



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.

How many hearts to bid? Do we bid our game or try for a penalty?

#3800 BBO – Saturday 22nd January 2022

21	♠ Q75	Dlr: N
	♥ 84	Vul: N-S
	♦ T872	
	♣ KT43	
♠ KJT942	♠ A83	
♥ KJ65	♥	
♦ J	♦ AKQ653	
♣ 92	♣ QJ65	
5 ♠ 6	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ NT	
9 16 ♥ AQT9732	N - - 1 - -	
10 ♦ 94	S - - 1 - -	
♠ A87	E 3 5 - 5 4	
	W 3 5 - 5 4	

Most tables reached 4♠ by West on board 21 last week although the number of tricks varied from 9 through to 12. While there are two clear club losers, it's not so easy for the defence to cash those. If they don't, declarer can in fact make 12 tricks with careful play.

Before we consider the play, let's look at the bidding as that also has interest on this hand. North passes and East will start with 1♦ leaving South with the first major decision. How many hearts to bid? Do you start with a simple 1♥ overcall or do you pre-empt?

The actions taken were fairly evenly spread:

1♥ - 3 tables; 2♥ - 2 tables; 3♥ - 5 tables; 4♥ - 2 tables

I think 4♥ is definitely too much – it's asking to be doubled for a large penalty (especially at this vulnerability). 2♥ is neither here nor there so, to me, 1♥ or 3♥ seem to be the choices.

Arguments for 3♥ are:

- It takes up a lot of bidding space and may make it harder for East West to find a spade fit.
- Partner is a passed hand so we know it's probably not our hand (if partner hadn't already passed that makes 1♥ more attractive because 3♥ might cause us to miss game).

But there are also arguments the other way:

- The unfavourable vulnerability – the opponents could easily be taking us for a penalty greater than the value of their contract. If we go 2 off that's -500 which is more than the value of any game they can make.
- We hold hearts not spades so the opponents can outbid us at the same level, hence pre-empting is not as effective as it would be if we held spades.

If partner was not a passed hand I would definitely bid 1♥. I think it's closer when they are a passed hand but at this vulnerability I still prefer 1♥. At any other vulnerability I would bid 3♥.

After 3♥ some Wests stretched to 3♠. This certainly got their side to game on this hand but it's not strong enough as it risks partner going too high – indeed one East jumped straight to 6♠ over it (a perfectly reasonable action considering you could have a minimum balanced hand and you actually have a void and an almost solid side suit!) I'd bid 2♠ over 2♥ as West but I think bidding at the 3 level is too much. It will get us overboard too often and could be ugly if partner doesn't have a spade fit.

What's more as West it's tempting to try and take a penalty with a singleton in partner's first suit and a stack of trumps. West should pass 3♥. When it comes back to East he should reopen with a double. This is takeout and giving partner the chance to pass if they wanted to penalise. On this hand, I think West should choose to pass despite holding so many spades. Obviously it looks like there is a big spade fit so 4♠ is also reasonable but the vulnerability makes it very tempting to try and take 3♥ 2 off for +500 instead (which will outscore 4♠). Again this is solely because of the vulnerability – any other vulnerability West should just bid 4♠.

Where South bid 1♥ West has a normal 1♠ bid and now the auction will probably be uncontested but will almost certainly reach 4♠. See advanced section for more on this particular start to the auction.

What about the play and defence? Looking first at 3♥ doubled, West will surely lead the ♦J. Best defence has East overtaking to play more diamonds and West can discard his clubs (probably best even when South ruffs the 3rd round of diamonds). Now the defence will score 1 spade, 2 diamonds and 3 trumps (probably 2 club ruffs and the ♥K). But almost any reasonable defence should still lead to 6 tricks. Even if East leaves West on lead with ♦J and he switches to a club they should still come to 1 spade, 2 trumps, 2 diamonds and 1 club. That's +500. Only one table actually took a penalty in hearts and that was against 4♥ doubled. Although they only got 500 (best defence would have been 800) that was still a top as it outscores even the East West pairs who made 12 tricks in spades for +480.

Now let's consider the play in 4♠ by West. Although there are two club winners to take, in practice North will surely lead the ♥8. Declarer should ruff in dummy, cross to their ♦J and then return to dummy to play more diamonds to try and discard their club losers. But if they rush to do this they will be disappointed when South ruffs the 3rd round. Careful play can prevent this and make 12 tricks though – see advanced section for how. Two tables actually went off in 4♠ because they discarded from dummy at trick 1, allowed South to win the ♥A, then lost 2 clubs and the ♠Q. Discarding from dummy to set up your ♥K can certainly be right on some hands but this isn't one of them – see advanced section for why not.

