



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.

Freak hands and some slam bidding tips

City and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 24th October 2022

14		♠ 7	Dir: E
♥ T43		♥ J863	Vul: Nil
♣ KQ654			
♠ AKT92	♠ QJ83	6	
♥ KQ97652	♥ QT42	12 10	
♣ 2	♣ AJT93	12	
	♠ 654		
	♥ AJ8		
	♠ AK975		
	♣ 87		
		NT	
		N - 2 - -	
		S - 2 - -	
		E - - 4 6 2	
		W - - 4 6 -	

There are no textbooks on how to bid extremely shapely hands and the 5701 shape West had on board 14 last week is no exception. Perhaps surprisingly, only 1 pair across the 23 tables playing at CBC and the city last week bid the 6♠ slam that was available. Let's see what might have happened.

The auction is likely to start quite gently. Even though East only has 10 points I would definitely open his hand 1♣. It's so much easier to bid if our side gets in first, besides I have good shape and I will be happy for partner to lead a club should we end up defending. Furthermore, I am not likely to have a rebid problem – there is no bid partner can make that will make things awkward (contrast that with a 0445 shape where a 1♠ response to 1♣ would be awkward).

South has a pretty normal 1♦ overcall and West should start slowly with 1♥. North may well try to get in the way and raise pre-emptively to 3♦ (a good idea). East passes over that (he already opened fairly light, partner bid his void and he has plenty of defence in diamonds where it looks like the opponents have the other 9 between them).

West at this stage can just bid 3♠ to keep going. With such a freak hand you almost always want to be declarer in something, your hand is much more powerful playing than defending – sometimes termed an “offensive” hand (as opposed to a hand with queens and jacks that has length in suits the opponents are bidding – those are “defensive” hands). The risk with a hand like this is that it's a big misfit but here he will get a pleasant surprise when East raises to 4♠.

At the point West bid 3♠ he might have only had 4 (although he is more likely to have more shape when he bids a suit instead of doubling - see advanced section for more discussion on this). So East will only raise with 4 card support – hence there is almost certainly a 9 card spade fit. Having found that, the sky is really the limit now. The challenge is how West should continue.

Many players launch straight into blackwood but this hand is not at all suitable for that. The reason is it has a void. Suppose partner shows you one key card. Is it the ♦A (completely useless) or the ♣A or the ♥A (both extremely valuable)? There is no way of knowing. Blackwood tells you how many key cards partner has but not which ones. How many isn't useful on a hand like this. A far better approach is cue bidding to identify where you have controls.

West might try a 5♦ bid over 4♠. This is a cue bid showing first round control in diamonds (and hence denying first round control in clubs). East should get very interested over that as he has ♣A and the intermediate trumps and partner is clearly interested in slam to have moved beyond 4♠. It's possible he should just jump to 6♠ himself. Either way he should definitely co-operate and the pair should now reach 6♠. See advanced section for some more discussion on the inferences of a cue bidding sequence.

A useful convention played by some top pairs is “Exclusion” which is a special form of Blackwood asking partner for keycards but excluding one suit. It is very suitable on hands with voids where you aren't interested in partner's key cards there. It would work well here - see advanced section for more.

Let's return briefly to the start and assume East didn't open. Now things are likely to proceed differently but the final outcome ought to be the same. South will open 1♦ and West might choose to start with 2♦, a Michaels cue bid showing at least 5-5 in the majors. North might still raise to 3♦ and East will venture at least 3♠. West should now get very excited when partner voluntarily bids spades because his hand is way more powerful than even the 5-5 shape he has already shown.

If you do reach 6♠ what about the play? The defence will probably lead a diamond forcing West to ruff. How should you play? There are no losers but there is nothing resembling 12 winners to start with! This is common with really distributional hands. The only possible chance for declarer is to set up the heart suit since it's impossible to discard all his heart losers. I would immediately lead the ♥K and run it, not worrying that it loses to South's ♥A (because the ♥Q is now established). South may be reluctant to force declarer again as he'd have to set dummy's ♦Q up in the process (although it's still his best defence since one discard is useless to declarer). Regardless, declarer should continue to ruff hearts in dummy and return to hand with trumps. When hearts break 3-3, the hand becomes easy. Note he should ruff small hearts in dummy with the ♠J and ♠Q (because he has all the other top trumps in his own hand) and preserve the ♥Q in hand. Once trumps are drawn, he can then cash the suit starting with the ♥Q. This avoids the ♥Q getting ruffed by a defender at any stage..

