



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.

The Michaels cue-bid; subsequent bidding and play.

#88570 BBO – Saturday 5th February 2022

13	♠ K953	Dir: N
	♥ J873	Vul: Both
	♦ T96	
	♣ 85	
♠ AJT64	♠ Q8	
♥ A5	♥ T2	
♦ AKQJ92	♦ QJ8742	
♣ 643	♣ 643	
4 ♠ 72	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ NT	
19 5 ♥ KQ964	N - - 2 - -	
12 ♦ AK53	S - - 2 - -	
♣ T7	E 5 1 - 5 2	
	W 5 1 - 5 2	

Board 13 last week included a very strong two suited hand but the way the field handled it surprised me a bit. Let's look more closely.

The normal start to the auction will be P P 1♥ and then West has to decide what to bid. The actions selected at the 11 tables were:

1♠ (3 times), 2♣ (2 times), double (4 times), 2♥ (once), 5♣ (once – but at that table East had opened a weak 2♦).

Only one table bid what I would have – 2♥ (a "Michaels" cue bid showing at least 55 in spades and a minor).

I think the West hand is a lot too strong for a simple overcall in either spades or clubs – if it's passed out you will feel very worried you have missed something. Give partner the ♠K and nothing else and you are very likely to make 4♠ and there's no way partner will bid anything with that (in fact if they have exactly ♠Kx and some clubs you will almost certainly make 6♣!)

Starting with a double is certainly possible but it's going to be almost impossible to show both your suits in the auction then – especially if North raises to 3♥. Most pairs who did double ended up in 5♣ but, as we'll see shortly, it's preferable to play 4♠ here.

I think by far the best bid is 2♥ Michaels which is a cue of the opponent's opened suit. Over a minor that shows at least 55 in the majors. Over a major, as here, it shows at least 55 in the other major and a minor. Some pairs use it on less shapely hands as well (e.g. 54+) but I think it's much better to guarantee the bigger shape – it makes it a lot easier for partner to know what level to compete to.

There are different schools of thought about the strengths of hand you should have to use Michaels – see advanced section for more discussion on that. Here of course whatever partner bids, you will take further action to show that you have a very strong hand.

North sometimes raised to 3♥ which is a little risky vulnerable with a poor balanced hand. But it is a good bid because it takes valuable space away from East West (especially after a double). The fact that it's a known 9 card fit should provide enough safety to bid it (3♥ is only going one off so it's fine as the opponents can easily make game).

If 3♥ comes back to West, he has another decision. What he does now will depend to some extent what he did on the first round. I like the bid chosen by the player who used Michaels to start with though – he bid 4♥, another cue of the opponent's suit. This is showing a very big hand worth game in its own right and East chose to bid 4♠ over it which is also a good decision as that scores more than 5 of a minor (see advanced section for more on this).

The play in 5♣ is straightforward. The likely lead is a heart which declarer will win and draw trumps in two rounds. When clubs behave nicely and break 2-2, we could play the ♣2 across to the ♣6 to try the spade finesse which we might be hopeful

will work as it's through the opening bidder. If spades are 3-3 with South having the K, we'll then make 12 tricks. In fact the finesse fails today but the rest of our spades are winners so we just lose 2 tricks. However, taking the spade finesse has some risk (see advanced section).

The play in 4♠ may not be as easy. After a heart lead declarer must start on trumps and, with no entry to East, the best way to do that is low towards the Q being prepared to lose to the K. If North ducks, declarer just plays more spades to knock out the K. The defence can then play more hearts (or a diamond) to force declarer to ruff. At this point declarer will have the ♠10 and North will have the ♠9 left. Some declarers now gave up on trumps and started playing clubs so North scored another trump trick – hence 4♠ made 10 tricks for +620. But there was no need to do that. They could have continued to draw the last trump. Yes that would leave declarer with no trumps either (he needs to play 4 rounds to draw all of North's and has had to ruff once) but that's fine because their remaining cards are all club winners. That leads to 11 tricks and +650 which would have been a joint top.

If the defence start with diamonds and force declarer to ruff immediately, he has to be even more careful but he should still make 11 tricks – see advanced section.

Key points to note

- The Michaels cue bid over an opening bid by your right hand opponent typically shows at least 55 in two suits (both majors over 1 minor, the other major and a minor over 1 major).
- Big 2 suited hands (55+ shape) are frequently best bid with Michaels as they can show both suits quickly. The strength of hand can vary a lot by agreement (see advanced section).
- When playing matchpoint pairs, priority should be given to playing a major not a minor as it scores more (even if the contract itself isn't quite as likely to make).
- When playing in a 5-2 fit, trump control can be delicate if forced to ruff. But using all your trumps to draw the defence's is fine if you then have a lot of winners to cash

More advanced

There are two schools of thought about Michaels.

- a) It is better to get hands with massive shape across quickly – and hence you want to bid it on any strength of hand.
- b) You want to bid it on weak hands (paving the way for a possible sacrifice) or on strong hands (to make your own contract – possibly slam) but not on intermediate hands (on these you overcall one suit and aim to bid the other on a later round of bidding).

As usual there are advantages and disadvantages to either approach. (a) will always get the shape into the auction but it's impossible for partner to know what to do if you might have a 6 count or a 20 count! (b) makes it easier for partner to judge what to do but suffers the problem that you might never get to show your second suit (where you could have a big fit) if the auction comes back to you at an uncomfortably high level. Personally I prefer (b) which is what I play with my regular partners.

On the two hands 5♣ is the “best” contract for East West. But that means “best” purely in the sense it's the most likely to make. Playing teams that is where you would want to play (losing a heart and, on this hand, also a spade). But playing matchpoints 4♠ is actually best. This time “best” in the sense that it's more likely to score the most. Even making 10 tricks in 4♠ outcores 5♣ making 11 tricks (620 v 600). 11 tricks in spades scores even more (650). Whenever spades are 4-2 or better (an 84% chance) you should be safe in 4♠ - it's only when spades are 5-1 that you might have troubles. Therefore at matchpoints you should aim for the higher scoring contract.

I said the spade finesse was risky in 5♣. Why? Suppose South had singleton ♠K. Having played the Q and A on the same trick we now have two spade losers. What's more we used our last trump in dummy when we crossed to the ♣6 so we can no longer ruff those losers. If we had played low to the Q and it lost to the singleton K, we are still OK because we have 3 more spade winners but now we still have a trump in dummy to ruff the losing ♠6 with.

The play in 4♠ on diamond leads is delicate too. Declarer ruffs the ♦K, then starts on trumps. Once North wins the ♠K and tries another diamond if declarer ruffs that it will be with his last trump and North will still have one. Declarer will have “lost control”. Usually that’s fatal because it means the defence can trump in and cash their own winners. But in fact on this hand it doesn’t matter so much because the defence cannot play two rounds of diamonds without setting the suit up for declarer (try it!) So there actually aren’t any winners for the defence to cash - declarer just plays his own club or diamond winners and allows North to take that trump whenever he wants. Then declarer gets back in for the rest of the tricks. Another option is how the play actually went at one table. Declarer declined to ruff the 2nd round of diamonds and simply discarded his heart loser instead. The defence continued a 3rd diamond but declarer could win that in the dummy with ♦Q, cross back to hand with a heart to draw the last trump and claim 11 tricks for +650. Well played for a deserved top.

Effectively the defence cannot force declarer in diamonds AND establish their heart winners. They can only do one or the other

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!

- **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.