



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. His column is updated weekly and published on the Sydney Bridge Centre website, under “Learn Bridge”.

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.

All about 4NT - Quantitative or Blackwood?

#58582 BBO – Saturday 23rd April 2022

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Last week I was asked a question about board 8 so I'll feature it here. It was a hand where most pairs reached a small slam but didn't really give themselves a chance of reaching the grand slam that was available.

Here the auction will almost certainly be uncontested. West has a fairly normal 2NT opening bid which is usually played as 20-22 balanced. Despite holding 5 hearts it's definitely the most descriptive bid. There are plenty of ways of finding out about 5 card majors over 2NT. The simplest is to play 3♣ as 5 card stayman. You respond 3M with 5, 3♦ with at least one 4 card major and 3NT with no 4 or 5 card major.

The key on this hand is what East does in response to 2NT. Several Easts bid 4NT.

I am not sure if they meant it as Blackwood or as “quantitative” - i.e. a natural invite. There is often confusion by newer players about when 4NT should be Blackwood and when it should be invitational. It's definitely worth discussing but it does partly depend what other methods you play.

Regardless of what else you play I'd certainly recommend that 4NT bids over NT openings or rebids are played as natural invitational. So for example 1NT-4NT, 2NT-4NT, 1m-1M-1NT-4NT, etc. You haven't agreed a suit in these sequences so there is no suit to use keycard Blackwood with. It gets more complicated after stayman and transfers (e.g. sequences like 1NT-2♣-2♥-4NT or 1NT-2♦-2♥-4NT). Without discussion it's probably simplest to keep these as Blackwood but there are better options - see advanced section for more.

It's easy to suggest a quantitative 4NT but what happens then though? Opener should obviously pass if he is minimum. If he is willing to accept the invite he could just bid 6NT but it's worth some discussion about what other bids might mean. Some people show the number of aces (i.e. treat it as if 4NT was Blackwood), others bid a 5 card suit suggesting another possible place to play. It's really up to you.

Returning to this hand, 4NT roughly describes the point count of the East hand but not the shape at all. Hands with long suits opposite strong balanced hands tend to be very powerful (for many years I think I have tended to undervalue them!). Here I would have bid 4♦ meaning it as a natural slam try. I'd be wanting to explore reaching 7♦ or 7NT and would certainly be bidding to at least 6♦. 4NT is more suitable on balanced hands that just want to play 6NT if partner is maximum or 4NT if he is minimum.

The 4♦ bid as a natural slam try raises another important point. Imagine you had the same hand but with the minors reversed. Bidding 4♣ as a natural slam try is perfect - just like 4♦ is on this hand. But many players instead use 4♣ as “Gerber” ace ask. This hand is a great example of why that is a REALLY bad idea. 4♣ natural over 2NT will get you to far more successful 6♣ contracts than using 4♣ as Gerber ever will! Almost no high level player uses 4♣ as Gerber - it's virtually always better played as natural, or as a cue bid if another suit has been agreed.

So what does opener do after a slam try like 4♦? Firstly it's important to understand that a 4NT bid is NOT Blackwood. Opener needs a way to show they aren't interested and 4NT is the only way to do that. It usually has a doubleton in the suit and minimum values (but in the context of 20-22 of course). Responder can pass that or make another move if they were intending to force to slam anyway. If opener likes responder's suit he should cue bid something else. So here he should bid 4♠ (showing the ♠A) because he likes diamonds. Note that when responder bids 4♦ he is saying that's the only suit he is interested in so there is no point playing 4M by opener as natural (had responder been interested in a major he would have started with some form of stayman).

Over 4♠ East can use Blackwood (with diamonds agreed). It's usually far better for responder to use Blackwood in these sort of sequences because they know more about their partner's hand and, like here, they are more likely to have shape where they will be better able to judge slam if partner has key cards in the right suits.

After getting a response of 0/3 key cards (obviously 3 in a 20-22 hand) East knows the pair has all the key cards and it's now a question of whether he can explore further to find 7♦ or 7NT. That is likely to depend on what methods the pair play after Blackwood. See advanced section.

There is nothing to the play on this hand as there are 13 easy tricks. One pair played 6♦ but that didn't score well as most were in 6NT - it's important to try for the higher scoring contract at matchpoints especially where, like here, there are long suits which can make a lot of tricks.

Key points to note

- 4NT is best played as quantitative when bid as a direct raise of NT openings or rebids.
- Over 1NT it's more complex what 4NT should be after stayman or a transfer and needs some discussion.
- Over 2NT after a transfer 4NT is usually Blackwood.
- 2NT - 4minor is much better played as a natural slam try than using 4♣ as Gerber ace ask.
- 2NT - 4minor (natural slam try) - 4NT is not Blackwood, it's just showing no interest in the slam try.
- Advanced partnerships need to discuss what bids mean after Blackwood. Using 5NT to confirm all key cards and inviting grand is useful and works very well on this hand.

