



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.

Discarding

#55667 BBO – Saturday 8th January 2022

15		♠ K975	Dir: S
		♥ T9874	Vul: N-S
		♦ KJ	
		♣ J9	
♠ A862	♠ 4		
♥ AJ	♥ Q6		
♦ AQ8	♦ T97654		
♣ AKT8	♣ 7543		
8	♠ QJT3		
22	♥ K532		
2	♦ 32		
8	♣ Q62		
		♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ NT	
		N - - - - -	
		S - - - - -	
		E 5 5 1 1 3	
		W 5 5 1 1 3	

+240 (1 or 2 no-trumps making 12 tricks) is not a score seen that often but on board 15 last week it occurred no fewer than 8 times! The problem was discarding which is often very hard. Let's see what happened.

At 12 tables the auction was a single bid of 2NT from West (most commonly showing 20-22) which was passed out. 4 tables were more ambitious – three bid to game and one to slam! Passing 2NT as East is perfectly reasonable – but see advanced section for some more thoughts on evaluating big hands like West and responding as East.

Most Norths led the ♥10 and this is perfectly normal – even though it works here, it would be very dangerous to lead away from the ♠K round to a known large

hand, the heart lead is much safer. Declarer will duck and South should do the same (to play the ♥K would give the ♥Q an entry to dummy later which could be critical – it would be extraordinarily rare for declarer NOT to have the ♥A on the bidding and lead which is the only time that playing the ♥K would be necessary). Declarer has no entries to dummy at all so has little choice but to lead the diamonds from hand. It is essential to play Ace then Queen hoping the opposing diamonds divide equally – when that works the ♦8 can be played across to dummy's ♦10 for the rest of the suit.

After North wins the ♦K they will of course knock out declarer's remaining heart. Declarer at this point has 1 spade, 2 hearts, 5 diamonds and 2 clubs which is 10 tricks. But when they run their long diamond suit, the defence have to make a lot of discards and that's where most tables gave the extra tricks away.

Here the critical suit turns out to be clubs. South needs to cling on to all 3 of his clubs. If he parts with one, declarer suddenly has 4 club tricks instead of 2 and now makes 12 tricks – which is what happened many times!

Discarding at bridge is hard – and, like defence in general, it is impossible to get it right without some sort of signal from your partner to help you. What's more you then need to trust your partner and that might mean giving up a suit yourself. Here North needs to help South. North must signal encouragement in spades as soon as he can (i.e. on the 3rd round of diamonds). That should tell South he can discard all his spades but needs to hang onto his clubs. Without a signal, it's a blind guess for South which black suit to keep.

There are assorted discarding methods in use. Traditional methods used high encourage. These days low encourage is more common (high encourage can mean you waste a card that might take a trick later). Other methods include odd encouraging (not so good when you have a holding of AK642 though!), or "revolving" (a discard in one suit encourages another). Like most things in bridge it really doesn't matter WHAT method you play, it is far more important that you and your partner are on the same wavelength!

Correct discarding here would hold declarer to 10 tricks and would have been worth almost a top!

Key points to note

- Discarding at bridge is hard – and impossible to get right without signals from partner.
- Try to help partner with your discards as early and clearly as possible so they know what suit(s) they may be able to throw away.
- There are many discard methods in use – all have pro's and con's. Which you play doesn't matter. It is far more important to have agreed with your partner what you are doing.
- When declarer has shown a specific point range, always add your points to dummy's and work out the range of points partner can have – this will often help you in defence in general, as well as with discarding.
- Aces tend to be worth more than the standard 4 points – hands with lots of aces and controls should consider upgrading.
- Be more inclined to push for game atimps than matchpoints – you have more to gain.

More advanced

How good is the West hand? Although it has 22 high card points, the fact that it has all 4 aces makes it extremely powerful. The "standard" point count evaluation is A=4, K=3, Q=2, J=1 but in practice Aces are worth more than 4, and Jacks are worth less than 1. So I think there's a good case to upgrade this hand and treat it as 23+ points. The only negative feature is the heart holding. Two tables did open 2♣ and this enabled them to reach game. Of course it's fairly lucky for game to make but the East hand is a total guess to evaluate. Pass and you find partner with ♦AKxx, bid game and you find partner with ♦Qx! I would pass 2NT at matchpoints but atimps I would probably bid to game simply because you have more to gain by bidding and making 3NT than you do to lose by playing 3NT-1 instead of 2NT making or 3NT-2 instead of 2NT-1. At matchpoints it doesn't matter how MUCH more you score on the board, it just matters how MANY pairs you do better than.

Another point on the play. Imagine the diamonds in dummy had been headed by the J. Now declarer should lead the Q from hand. This works if they are 2-2 but it also might catch out a defender holding Kxx. If they take the K, declarer will now be able to play A and J and run the rest of the suit. To cut dummy off, the defence need to duck the Q!

How should North South go about their discards on this hand then? Before they start, both should count points to see if that helps. Whenever declarer has shown a particular point range, it's possible to work out a range of points that partner has once dummy is visible. This is a very good exercise that all good defenders should do as a matter of course. Here for example if West's 2NT is 20-22, then both North and South should mentally add that to 8 in their own hand and 2 in dummy. That is 30-32 which leaves partner with 8-10. This is not always essential knowledge but it gives a feel for what cards partner can, or cannot, have. Things then get clearer as you see partner play some cards or give you a signal.

Here the point count information is more useful to South than North. South sees partner produce 4 points in diamonds and once he sees partner encourage spades he knows North has 3 or 4 points there too. That leaves room for very little else. That should point him towards realising he must hold his club cards. Even though normally you would want to cling onto a spade holding like South's he needs to trust his partner's signal here and throw them away.

Both defenders ultimately have to make 4 discards on the diamonds. South should throw 3 spades and 1 heart. North should throw 2 spades (keeping Kx), 1 club and 1 heart. Note North cannot afford to throw both his clubs away – if he does, declarer can finesse against South's Q.

Another thing it's valuable to do as a defender is try to plan ahead. Here both defenders KNOW they are going to have to make 4 discards on the diamonds. The sooner they can plan what these are the better. All too often you see players making easy discards first but then get caught in agony on the last long card in dummy working out what to do. A good declarer will read what your problem is and get the hand right as a result. Although it's very easy to say and very hard to do(!) you should aim to make your discards as smoothly as you can to avoid helping declarer.

One final thought. Discarding is not easy – even for the best players. Therefore as declarer you should consider running your long suits. You never know what problems the defence may have (real or imaginary). Sometimes they will allow you to make a contract that had no genuine chance!

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)

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.