



## 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.

### The value of splinters and of pre-empts. Counting a hand.

#2858BBO – Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> September 2022

<b>3</b>		♠ 6	Dlr: S
		♥ 732	Vul: E-W
		♦ AQ98642	
		♣ 97	
♠ AKT9	♠ 843		
♥ 64	♥ AKQT985		
♦ JT53	♦		
♣ AK8	♣ QT2		
		♠ QJ752	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ NT
6	♥ J		
15 11	♦ K7		
8	♣ J6543		
		N - 1 - - -	
		S - 1 - - -	
		E 3 - 7 5 4	
		W 3 - 7 5 4	

Board 3 last week had a slam available to East West although it was hard to bid and only one pair reached it.

South might open 2♠ if playing a method where that shows a weak hand with spades and a minor, or possibly an aggressive weak two even though he only has a 5 card suit. Only one pair did that. At the table West passed (I might have tried 2NT), so did North and East bid 3♥ so it continued 3NT – 4♥.

If South passes, West will almost certainly open 1NT (15-17). North may well now overcall some number of diamonds. Given the favourable vulnerability, I would definitely be bidding 3♦ over 1NT to get in the way. East probably bids 3♥ (natural and game forcing). West may now try 3NT as he only has 2 hearts (East shows no more than 5 when he bids 3♥) and a diamond stopper. If he does that then East

will probably just sign off in 4♥ because values in diamonds are of no use to him.

If West instead chooses to raise hearts (which he might because his diamond stopper is poor and he has AK holdings in both black suits) then East might now make a try for slam. But it's not clearcut.

A 3♦ intervention from North certainly makes it harder to judge the hands to reach slam. Without that intervention it's a lot easier. If East can start at the 2 level and show both his good heart suit AND his diamond shortage then there are definitely opportunities to reach slam. Transferring to 2♥ and then jumping to 4♦ could do this – that's usually played as a “splinter” showing diamond shortage and a strong heart suit (note 3♦ is natural and game forcing over 2♥ which is why 4♦ doesn't also need to show diamonds). Splinters are incredibly valuable bids because they allow partner to judge how well their hand is fitting – generally points opposite a known shortage in partner's hand are wasted. See advanced section for more discussion on this.

The one pair that reached slam in fact did so very simply: P - 1NT – 3♦ - 6♥! There was no guarantee of course that West's hand would be as good as it is so perhaps East got lucky here. On the other hand, it's easy to undervalue hands with good long suits opposite strong balanced hands.

What about the play in hearts? There are 12 top tricks so the only interest is what the best play is for 13 tricks. The spade suit is the critical one. There are a few possible plays:

1. Play South to have both the ♠Q and ♠J. Play a spade towards West and cover South's card, repeating later if South inserts one of the honours on the 1st round.
2. Play North for a singleton ♠Q or ♠J. Cash one top spade hoping to drop an honour, then finesse against South for the other honour.
3. Play either North or South for a doubleton ♠QJ.

Which is best? The answer is option 1. See advanced section for how to count the exact shape of the North hand which narrows down the choices.

One other question – what should declarer discard from West on the 3rd round of trumps? And why does it matter? See advanced section for the answer.

## Key points to note

- Don't be frightened to pre-empt over a strong NT when you have some shape, especially at favourable vulnerability.
- Hands with long strong suits tend to play very well opposite strong balanced hands.
- A transfer to a suit followed by a jump in another is best played as a splinter with a self-supporting transfer suit (a simple rebid in another suit is natural and forcing).
- Splinters are very useful bids as they allow partner to judge whether his values are working or not. Points opposite shortages are generally not worth much.
- It is sometimes possible to count the full shape of a hand by playing side suits until someone shows out (telling you what the original distribution of that suit was). That information can tell you how to play a key suit later on.

## More advanced

An uncontested sequence by East West to slam might well start 1NT – 2♦ – 2♥ – 4♦. The 4♦ bid is a splinter showing a self-supporting heart suit and a diamond shortage which is a perfect description of the East hand. Why should 4♦ mean that? Because a 3♦ bid after the transfer would be natural and game forcing so there is no need to also use 4♦ to show diamonds. A splinter with a good heart suit is a much more useful meaning to ascribe to the bid (4♣ would be similar, 3♠ might be as well depending on whether the pair plays 1NT -2♦ - 2♥ - 2♠ as game forcing or just invitational). This is a hard hand to show otherwise, you need to emphasize how good the hearts are AND show the diamond shortage AND do so at a level where there's still room for partner to judge whether the pair should look beyond game.