More advanced

Let's look a bit more into 4NT bids after transfers or after stayman.

Firstly over 1NT. With a single suit there are other ways responder COULD set that suit and use Blackwood. For example a method I play over 1NT is 4♣ shows hearts and 4♦ shows spades. Therefore to just Blackwood in a major I use that route. Another method is to play a 3 level response to 1NT as a single suit slam try (with a follow up 4NT bid as Blackwood). With these options available a transfer and then 4NT doesn't also need to be Blackwood so it can be quantitative.

It's similar with stayman. It's useful to have a method to strongly agree opener's major and show possible slam interest. I play a bid of 3 of the other major to do this (so 1NT-2♣-2♥-3♠ or 1NT-2♣-2♠-3♥ - note the 3♠ bid over 2♥ is NOT a splinter, it's merely strongly agreeing hearts). Once you have that option then that's how you go about using Blackwood. Which means a sequence like 1NT-2♣-2♥-4NT can be quantitative (presumably with 4 spades).

Over 2NT it's different though. The auction is starting a whole level higher so there simply isn't room for responder to have those options. Yes you COULD play 4♣ as showing hearts but, as discussed above, that's better used as a natural slam try. 4♥ immediately with a strong hand also doesn't work as partner could pass it and you never then get a chance to use Blackwood! So here I think most people do still play a transfer and 4NT (e.g. 2NT-3♦-3♥-4NT) as Blackwood since it's the only viable way to bid that sort of hand.

What about after Blackwood? Lots of methods are in use and I've mentioned some in previous columns. A key thing to agree is what 5NT means. Some play it as a side suit king ask (either looking for specific kings or number of kings). A method I like and which would work very well on this hand is to play 5NT as confirming all key cards are held and showing interest in a grand slam if partner can bid one.

So far I've suggested the auction 2NT(20-22) - 4♦ (single suit slam try)- 4♠ (cue agreeing diamonds) - 4NT (key card Blackwood)- 5♣ (0 or 3 - obviously 3 here).

If East does now bid 5NT (all key cards held, grand slam interest) what should West do? If you trust your partner the answer is 7NT! Think about it:

- a) Partner must have at least 6 diamonds for the initial 4♦ bid.
- b) These must include the A and Q because all key cards are held and partner didn't bother to ask about the ♦Q when he had the chance to; yet was interested in a grand slam.
- c) Partner has the ♥A because all key cards are held.

Given that knowledge West can virtually count 13 tricks (5 hearts, 6 diamonds and 2 aces). It's the additional source of tricks in hearts West knows about that East doesn't which enables him to bid 7. Had East only been able to ask about kings, he would no doubt have discovered West has the ♥K but would still be worried about clubs and couldn't realistically bid 7.

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)

Play in the Same League – A special event for Novice players ONLY



The Sydney Bridge Centre is running a **F2F Australia Wide Novice Pairs Event** on Wednesday 25th May at Level 1, 162 Goulburn Street, Sydney. A no-fear morning session from 10am – about 1.15pm. **ONLY players with less than 100 masterpoints** will be accepted in this competition. Refreshment included.

Your results will be compared to other participating players who are of similar level in the whole country – a much better indicator to see where you are in the bridge journey! ALL participants will be given a booklet of hand analysis after the session. An invaluable and meaningful prize for

the winners – a **Complimentary SBC Workshop by Will Jenner-O'Shea** of your choice.

Please find the details on the [program brochure](#) and [enter online](#).

Players with more than 100 masterpoints are welcome to join our normal Open duplicate on the side

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We are as pleased as you are that Will is running his Workshops again. The Friday Workshops are filling up! Please book in early to avoid disappointment. The next two workshops will be held in the City on:

- **Friday 6th May:** Competitive Bidding and Judgement
- **More are under schedule**

\$50 for member (both Sydney Bridge Centre and Strathfield Bridge Club members can enjoy the special rate) / \$55 for visitors. Please find the [details](#) on our website. [Booking](#) essential for catering purpose.

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 -

We have been running Monday and Thursday Morning sessions in Canada Bay Club, 10.00am for 10.15am start. Starting from 1st June, there will be **NEW session on Wednesday afternoon for Supervised players**. Details will be announced soon! Please keep an eye on our website.

Member's rate for both Sydney Bridge Centre and Strathfield Bridge Club players in any session and events run by either club in either venue.

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

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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.