Key points to note

- With 44 shapes, respond with the lower suit (to allow room for partner to bid the other suit if he has it).
- With 55 shapes, respond with the higher suit (to give yourself room to bid the other suit later).
- Hands that bid suits twice instead of re-opening with a takeout double tend to be more distributional.
- Blackwood with a void is not a good idea – an ace in your void suit could be totally useless. Cue bidding is far better.
- Exclusion keycard is a useful advanced convention where you show key cards but excluding one suit – it's ideal for hands with voids.
- Freak hands should always try to be declarer – they are “offensive” hands that are much more powerful when playing the hand than when defending.
- Making high level contracts with very distributional hands will almost always need you to set up one of those suits – you will have too many cards in it to be able to discard them.

More advanced

If West had a relatively balanced hand (e.g. 4513) he might prefer to re-open the bidding over 3♦ with a takeout double. That has the added benefit that partner might be wanting to pass it for penalties. Hence when West doesn't re-open with a double but bids something instead, it usually shows a more distributional hand that didn't want partner to pass a takeout double. Here of course the last thing West wants to do is defend 3♦ doubled! His 3♠ bid is usually either something like 46xx or 56xx. It won't be 55xx because he would have bid 1♠ on the first round with that (with 44 shape you bid the lower suit to allow partner room to bid the higher suit if he has it, with 55 shape you bid the higher suit first to allow you room to bid the 2nd suit later).

When cue bidding it's normal to cue the cheapest available control. That's why West's 5♦ bid denies a top club control because with that he'd have bid 5♣. The negative inferences when cue bidding (i.e. what suit(s) partner does NOT cue) are just as important as the positive inferences from what partner does cue.

It's not usually a good idea to cue bid a void in partner's suit as it doesn't help him set the suit up into winners (he will expect it to be the ace instead). But over 5♦ this hand might be an exception since East definitely wants to show interest. Note also that by continuing to cue bid, East is also saying he has a club control – if he didn't he would sign off in 5♠ since partner has already denied the ♣A. Another option for East is to just jump to 6♠ over 5♦. He might be worried that bidding 5♥ could get partner too excited (after all from West's perspective if he thinks partner has 4 spades, the ♥A and the ♣A then he'd almost certainly want to bid 7♠). East knows his heart control is a void and not the ♥A so, while he wants to be encouraging, he doesn't want to be that encouraging!

It's not really relevant on this hand but it's worth noting there are two basic styles of cue bidding. One focuses on first round controls. If you fail to cue a suit you are denying first round control so if you cue it next time you are now showing 2nd round control. The other style cue bids on either first or second round control. In this style if you fail to

cue bid you are denying either of those (e.g. you have a suit header by the Q at most). This can be more flexible and can allow you to stop quickly but it also means you may have to follow up with blackwood to establish whether partner's cue bid was the A or K of the suit! It's important to discuss with your partner what your agreed style is.

Exclusion keycard is a method played where you show keycards but do not count those in the suit the ask is in. It's very useful for hands with a void. So for example here West could use Exclusion keycard on diamonds which asks partner for how many keycards he has – but excluding anything in diamonds (because West knows the ♦A is useless to him). It is sometimes confusing exactly when a bid is exclusion keycard and when it's something else. Generally, it's a really unusual leap to a new suit that can't have any other sensible meaning. So for example in this auction if East had been able to bid 3♠ at some point, then a jump by West to 5♦ could be played as Exclusion keycard. It's less clear over 4♠ as it's not a jump – that would only be Exclusion keycard if the partnership had specifically discussed and agreed it. More usually it would just be a cue bid.

Responses to Exclusion vary but a common scheme is:

- Step 1 = 0 key cards or just the Q of trumps
- Step 2 = 1 key card but not the Q of trumps
- Step 3 = 1 key card plus the Q of trumps
- Step 4 = 2 key cards but not the Q of trumps
- Step 5 = 2 key cards plus the Q of trumps

It's going to be very rare for a hand with fewer than 2 key cards itself to be in a position to use Exclusion keycard. Hence you tend not to need responses beyond 2 key cards (and remember there are only 4 in total now as one is excluded)

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)

Sunday Funday on 13th November AND 27th November 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's each month, whenever the venue on Goulburn Street is available. The next few Sunday Funday's will be held on:

- Sunday 13th November 2022, 1.30pm - 4.30pm
- Sunday 27th November 2022, 1.30pm - 4.30pm (parallel with Under Hundred Masterpoints Pairs Final)

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.

Under Hundred Masterpoints Pairs on Sunday 27th November 2022



A special event designed for players with fewer than 100 masterpoints! ALL are welcome, you don't need to have played in any club qualifying event. The only pre-requisite is the masterpoint limit, i.e. you and partner MUST each have under 100 MPs. There will be 4 divisions for players with 0-10, 10-25, 25-50 and 50-100 masterpoints to be scored State wide.

- Sunday 27th November 2022, 1.30pm – 4.30pm at Level 1, 162 Goulburn Street, Surry Hills.

\$18 member (\$15 concession member)/\$22 visitor. Refreshment throughout play and join us for a glass at the end of the session.

Friday Workshop

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 18th 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.