Here a 4♦ splinter bid by East is music to West's ears – he has almost nothing in diamonds opposite the shortage and he has AK of both black suits which will fit beautifully with anything East has there. West might well just bid blackwood at this point, or at the very least cue bid 4♠. The pair should definitely reach at least 6♥ from there.

Observe how a 3♦ bid from North takes all this away from East West. East cannot easily now show his diamond shortage which is the key thing that makes slam so good. The auction is far more likely to stop in 4♥. It shows how important getting in the way of opponents' auctions can be.

What about the play in the spade suit? Before deciding on that, declarer should find out as much about the shape of the hand as he can. It's safe to do that here and it's actually possible to obtain a perfect count of the shape. Let's assume South will have led ♦K which declarer ruffs and draws trumps (noting that North started with 3). Next he crosses to ♣A, ruffs a diamond, crosses back to ♣K and ruffs another diamond. The purpose of this isn't to try and set up any diamond tricks, it's purely to find out the shape. When South shows out, that confirms he started with 2 diamonds which in turn means North must have started with 7. North is also known to have 3 hearts. He's followed to 2 clubs as well already. After declarer cashes the ♣Q, North shows out which confirms he had exactly 2 clubs. Therefore his shape must be exactly 1372. So the only question is what the singleton spade is! Given spades are now known to be 5-1, the mathematical odds favour both honours being with the 5 card suit. Note that had North followed to the 3rd club he would now be known to be 0373 and the play in spades then becomes a certainty. Counting a hand can be very rewarding when you can work out the shape exactly, and hence the right play.

There is one final catch when doing this. What should declarer discard from West on the 3rd round of trumps? A diamond might seem "obvious" but in fact it's not! It needs to be the ♠9, not a diamond. Why? Project the play forward. If you have discarded a diamond earlier and you play as above you will be left with only spades in dummy at the point you cash the ♣Q. Now if you play a spade up, South can insert one of the honours and declarer will have no way of getting back to his own hand to finesse the spade a 2nd time. He needs to have retained a diamond to be able to trump that back to his own hand to lead spades through South a 2nd time. The ♠9 is an illusion here because to make 13 tricks declarer only needs 3 spade tricks not 4.

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)

## Sunday Funday on 9<sup>th</sup> October 2022



Sleep in on a Sunday and enjoy a relaxed game in the afternoon! We hope you enjoyed the classic cucumber sandwiches, cheese platter and everything makes a Sunday great. As requested by players the club will now run one, and hopefully two Sunday Funday each month, whenever the venue on Goulburn Street is available. The next few Sunday Funday will be held on:

- Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> October 2022, 1.30pm - 4.30pm

You don't need a partner. No need to book in, visitors and walk-ins are welcome. \$18 member (\$15 concession member)/ \$22 visitor. Refreshment throughout play and join us for a glass at the end of the session.

### F2F Workshops for different levels of players!

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 workshop will be held in the City on:

- **Friday 7<sup>th</sup> October:** Playing Easy Hands. Playing Hard Hands.
- **Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> October (Half Day ADVANCED):** Slam Bidding and Advanced Plays.
- **Friday 18<sup>th</sup> November:** Improve Your Overcalls and Competitive Bidding

\$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 -

- Monday morning 10.00am – 1.15pm, Open Inclusive
- Tuesday morning 10.00am – 1.15pm, Open Inclusive
- Tuesday night 7.15pm – 10.00am, Open Inclusive (booking in advance required, please contact office)
- Wednesday morning, 2 separate sessions – Intermediate/Open (9.45am – 1.15pm with a 15mins pre-game talk) and Beginners Supervised (10.00am – 12.30pm)
- Wednesday night 6.30pm – 9.30pm, Beginners Supervised
- Thursday morning 10.00am – 1.15pm, Open Inclusive

#### - F2F @ CANADA BAY -

- Monday morning 10.00am for 10.15am start – 1.30pm, Open Inclusive
- Wednesday afternoon 1.30pm – 4.30pm, Intermediate Supervised (1-hour lesson plus 2-hours game)
- Thursday morning 10.00am for 10.15am start – 1.30pm, Open Inclusive

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 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.