



## 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](mailto: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.

### Michaels again and an example of counting shape.

#30763 BBO – Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> February 2022

6	♠ 7	<i>Dir: E</i>
	♥ KQT983	<i>Vul: E-W</i>
	♦ T	
	♣ 98654	
♠ AJ942	♠ KQ83	
♥ A2	♥ J765	
♦ AK84	♦ J932	
♣ Q7	♣ K	
5	♠ T65	♣♦♥♠NT
18 10	♥ 4	N 3 - - -
7	♦ Q765	S 3 - - -
	♣ AJT32	E - 5 - 5 5
		W - 5 - 5 5

Last week I talked about the Michaels cue bid. This week it could have been used again to good effect on board 6 to find a good sacrifice. Let's have a look.

The normal auction starts P P 1♠ to North. Some Norths overcalled a number of hearts and there are arguments for doing that instead of using Michaels (see advanced section). But others started with 2♠ the Michaels cue bid showing at least 55 in hearts and a minor.

East will now raise spades. As after regular overcalls it is sensible to play a method to distinguish a good raise from a semi pre-emptive one. This can be done with a cue raise of 3♥ (the suit we know the opponents have). East West will then bid to 4♠.

The spotlight is then on South. The value of Michaels now shows up. Knowing their partner is at least 55 in hearts and a minor means South knows there's a good fit in one of the minors even though they don't yet know which North has. It is also attractive to bid to 5 minor over 4♠ because all the conditions for a sacrifice look like they are met:

1. Their 4♠ contract is highly likely to make as we have very little defence (the only slight worry in this regard is our singleton heart - see advanced section for more on this).
2. It looks likely that all the other pairs will be bidding game.
3. The favourable vulnerability means we can afford to go 3 off (8 tricks) and still show a profit. This looks very likely. Given we have 3 spades partner's most likely shape is 1525 or 1552. Our worst case then looks like we will lose 1 spade, 1 heart, 1 trump and 2 of partner's other minor. This is a valuable exercise to do - try and visualise the shape of partner's hand (much easier after they have made a bid like Michaels) and project what tricks we might lose.

How does South find out which minor North has? He should simply bid 5♣. This is a "pass or correct" bid - meaning he wants partner to pass with clubs or correct to 5♦. It's important to understand that ALL club bids (at any level) on this sort of bidding sequence are like this - they are not showing your own club suit. Yes once in a blue moon you could get dealt 8 solid clubs and want to bid 5♣ yourself even when partner has diamonds. There's no good answer to that - you can perhaps bid pass or correct first (4♣) but then pull partner's 4♦ bid back to clubs. In the real world it just doesn't happen!

Once North South have bid to 5♣ East West then have a problem. They have to decide whether to double or bid onto 5♠ - always a hard decision. Even though it's right to bid 5♠ on this hand I doubt I would. East has defensive values in the ♣K and West is relatively balanced. I'm pretty sure I would double 5♣.

Only two tables bid to 5♣ (and neither did it by using Michaels!). But they were successful as it only went for -300 against the -620 or -650 being made at other tables.

How will the play go? In 5♣ declarer will just lose a trick in each suit. He will lead up towards the hearts in North and ultimately set them up.

What about if East West are playing in spades? Some Norths led the  $\spadesuit 10$  which, unluckily, picked the whole suit up for declarer so they made 11 tricks easily. Others led the  $\heartsuit K$ . There's a clear loser in hearts and clubs so whether declarer makes 10 or 11 tricks depends on how the diamonds are played. If declarer starts with the  $\spadesuit A$  the 10 drops with North. Declarer then has to decide whether to use the J9 in dummy to finesse through South or try to drop Q10 doubleton with North. In fact the answer (to finesse against South) can be worked out with certainty - see advanced section for how.

### Key points to note

- The Michaels cue bid can be effective at finding a fit in order to then sacrifice profitably.
- After the opponents bid Michaels you should use a cue raise to show a good raise of partner's suit - this helps judge later whether to double or bid on, and it may also help your side reach slam.
- Try to visualise your losers opposite partner's hand – easier after a distribution showing bid like Michaels (or a pre-empt).
- After such bids it also becomes much easier to count the shape of the hand - see advanced section.

### More advanced

Some Norths chose to overcall hearts and not bid Michaels. Although it doesn't work so well on this hand there's certainly a case for it for two reasons:

- a. we have 6 hearts so we could well want to play there when partner has 2 - but if we only show 5 hearts by bidding Michaels then partner will be very reluctant to bid hearts with only two.
- b. if partner ends up on lead we definitely want him to lead hearts and not a minor.

