



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.

No trump play and defence. What do "4th and 2nd leads" really mean?

#70118 BBO – Saturday 18th December 2021

7		♠ J9	<i>Dir: S</i>																															
		♥ K8	<i>Vul: Both</i>																															
		♦ AJ643																																
		♣ Q952																																
♠ T8652		♠ Q73																																
♥ 432		♥ A976																																
♦ K2		♦ T87																																
♣ KT7		♣ 863																																
11		♠ AK4	<table><tr><td></td><td>♣</td><td>♦</td><td>♥</td><td>♠</td><td>NT</td></tr><tr><td>N</td><td>5</td><td>5</td><td>5</td><td>3</td><td>5</td></tr><tr><td>S</td><td>5</td><td>5</td><td>5</td><td>3</td><td>5</td></tr><tr><td>E</td><td>-</td><td>-</td><td>-</td><td>-</td><td>-</td></tr><tr><td>W</td><td>-</td><td>-</td><td>-</td><td>-</td><td>-</td></tr></table>			♣	♦	♥	♠	NT	N	5	5	5	3	5	S	5	5	5	3	5	E	-	-	-	-	-	W	-	-	-	-	-
	♣	♦			♥	♠	NT																											
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6	6	♥ QJT5																																
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17		♣ AJ4																																

This is the last column before Christmas. I hope everyone has a good break and it isn't too spoilt by Covid! It sounds like there will be a BBO duplicate on Christmas day so I will do a column for that although it's possible it may be a little delayed.

Unusually board 7 last week was a hand entirely about the play and defence. The normal auction is simply 1NT – 3NT which is what happened at every table so all the matchpoints were decided by how many tricks were made and this ranged from 7 to 11. Let's consider the play and defence.

Every West led a spade (perfectly normal) and almost all of them led the ♠5, their 4th highest. Declarer now had a guess whether to play the ♠J (right if West has led from the ♠Q) or the ♠9 (right on this hand as it forces East's ♠Q). However

the opponents' leading methods and agreements may be important here – in particular whether they regard the 10 as an honour. See advanced section for more discussion on this.

Most declarers guessed wrong and played the ♠J at trick 1 – perfectly reasonable (I would have done the same – people tend to lead from queens more often than tens). Best play then is to duck the Q and win the next round, the hope being to exhaust East of spades. Declarer then has to decide what suit(s) to play on. A good general philosophy is to knock out the certain cards that you HAVE to lose first. If a finesse is right, it's still going to be right later in the hand. So on this hand it looks reasonable to start with knocking out the ♥A – particularly as a diamond finesse can be taken later into the East hand which is what we call the "safe hand" – i.e. the hand that we hope will have run out of spades by then so that, even if the finesse loses, the defence can't cash spade winners.

Assuming East returns their last spade after taking the ♥A that knocks out declarer's final spade stop. With 2 spades and 3 hearts declarer still requires 4 tricks from the minors.

When tackling the diamond suit, most declarers led the ♦Q from hand. But West covered and this now caused East's ♦10 to become a trick. At that point declarer only had 2 diamond tricks but there was no point continuing to set up the last 2 as they had no other entry to dummy to cash them. Therefore instead they resorted to the club finesse. When that lost West had two more spades to cash and the contract was 1 off.

Had declarer started with a low diamond towards the ♦J and then cashed the ♦A, West's ♦K would have fallen. Declarer would have had 3 diamond tricks and would no longer have needed the club finesse. It costs nothing to try the ♦A after the ♦J wins.

Although we are usually taught to play the honours from the shorter holding to keep suits from getting blocked, there is a clue here suggesting that a low diamond will be better – see advanced section for why.

Note that those declarers who did guess the spade right at trick one (i.e. it went ♠5, 9, Q, A) had another important benefit – another entry to North in the form of the ♠J. They could therefore afford to play 3 rounds of diamonds and set that suit up. If they got diamonds right they would score 3 spades, 5 diamonds and would then have time to knock out the ♥A to

make 3 tricks there as well. With the ♣A as well they could actually have made 12 tricks! No-one managed that, however but even getting diamonds wrong should lead to 3 spades, 4 diamonds, 3 hearts and 1 club for 11 tricks.

Key points to note

- 4th highest leads from honours against no-trumps are standard.
- The Rule of 11 can help a defender work out how many higher cards declarer has in the suit (see advanced section).
- As declarer in no-trumps it is usually best to knock out the certain cards you will have to lose (e.g. aces) first. Finesses can be taken later if necessary (sometimes you can choose which hand you finesse into as well).
- It is frequently better to start playing suits by leading low towards honours rather than running an honour from one hand (because short honours on your left will drop).
- If one hand is known to have length in one suit, it makes them less likely to have the longer holding in a different suit.
- When you can afford to, test one suit fully before resorting to another (e.g. here cash the ♦A before resorting to clubs).

More advanced

Frequently pairs describe their leading methods as “4th and 2nd”. What does that actually mean though? The answer is 4th highest from a long suit headed by honours, 2nd highest from poor suits not headed by honours (e.g. you’d lead the 7 from a holding of 9765 but the 5 from a holding of Q765). The idea is to try and help partner distinguish whether you are making an attacking lead from a long suit where you are hoping to set up winners or a passive lead from a poor suit where you are either trying to find partner’s suit or just trying to not give a cheap trick to declarer. The 2nd card in a bad suit is usually higher so that partner can see it isn’t a 4th highest lead.

