



Weekly Wisdom

The Sydney Bridge Centre mini lesson

Starting from October 2022, Julian Foster (many times NSW representative) will be analysing an interesting hand from each Monday morning session. The City and Canada Bay venues are planning to play the same hand on Monday morning. 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.

What's double of a strong NT? Using your entries effectively.

City and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 14th November 2022

11	♠ 863	Dlr: S
	♥ KQT5	Vul: Nil
	♦ J6	
	♣ AKQ4	
♠ QT9	♠ AK4	15
♥ 764	♥ AJ2	7 17
♦ A7	♦ KQT832	1
♣ JT532	♣ 7	
	♠ J752	
	♥ 983	
	♦ 954	
	♣ 986	

On board 11 last week a large number of East West pairs played in 2♦ despite holding 24 points between them and being able to make game in 3NT or 5♦. Let's see what might have happened.

The normal auction will start Pass, Pass, 1NT (15-17). Maybe a lot of Easts overcalled 2♦ and that was it? If East doesn't have a penalty double of 1NT available (see below) then he has a problem. In my view this hand is too strong for a simple 2♦ overcall - as can be seen here, partner can have a very modest hand that will clearly pass but game has been missed. Maybe if East cannot double then he should bid 3♦?

There are many bidding methods in use over 1NT. It's not relevant to discuss them all here but it is important to consider what double means. Traditionally double of 1NT is played as penalties. While it is definitely right to play double of a weak NT as penalties, there's a school of thought that says it's not worth playing double of a strong NT as penalties because it comes up so infrequently. Pairs with that view might play double as showing any single suiter or something. This hand is a good example against that argument! If East doubles 1NT for penalties what is poor South supposed to do?! There isn't anywhere good for North South to escape to. Anything they play in should go for a penalty of at least 500. West should also be happy to pass the double with a balanced 7 count as he knows his side have a good majority of the points. Sometimes of course that isn't the case (South might have the balanced 7 count instead) and when West has nothing he can pull his partner's double.

Moving onto the play now – although no-one played there let's first consider the carnage that could have happened in 1NT doubled. East leads ♦K, West should probably overtake to unblock the suit and return a diamond. That should lead to the defence taking 6 diamonds, 3 spades and ♥A for 10 tricks. If they get it right that means 1NT doubled 4 off for -800! See advanced section for some discussion on how East West can make sure they don't tangle these tricks up.

Most pairs played in diamonds so let's look at the play there as well. South has no obvious lead as can be seen by the variety of different leads chosen. On a black suit lead declarer will probably win in hand and it seems natural to draw trumps. Having done that in three rounds, declarer can cross to dummy's ♠Q and lead a heart towards his ♥AJx. But North can insert ♥Q and, after winning the ♥A, declarer ends up having to lead away from ♥Jx. That leads to 10 tricks for +130.

But 11 tricks are available with slightly better timing. To score both the ♥A and ♥J declarer needs to lead towards his hand twice. There are two entries in dummy to enable him to do that - ♠Q and ♦A. But you need to use them both properly! Play two rounds of trumps ending in dummy with the ♦A (yes that means you leave a trump out for the moment). Then lead towards the ♥AJx. Assuming North plays the ♥Q, win the ♥A, complete drawing trumps and NOW cross to dummy's ♠Q and leading up towards the remaining ♥Jx. The defence now just score one club and the ♥K. The key is to realise you need two entries and one of them is in trumps so it needs to be used even though you haven't yet drawn all the trumps.

You might think it's dangerous to leave a trump out? Not on this hand. Also, how do you know that it's worth doing - i.e. that North has both the ♥K and ♥Q? See advanced section for the answers.

Key points to note

- Double of 1NT is normally played as penalties. Some pairs don't play this over a strong NT but it can still be worthwhile.
- If you don't play double of 1NT as penalties you need to decide what you bid instead on strong hands.
- Count your entries and plan what they will be used for (e.g. to lead up to a holding twice).
- Counting points when someone has opened 1NT can tell you the point range of the other hand and may enable you to place some key cards.
- When running a suit as a defender always remember your partner can't see your hand and could easily discard incorrectly. Help wherever you can by signalling where your cards are.

More advanced

Firstly I mentioned it's definitely right to play double of a weak NT as penalties. Why? Because one of the few disadvantages of the weak NT is it can go for a large penalty! Overall it comes up more frequently than a strong NT and is effectively a mini pre-empt because it removes the entire 1 level. Those are big advantages. Not playing double as penalties is taking away its only real disadvantage.

Looking at all four hands it seems easy for East West to take 10 tricks (3 spades, 1 heart and 6 diamonds). But of course we have to remember they can't see each other's hands when they defend. Assuming the play starts as expected (♦K overtaken and returned), what should then happen? The lazy defence is for East to cash his 6 diamonds straight away. Why is that lazy? Because it will force West to make 4 discards and he could easily go wrong. One simple thing East can do is cash ♠K to tell his partner he has ♠A before he continues cashing the diamonds. Now there's no risk of West pitching a spade. Another relevant thing is the order that East plays his diamonds. After the 3rd round (♦10 drawing dummy's ♦9), East has the last 3 diamonds left. Most of us would instinctively just cash them from the top down. But East can actually play them in 6 different ways! (832, 823, 382, 328, 238, 283). That order can be suit preference - for example top down indicates he has spade cards, bottom up indicates clubs, etc.

What should West discard then? His first discard should probably be a discouraging heart because on the 3rd round of diamonds he hasn't yet had any signal and discarding from 3 small is definitely safe. After he gets some help from East signalling the majors, he can then safely throw his clubs away.

We've seen that, to make 11 tricks in diamonds, it's necessary to leave a trump out. But there's no risk of a ruff because we are just leading towards our ♥A. Hearts would have to be 7-0 for there to be a ruff - which is impossible when North opened 1NT.

How can we also tell that it's worth leading up to the ♥AJx? By counting points. We can see 17 in hand and 7 in dummy. That's 24 which leaves 16 for North South and North opened 1NT (15-17). That leaves South with a range of -1 to 1 points! So North must hold both ♥K and ♥Q. Just like when defending after declarer has shown a point range, when one defender has shown a specific point range it's equally possible for declarer to calculate the point range of the other hand.

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)

Upcoming Events (please check SBC website / What's on...)



Sunday 27th November 2022
1.30pm – 4.30pm



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1.30pm – 4.30pm



FRI 9th / WED 14th December 2022
Bridge + Lunch, 1 session or 2 sessions