



Wednesday Wisdom

The Sydney Bridge Centre mini lesson

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative) will be analysing an interesting hand from each Wednesday morning session. This hand commentary will be sent to participants before the next Wednesday session.

You are also welcome to [send questions](#) about hands that you have played. We will collate them and let our panellists (Julian Foster, Marcia Scudder and Paul Roach) answer them.

#2696 BBO – Wednesday morning session 26th August 2020

9	♠ AT73	Dir: N
	♥ 54	Vul: E-W
	♦ QJ743	
	♣ 74	
♠ 984	♠ Q62	
♥ AQ9	♥ K8762	
♦ A9	♦ T86	
♣ AQ862	♣ KJ	
7 ♠ KJ5	♣♦♥♠ NT	
16 9 ♥ JT3	N - 1 - - -	
8 ♦ K52	S - 1 - - -	
♣ T953	E 4 - 4 - 4	
	W 4 - 4 - 3	

Board 9 last week showed the importance of looking ahead when declaring.

The auction will normally start with three passes to West who will open a strong NT. East will transfer to hearts and then either bid 2NT or 3NT depending on how aggressive they are feeling! Personally I would bid 2NT because my 9 points are opposite 15-17 and they are not great (♣KJ may not be worth much – we don't know). Either way, West should accept any invite because, although they have 16 points (i.e. in the middle of 15-17) they hold 3 aces and a good side 5 card suit. With 3 card heart support plus the chance of trumping a diamond in that hand, it's even clearer to accept.

So the final contract should be 4♥ played by West (which was the case at every table except one).

North will most likely lead ♦Q which declarer will win with the A. Now what?

As usual we should count our tricks and our losers. Our tricks are looking good. We have 1♦, 5♥s (assuming they split 3-2) and probably 5♣s as well. That's 11. What about our losers? The spade suit is dangerous – we could easily lose 3 tricks there.

So the first thing we should observe is that trying to trump a diamond in the west hand is not a good plan. We would have to lose a diamond before we could do that and the defence may then be able to take 3 spades and beat us. We are better off trying to just take what looks like our 11 tricks.

Normally if we want to cash tricks we need to draw trumps first to make sure the defence cannot trump any of our winners. Should we do that here? If we do it will take 3 rounds. We now have to try and take our club tricks. But after the ♣K and the ♣J we have a problem. If we leave East on lead with the ♣J we can no longer reach the West hand to take the rest of our clubs (the ♦A went at trick 1 and we took all 3 trumps out as we drew them). So we must OVERTAKE the ♣J with the Q to carry on cashing the suit. But that now leaves West with A86 and South with 109. We can take the ♣A but that's all. All of a sudden, our 5 clubs tricks have become 3 and our total only 9! Were we unlucky the clubs didn't split? Actually no – a 4-2 split is the most likely (see advanced section for details).

How could (and should) we have avoided this? We needed to look ahead to see what was going to happen. We had to get that ♣KJ out of the way BEFORE we ran out of entries to the west hand. We can certainly START drawing trumps but we should only play the A and the K. Now we temporarily leave the last trump out and cash the ♣KJ. THEN we cross to the ♥Q drawing the last trump in the process. Finally we continue cashing the clubs and throw 3 losers from the East hand (there are 5 losers left there – 3 spades and 2 diamonds so we will throw 3 of them away and lose the other 2, making 11 tricks).

Key points to note

- When declaring we need to count our tricks and our losers. Both can be critical when deciding how to play the hand.
- Whilst drawing trumps is often right, we should also look ahead for what could go wrong if we do.
- Always be very wary of suits that are blocked (where we either cannot move between the hands at all or will have to overtake big cards to do so). Try to unblock them as soon as possible.
- Always look at entries in both hands. Look ahead for how you will reach your tricks.

More advanced

While it is not necessary to have detailed knowledge of the mathematical odds of how suits will split, most serious players at least have some feel for it. A good general rule is when there are an ODD number of cards out, they will split evenly most of the time. The most common example is when we have 8 cards in a suit and the opponents have 5. In the absence of any other distributional information provided by the bidding the opposing 5 will split 3-2 68% of the time (4-1 is 28% and 5-0 is 4%).

Conversely when there are an EVEN number of cards out, they will tend NOT to split evenly. A common example (relevant to this hand) is when we have 7 cards in a suit and the opponents have 6. This time an even 3-3 split is not the most common. It will happen 36% of the time but a 4-2 split is more common at 48% (5-1 is 15% and 6-0 is 1%). This hand follows the odds with the ♣s splitting 4-2.

The lead was important here. Had the ♦A still been in the west hand, we could have just drawn trumps, cashed ♣KJ and then crossed back to the ♦A. Once it had been knocked out we had to be more careful and leave a trump entry there instead.

If we had had the ♣10 in the west hand things are also very different. Now we could afford to overtake the ♣J and still make 5 club tricks when the suit broke 4-2 or 3-3 (84%). So that should also influence how we play the ♥ suit. This time we no longer need to leave a big heart with West so we should cash the ♥AQ first. That's because if south has singleton 10 or J, we can next run the ♥9 through N. If he covers we win ♥K and cash the ♥8 to draw the last trump and continue as before. If he doesn't cover we cross to the ♣K and draw North's last trump with the ♥K. Playing ♥AQ first lets us cater for some of the 4-1 trump splits as well as all the 3-2 ones which we couldn't do before.

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)

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The SBC online session timetable

We have daily session from Monday to Saturday. Please find our [session timetable](#) on our website.

To book an Introduction to BBO session

Join our [BBO Training session on Zoom](#), we will be able to show you how a tournament table looks like on BBO, how to make alerts, how to find out the meaning of opponent's bids, etc. It's a live session running on Zoom teleconference application, completely free of charge. You can book a session with us by picking a time suitable for you via this [booking form](#).