That’s all very well but what’s an “honour” for these purposes? A, K, Q, J definitely but opinion varies about the 10. Some pairs do treat it as an honour, others don’t. That can influence what card your partnership would lead from holdings like the West hand. With one of my regular partners we have agreed we do NOT treat the 10 as an honour. I would therefore have led the ♠8 being 2nd highest from a poor suit. On this occasion that would help declarer because they could work out the 8 cannot be a 4th highest lead so it’s going to be passive. Therefore West cannot have the ♠Q and the only hope at trick 1 is to try the 9. With another of my regular partners, however, we have agreed we DO treat the 10 as an honour. Then I would lead the ♠5 and this time it’s a genuine guess for declarer as I could be leading from the ♠Q or the ♠10. This is why it’s important to ascertain what your opponents’ agreements are (it’s information you are entitled to know) and sometimes you may need to ask for more detail than just the basics. Some of the larger convention cards do have a section with sample holdings where the card led is meant to be circled. However that’s not something you are likely to see in a BBO club game.

It’s not particularly useful on this hand but the “Rule of 11” is also a valuable tool for defenders. How does it work? It applies to the partner of the person leading. When your partner leads 4th highest, the rule tells you to subtract the card led from 11 (so in this case $11 - 5 = 6$). That tells you how many cards HIGHER than the 5 are in the other 3 hands. Here East can see four of them (J9 in dummy and Q7 in his own hand). That tells him there are 2 cards in declarer’s hand higher than the 5. That isn’t very useful information on this hand but on some other hands it can be. For example suppose a suit was laid out: West (on lead): Q10874, North (dummy): K92, East: AJ3 and South (declarer): 65. When West leads the 7, East can subtract 7 from 11 to arrive at 4. He can see 2 cards higher than the 7 in dummy (K9) and 2 in his own hand (AJ). Therefore he can work out declarer has no card higher than the 7. Consequently he can play the J to win the trick.

Note of course the rule of 11 only works when partner actually ♥AS led 4th highest though! Sometimes they might be leading something else – it’s not always possible to tell but on many hands it will be.

I mentioned the play of the diamond suit too. Why is low to the J better than running the Q? Primarily because West has led what looks like a 4th highest spade and therefore has length in the suit. That makes his hand more likely to

have the shorter diamond holding (there are only 13 “spaces” in each defender’s hand so the more they have of one suit, the fewer they are likely to have in another).

Even without a clue to the distribution it is generally better to lead low towards honours rather than run honours. Primarily because honours could be short on your left. For example here:

- West might have singleton ♦K in which case it will appear immediately and we will not have wasted our ♦Q
- West might have doubleton ♦K in which case it will drop under the ♦A on the 2nd round and set up our ♦Q for the 3rd round

It’s also important to fully test a suit. That’s why after the ♦J holds declarer should cash the ♦A next to test whether the ♦K drops. The same actually applies after leading the ♦Q. After having it covered and winning ♦A it costs nothing to cash the ♦J and test whether the ♦10 drops (in which case declarer’s ♦9 would again be a 3rd trick in the suit and he would no longer need to risk the club finesse). Running the ♦Q is basically playing for West to have ♦Kxx and East to have ♦10x. In isolation this is just as likely as ♦Kx opposite ♦10xx but, as we have seen, the opening lead indicating spade length with West makes him more likely to have the shorter diamonds.).

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)

Holiday Operating Time and Events



Our clubroom on Goulburn Street is still open for F2F sessions the next two weeks before the Holiday Break from Christmas Eve 24th December 2021 - 2nd January 2022.

There will be F2F sessions every morning from Monday - Thursday, an extra Supervised session on Wednesday morning, night game on Tuesday (Open 7.15pm) and Wednesday (Supervised 6.30pm). BBO will continue to run through the holiday seasons on Monday morning (10.15am), Thursday and Saturday ARVO (1.45pm), including Xmas Day and New Year’s Day.

Our **F2F sessions on Goulburn Street** will restart on Monday 3rd January 2022, [session timetable](#) remains the same. We will kickstart **F2F sessions at Canada Bay** on Monday 10th January 2022, with sessions on Monday morning and Thursday morning (10am start).

A lot of RED points sessions are scheduled during the Holiday Seasons! Please check out the **RED POINTS FRENZY** events to grab some RED masterpoints before the end of the year:

For Face-to-Face sessions:

- **RED** F2F Open on Monday 20th December 2021, 10am start
- **RED** F2F Open on Tuesday 21st December 2021, 10am start
- **RED** F2F Open on Wednesday 22nd December 2021, 10am start (There will be a separated field for Supervised players, Green masterpoints)
- **RED** F2F Open on Thursday 23rd December 2021, 10am start

Normal table money fee.

For BBO sessions:

- **RED** BBO Christmas Day on Saturday 25th December 2021, 1.45pm start
- **RED** BBO on Monday 27th December 2021, 10.15am start
- **RED** BBO on Thursday 30th December 2021, 1.45pm start
- **RED** BBO New Year’s Day on Saturday 1st January, 1.45pm start

BB\$4 for 24 boards.