



Weekly Wisdom

The Sydney Bridge Centre mini lesson

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative) will be analysing an interesting hand from each Saturday ARVO BBO session. To subscribe, please email your name and email address to office@sydneybridgecentre.com.

You are also welcome to [send questions](#) about hands that you have played. Please use "Weekly Wisdom" as email subject. We will collate them and let our panellists leading by Julian Foster to answer them.

"Frozen" suits and when you DON'T cover an honour with an honour!

#10524 BBO – Saturday ARVO 6th November 2021

13		♠ 8432	Dlr: N
		♥ 8	Vul: Both
		♦ J964	
		♣ JT82	
♠ 6	♠ KT		
♥ J954	♥ AKQ76		
♦ AT832	♦ Q5		
♣ K63	♣ Q974		
2 ♠ AQJ975	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ NT		
8 16 ♥ T32	N - - - 3 -		
14 ♦ K7	S - - - 3 -		
♣ A5	E 2 2 4 - 2		
	W 2 2 4 - -		

Board 13 last week was another example of how often it is right to bid 4♠ over 4♥!

After a pass from North most Easts opened 1♥ although one table chose 1NT. South has a normal 1♠ overcall and it's then just a question of how far, and how quickly West and North raise their partners!

Bids chosen by West included 2♥, 3♥, 4♥ and 2♠ (cue raise). See advanced section for another option again! It is a bit of an inbetween hand – I think I would probably have bid 2♥ (with the intention of competing further to 3♥). It's definitely too good for a pre-emptive raise but it's perhaps a little too light for a cue raise. North definitely should now be bidding a pre-emptive 3♠. East has an easy 4♥ bid at this point regardless of what North does as their hand is significantly better than

minimum (even though the ♠K has now become worth less after the overcall). Assuming North did raise spades, South should now definitely bid onto 4♠ as they know their side has a 10 card fit and they can almost "see" the heart shortage in partner's hand. Neither West nor East has an obvious action over that (West is a bit weak and East is too balanced to have confidence at the 5 level – plus both have some cards that look like they will take tricks in defence) although two tables did push onto 5♥.

Both 4♥ and 4♠ are hard to defend against. Let's start with 4♥. South has a revolting lead and might well kick off with the ♠A which is not a success. Although players frequently lead A from Ax it's not often that effective – for it to work you basically need partner to have the K and to be able to score a ruff which, in practice, isn't very likely – far more often leading the Ace into thin air just gives declarer tricks they are not entitled to. In fact South's only safe lead is a trump. But after drawing trumps, declarer can lead a club to the K and duck one on the way back (there is no point playing the Q as South is known to have the Ace when the King wins – so the only hope is that South only has a singleton A left at that point – quite plausible given they are known to have spade length). Now when in with the ♣A, South has to give some help to declarer – either opening up the diamond suit, or leading round to the ♠K. Declarer is likely to end up scoring 5 hearts, 2 diamonds, 2 clubs and a ruff, or 1 spade, 5 hearts, 1 diamond, 2 clubs and a ruff.

4♠ is equally hard to defend against. Deep Finesse says it can be held to 9 tricks (see advanced section for how) but every pair who played in spades actually scored 11 tricks! The normal lead is a heart to the Q although, surprisingly, only 1 table actually did this. The other choices (one ♦A, one low club and one trump) all immediately gave something away – it's definitely better to lead partner's suit unless you have a good reason not to. But even after a heart lead East has a tough decision about what to play at trick 2. Some switched to the ♦Q but that allowed declarer to cover with the K which not only set up the ♦J but allowed an entry to dummy to take the trump finesse. The safest defences are actually to play a 2nd heart to allow a ruff into dummy or to switch to a club through declarer (but a club switch away from the Q could be very dangerous as well).

If the defence don't touch clubs and declarer leads the ♣J from dummy should East cover? No! If they do declarer can win the A and lead back towards the 10 setting that up as a trick on which they can later discard one of their diamonds. But we

are taught to “cover an honour with an honour” I hear you say! Yes – but it’s not as simple as that. When there are touching honours in dummy you should wait and cover the second not the first. See advanced section for why.

The key to the hand is really the diamond suit though. It is what is known as “frozen” – which means that whichever side first leads it will give a trick away. Try it. If East or West open the suit up North/South just have to cover any honour led and they will score a trick in the suit. Likewise if North or South lead the suit, East/West also need to cover any honours and now North South won’t score any tricks in the suit. Broken honour holdings like those in the diamond suit are extremely dangerous and leading from them frequently gives a trick away. Good defenders tend to shy away from touching suits like these if they possibly can (at least until their partner has been able to signal they have something in the suit as well).

