but no blows were struck.

So you also can safely rely on the same ambiguities of this rule and the unwillingness of directors to enforce the rules we have.

But, if you want to abuse the rules, you should do so soon.

Players are becoming increasingly fed up.

The rules committee is considering changes to the rules.

So it may be that your opportunity to abuse the rules will be short lived.

As Vern Gosdin also sings "That Just About Does it, Don't It?"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lKalzzOPyEA&NR=1&feature=fvwp>

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P.S.

The solution:

The solution to most of the above conduct is simple.

A new rule should be added along the following lines:

“In most instances, shuffleboard rules must be enforced by the players. Thus, where a warning is required (rules 2.8, 9.1, 10.2, 10.5, 10.6 and 10.8) a player may provide the warning and, if the conduct is repeated, invoke the penalty. The penalized player may appeal to an official. The ruling of the official shall be final.

“Rules providing for more severe penalties (rules 1.2, 1.4, 1.5, 2.2 and 7.3) require a ruling from an official. An official need not personally observe conduct but may make a final determination based on such information as is available to him.”

"The director should arrange, in advance, for several players or officials who are knowledgeable about the rules to stand ready to be appointed to serve as referees in matches in which disputes arise. When misconduct is alleged, the director or official in charge should send a referee to observe the remainder of the match. The referee shall have the authority to decide all rules questions in the match for which he is appointed."

In short, a simple clarification of the rules and a change in the present policy of non-enforcement would resolve many of our misconduct problems.

But how should our sport treat the problem of throwing games and collusion?

Follow Screwtape and consider the game a quest to be the most effective cheater?

Or?

Right now Screwtape has the advantage.