Key points to note

- What level to overcall should be influenced by whether partner has already passed or not and, even more importantly, by the vulnerability. Be very wary at unfavourable vulnerability.
- It's OK to stretch a bit to bid when they pre-empt but if you go too far, partner may then go overboard.
- Be encouraged to try for penalties if the opponents are at unfavourable vulnerability – otherwise prefer to bid your own game.
- If the defence haven't found their best lead, try and take advantage by discarding some of your losers before letting them in for a 2nd chance!
- After a pre-empt, suits are less likely to break evenly.

More advanced

After the auction 1 minor, 1♥ overcall it is possible (and useful) to be able to distinguish responder's spade length. A popular agreement is to play double as showing exactly 4 spades and 1♠ as showing at least 5. Another option is to play 1♠ as showing 4+ spades (as it would be without the overcall) and use double as a hand that has some values but not 4 spades. The latter method works better when played in conjunction with support doubles (so opener can show if they have 3 spades should there be a bid by the intervening hand).

That might influence the auction here. If East knows West has at least 5 spades he can agree those immediately. Otherwise he will probably rebid clubs. When West repeats spades, now East can definitely go to at least 4♠.

How does West make 12 tricks in spades after a heart lead? Ruff, cross to ♦J, then ruff a heart back to dummy. Now the key play is to cash the ♠A. This exhausts South's trump so now we can play diamonds from the top and South can't ruff. North has to follow to 4 rounds so we can discard 3 of our cards in clubs/hearts. We have already ruffed 2 hearts in dummy so we only have 1 heart left. We simply play another winning diamond and discard that last heart while North has to ruff. But now North's ♠Q falls under our ♠K and we have the rest of the tricks. This works well when trumps are 3-1. When trumps are 2-2 it's not so good because after South ruffs a diamond we have no more entries back to East. The auction may give a clue though – if South has pre-empted 3♥ that suggests trumps are more likely to be 3-1. Diamonds might also be 3-3 all along which would allow us to discard both our clubs before anyone can ruff.

Note that sometimes with holdings like the heart suit, it is advantageous for declarer to not ruff in dummy at trick one, instead just discard something and let South win the ♥A. This then sets up the ♥K for a 2nd discard. It's not a good idea on this hand though because we have two immediate club losers exposed so we can't afford to let South win trick

one. Instead we want to quickly try and discard club losers on dummy's diamonds. Had the club position been something like Axx opposite xxx it would be an attractive play because both club losers can now be discarded and we don't have to use any of dummy's trumps to achieve that.

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)

WHAT'S ON in February

Let's hope we will have a fresh start in February with the downward trend. More **Red** and **Super Green** **masterpoints** to grab both in club and online!

- **RED F2F at City: Lunar New Year Thursday Morning** on 3rd February 2022, 10am – 1.15pm
- **RED F2F at Canada Bay: Lunar New Year Thursday Morning** on 3rd February 2022, 10am for 10.15am start – 1.30pm
- **RED Online on BBO: Lunar New Year Thursday ARVO** on 3rd February 2022, 1.45pm
- **Super Green F2F at Canada Bay: Strathfield Summer Pairs** over 3 Monday mornings on 7th, 14th & 21st February 2022, 10am for 10.15am start – 1.30pm
- **RED Online on BBO: SBC Valentine's Day Monday Morning** on 14th February 2022, 10.15am start

Normal table money fee. No need to book in advance. Visitors and walk-ins are welcome!

More Bridge in the New Year

Our City venue has reopened on Monday 3rd January 2022, and our Inner West venue at Canada Bay Club has restarted bridge sessions on Monday 10th January 2022.

- F2F @ CITY -

There will be sessions every day from Monday to Thursday at City, with a separated field for Supervised players on Wednesday morning. All morning sessions start at 10.00am. We have two evening sessions – the Tuesday night is for Open (7.15pm start), please contact office for pre-arrangement if you are not a regular of this session. The Wednesday night is a study group for Supervised players, 6.30pm start and aim to finish at 9.00pm.

- F2F @ CANADA BAY -

To start with, we will have two morning sessions in Canada Bay Club. We co-host the Monday morning session with Strathfield Bridge Club and add an extra Thursday morning session to the week. Both club members will enjoy member's rate for the table money fee. Cash only for the moment, we intend to extend the usage of PP over there.

Please find the details of [the session timetables](#) and find out [more about our venues](#) on our website.

- ONLINE @ BBO -

If you prefer to play online, there are regular club sessions on Monday morning (10.15am), Thursday afternoon (1.45pm) and Saturday afternoon (1.45pm) on BBO. To join our online game, please follow this [step by step guidelines](#).

BB\$4 for 24 boards.