Key points to note

- It is almost always right to bid 4♠ over 4♥ in competitive auctions – especially when you have a good fit.
- It is useful to have several ways of raising partner – so that you can pre-empt the opponents or make constructive tries for game yourself.
- Be wary of leading from broken honour holdings – both at trick 1 and later in the hand. It tends to give away tricks more often than not.
- Sometimes suits are “frozen” (meaning whichever side first leads it costs a trick).
- As defenders, generally cover the 2nd of two touching honours in dummy not the first.

More advanced

What other bid could West consider after 1♥ 1♠? A method played by some pairs is “fit jumps” – where a jump to a new suit shows length there and support for partner. A fit jump (3♦ here) typically shows a 5 card suit with 4 card support for partner’s major and around invitational values. It describes this hand fairly well – if partner has some fitting cards in diamonds we almost certainly want to be in game. On this hand, East will probably bid game regardless as they are better than minimum. But a fit jump can often be a way of evaluating whether the hands are fitting well. This can also help with later decisions about whether to bid on or defend.

So how do the defence defeat 4♠? By going passive! Heart lead followed by a club switch to the K and a 2nd club will work. But another heart to give dummy a ruff (which the defence can’t prevent declarer taking anyway) is fine too. The key is to not touch the diamond suit. If they manage that they will score 1 heart, 2 diamonds and 1 club. Provided, of course they don’t give declarer a 2nd club to discard one of his diamonds on.

I said East should not cover the ♣J if it’s led from dummy. Why not? We are usually taught to “cover an honour with an honour”. That’s true but generally if there are two honours in the hand in front of us we should wait to cover the 2nd of them, not the 1st. (Unless we have something like Kx where we are better off making sure our K covers something on the 1st round - otherwise we risk it hitting thin air on the 2nd round).

So why should we cover the 2nd and not the 1st? Several reasons:

1. Covering the first may give declarer tricks they aren’t entitled to. That’s what happens here, declarer wins in hand and can lead towards the 10 to set that up as a trick. Contrast what happens if we don’t cover the ♣J. Declarer can run it to partner’s K but they now have no way of scoring a 2nd trick in the suit.

Another common example is a suit in dummy like QJ9x, where we hold Kxx and declarer Axx (leaving partner with 10xx). If declarer leads the Q and we cover he can win the A, and then play low to the 9 scoring 4 tricks in the suit. But if we let the Q hold look at the difference. If he tries the J this time we cover and then partner’s 10 scores. If he plays low so do we and he has to play the A to stop partner’s 10 scoring. Either way we get a trick.

2. We may mess up declarer’s entries. That isn’t relevant here but it frequently can be. Suppose declarer has something like AQx opposite J109x. If we cover the J with the K, declarer can score 4 tricks in the suit. If we withhold our K, he is limited to 3 (unless our holding is Kx or Kxx and, even then, he will need another entry back to the 4th club which he may not always have).

3. We might crash a singleton honour in partners hand. This is more relevant with longer suits. Suppose declarer has Axxx in hand and J10xxx in dummy. We hold Kxx and partner has singleton Q. If declarer led the J and we covered it would be very embarrassing!

Remember the only purpose of covering is to promote tricks in either ours, or partner's hand. If we can see the intermediate cards in dummy instead we know we aren't promoting them as tricks so covering can't gain (and might lose)!

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)

We have REOPENED for Face-to-Face bridge on Monday 18th October 2021

For Face-to-Face sessions:

Welcome back! Our clubroom on Goulburn Street has opened from Monday 18th October 2021. We will start with 6 regular sessions on the first week: Monday – Thursday morning, 10am – 1.15pm and Tuesday night 7.15pm – 10.00pm. There will be a separate field for Supervised players on Wednesday morning and a “Play it out loud” Supervised session on Wednesday night (6.30pm start).

For BBO sessions:

We will continue to run the 5 regular club session online on BBO. Please check our [session timetable](#) here.

All are welcome. No need to book. Please find us on BBO / Featured Areas / Virtual Clubs / ABF-Australia. Tournament title “Sydney Bridge Centre & Friends”. Tournament will open only 2 hours before the game starts.

24 boards, BB\$4 per person per game.