



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.

The Power of the 4-4 fit

City and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 21st November 2022

5		♠ Q3	Dlr: N
		♥ T83	Vul: N-S
		♦ JT874	
		♣ KJ4	
♠ AJ	♠ K98654	7	
♥ QJ72	♥ AK65	17	10
♦ KQ965	♦ 973	6	
♣ A5			
♠ T72	♠ NT		
♥ 94	N - - - -		
♦ A32	S - - - -		
♣ QT862	E 1 2 6 5 2		
	W 1 2 6 5 2		

Board 5 last week showed the potential power of a 4-4 fit. Playing in hearts East West can make 12 tricks, playing in spades they can only make 11. Let's see why.

First the auction though. East has the first decision whether to open. I would open 1♠ despite only having 10 points - my shape is great, all my points are in my long suits and they are A,K,K (much better than Qs and Js). After that the auction is likely to continue uncontested with 2♦-2♥ and it's now up to West to agree hearts strongly. He has a huge hand. Both black aces are very valuable cards as are the ♥QJ. He's too good to just raise 2♥ to 4♥.

One way of agreeing hearts strongly is to go via fourth suit forcing first. Therefore, instead of 4♥ West first bids 3♣ as the 4th suit (also establishing a game force). That asks East to describe his hand further. It's what West would do if he was looking for the best game (eg if East has a club stop to play 3NT). This time though West has another reason for using 4th suit so he doesn't really care what East responds.

East of course doesn't yet know what West is up to so he should just respond to 4th suit forcing. Here he should bid 3♠ (he has an extra spade, he doesn't have support for diamonds and he doesn't have a club stopper to bid 3NT). NOW West bids 4♥. This shows a hand that was better than a raise to 4♥ originally. Here East is very minimum and has a void in partner's first suit so he will probably give up in 4♥. But if he had a bit more he could now proceed towards slam.

Let's also consider what might happen if East passes initially. West might start with 1♦ and rebid 2♥ over 1♠ (a reverse showing at least 16 points). East has a nice hand in support of hearts but, with his diamond void, broken spade suit and 3 small clubs, he should probably just raise to 4♥ rather than go the stronger route via 4th suit forcing. West might move again though now he knows about the heart fit - again because of his black aces and his ♠A will help that suit get set up (partner will have at least 5 - see advanced section for why).

West might also choose to open 1NT (personally I think he's a bit too good with a 54 shape and 17 points but it's close). Over that East should transfer to spades and then bid hearts. Yes he has 6 spades so after 1NT he knows there is a spade fit but there is no rush to commit to that. He should look for a heart fit as well (because a 4-4 fit is more powerful). If West were to bid 3NT over 3♥ then East can (and should) bid 4♠ having explored all options. Several pairs did play in 4♠ so I suspect East did just insist on spades.

Before we look at the play let's next consider why 4-4 fits are so good and usually better to play in than a 5-3 or 6-2 fit if both are available. Three main reasons:

- Ruffs of losers can be taken in either hand (and the other used to draw trumps) which gives more flexibility in how to play the hand.
- If the 4-4 fit is trumps, there may be discards for losers available on the long cards in the 5-3 or 6-2 fit. But if that suit were trumps instead then the 4-4 fit provides no discards for losers.

c) The 5-3 or 6-2 fit may have an inescapable loser if it's trumps. But if it's a side suit you may still be able to ruff it out to establish the long cards as winners.

This hand is an example of (c). If spades are trumps there is a trump loser no matter what declarer does (try it and see). There is also a club loser. But if hearts are trumps it's possible to trump the 3rd round of spades in the West hand (with the ♥Q or ♥J to avoid being over-ruffed) and set the long spades up. There is no longer a spade loser. It's not quite as simple as that to make 12 tricks in hearts as you also need to deal with East's 3rd club (see advanced section) - but that's the general principle. It is certainly quite easy to make 11 tricks.