After a Michaels sequence like  $1\spadesuit (2\spadesuit)$  there are different bidding methods in use. One option is to play double as showing a raise to  $2\spadesuit$  but a more common treatment is to use double as expressing interest in penalty against at least one of the opponents' suits (subsequent doubles are normally then penalty). Doing that you tend to bid  $3\spadesuit$  with what would otherwise have been a raise to  $2\spadesuit$ . And you cue the opponent's known suit to show a good values raise to at least  $3\spadesuit$ . Bids of 3 minor are natural and forcing (yes we know our RHO has one of the minors but that shouldn't stop us bidding our own suits naturally!)

Why might South be concerned about their singleton heart when considering a sacrifice? Because if partner has the  $\heartsuit A$  the defence could score some ruffs and perhaps be beating  $4\spadesuit$ . The defence could perhaps be about to go  $\heartsuit A$ ,  $\heartsuit$  ruff, cross back to North (with  $\spadesuit A$  or  $\clubsuit K$ ) for a 2nd ruff. "Sacrificing" for -300 doesn't look so clever if we were about to score +100! But there's no guarantee that's the case. Firstly even if North does have the  $\heartsuit A$  he may not have a 2nd entry in time to get a 2nd ruff or declarer might also be short in hearts in one hand. Secondly there's a practical consideration. If we were on lead we'd surely lead our heart singleton. But against spades partner is on lead. It is much less likely that partner will lead the  $\heartsuit A$  unless they happen to have AK (leading aces into thin air is usually a bad thing to do). So even if, in theory,  $4\spadesuit$  might be beatable it may well in practice not be. Hence it's still then attractive to sacrifice.

What about the play in spades after  $\heartsuit K$  lead? Declarer can still make 11 tricks if he gets diamonds right. There are two reasonable lines:

1. Run the  $\spadesuit J$  from dummy intending to finesse twice against South (playing them for  $\spadesuit Q10xx$ ).
2. Cash one top diamond hoping North has  $\spadesuit Q10$  or  $\spadesuit Q$  or  $\spadesuit 10$  and then either drop the  $\spadesuit Q$  with North or finesse against South on the 2nd round.

The first line requires us to be careful with entries because after drawing 3 rounds of trumps there's only one more entry to dummy and we need that to finesse against the  $\spadesuit 10$  on the 2nd round (we assume the 1st round will go  $\spadesuit J$ ,  $\spadesuit Q$ ,  $\spadesuit A$ ). Therefore, we must finish drawing trumps in dummy to lead diamonds the first time. As it turns out this

doesn't matter because the ♦J pins the singleton ♦10 in the North hand. This line loses to singleton ♦Q and ♦Q10 with North though.

The second line also works and, after North's ♦10 falls we can count the hand to be sure of where the ♦Q is. Win the ♥A, draw trumps in 3 rounds and cash one top diamond. Next lead a heart towards the J. On this trick North will win the ♥Q and South will discard. North will probably now lead a club to South's ace and he will continue a club or diamond. At this point declarer should count the shape of the hand. After drawing trumps he knows North had 1 and South 3. When he sees South discard on the 2nd round of hearts he knows South started with 1 which means North must have started with 6. The Michaels cue bid says North has at least 5 clubs as well. That means we KNOW North has 1 spade and 6 hearts and we infer he also has at least 5 clubs. Given he only has 13 cards that means he can have at most 1 diamond and we've actually already seen it played under the ♦A. Therefore we know he had to be 1615 shape originally and therefore we must take the diamond finesse against South's Q.

The above is a fairly simple example of counting the shape of the hand (it's always easier when the opponents have made a distribution showing bid like Michaels or a pre-empt) but it shows the value of it. It allows us to be certain the diamond finesse will win and not have to guess whether North had Q10 to start with. Counting is just basic arithmetic but it's hard work when there's so much else to think about at the same time. It's a good habit to try and develop if you want to get better though - it's definitely one of the things that sets the experts apart from the average player. It's also very rewarding when you get a hand right because of it.

There are actually 3 different things you might need to count on any given hand:

1. Shape (Find out the layout of 3 suits to work out the 4th and therefore determine which opponent can have a key card in a suit - as here.)
2. Points (If point ranges have been shown in the bidding as you see more high cards played you may be able to work out who can or can't have a remaining high card.)
3. Tricks (Do the opponents have enough tricks ready to make their contract or beat ours? If they do then we need to get desperate and try to cash our own tricks quickly. If not we can be more passive.)

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)

## Regular F2F and Online sessions at 3 venues

### - 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.