What about the play in spades? It depends on the lead. If the defence lead a club declarer wins and plays another club getting ready to ruff his losing club with ♠J. Drawing trumps would be premature now as it would leave the East hand with two club losers exposed. That will be 11 tricks just losing a club and a trump. The defence can stop a club ruff if they lead a trump initially (they'll play a 2nd trump if declarer gives them a club). But declarer can still make 11 tricks – see advanced section for how. In fact one pair managed 12 tricks after South led the ♦A. Not a good idea - declarer ruffed it and this set up both the ♦K and ♦Q for club discards. Another reason why leading unsupported aces is generally a bad idea!

Key points to note

- Don't be frightened to open with only 10 points if you have suitable shape and good cards in your long suits.
- 4th suit forcing is most commonly used to explore for the best game - but can also be used to strongly agree one of opener's suits (usually the 2nd).
- 4-4 fits will often play better than 5-3 or 6-2 fits. It's still worth looking for them even if you know you also have another fit available.
- Don't draw all the trumps until you have worked out what you are going to do with your other losers. You may want to ruff them first

More advanced

In an auction starting from West 1♦-1♠-2♥-4♥ I said East is now known to have at least 5 spades. Why? Because he has shown 4 hearts when he jumps to 4♥. But had he been 44 in the majors initially he would have responded 1♥ not 1♠. Therefore, his spades must be longer so he's 5-4 or, as here, 6-4.

In spades we saw that a club lead allows declarer to make 11 tricks via a club ruff in dummy. A trump lead will prevent that ruff but gives declarer a different route. He should play two rounds of trumps ending in West, then play ♦K and discard a club on it. This is known as a "loser on loser" play. Even though South wins ♦A, the ♦Q is now established to discard East's other club. So again 11 tricks this time losing a trump and ♦A. The loser on loser is effective because the ♣A was not knocked out immediately.

In 6♥ a club lead is the most challenging. It might seem obvious to set about the spades but you also need to do something with East's 3rd club. So declarer should win and immediately play a 2nd club. If North wins that and switches to a diamond, East will have to ruff. Now ruff a club, then play ♠A, ♠K and ruff a spade with the ♥Q to set up the spades. Finally now you are ready to draw trumps! ♥J and a low trump back to East's ♥AK and his hand is high. This requires hearts 3-2 but that's a 68% chance so is pretty good.

The value of a 4-4 fit over a 5-3 fit is seen clearly on a hand like this:

AKxxx	Qxx
Axxx	KQJx
Axx	xxx
x.	Qxx

Playing in spades you have at most 10 tricks (5 spades, 4 hearts and ♦A) and if spades break 4-1 you will only have 9.

Playing in hearts if the defence cash a club you can make slam if spades break 3-2! The 4th and 5th spades in the West hand can be used to discard East's 2 losing diamonds. Even if spades don't break you may be able to ruff the 4th round in East and establish the 5th one to at least discard one diamond and still make 11 tricks.

As usual in bridge there's no golden rule though. It's not automatically the case that 4-4 fits always play better. So when might a 4-4 fit not be so good? Sometimes when your trumps aren't that strong or if the defence is in a position to force the hand with the long side suit to ruff early. Now it might be too hard to set that long suit up, draw trumps, and get back to that hand to enjoy it. A 4-1 trump split can also be painful because now you can only afford to take ruffs in one hand as you need to keep the trump length in the other hand to prevent the defence taking trump control.

In those situations you may need the security of long suit as trumps so you can't be forced. These positions are often quite hard to judge in practice (although holding intermediate trump honours like West does here is definitely an aid to that suit being trumps). Another clue might be the opposition bidding which could point to suits being more likely to break badly.

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)

Christmas Parties on Friday 9th December AND Wednesday 14th December 2022



A get together for the Sydney Bridge Centre players and friends! There will be TWO Christmas Parties (and Yes! You can join both) on Friday 9th December AND Wednesday 14th December 2022. There will be 2 sessions on each parties – morning 10.00am – 1.15pm and/or afternoon 2.15pm – 5.15pm.

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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.