



## 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.

### Bid on when hands fit well, and on freak hands!

City and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 12<sup>th</sup> December 2022

This week for the first time I'm going to talk about 2 hands. I looked at board 4 and decided it was a good one to write about. But then I saw board 5 had two hands shaped 7510 which was surely also worth a mention! So as an early Christmas present this column is two hands for the price of one!

<b>4</b>		♠ J92	Dlr: W
		♥ K843	Vul: All
		♦ A9	
		♣ AQ63	
♠ A8543	♠ KQT6	14	
♥ J72	♥ A965	8	11
♦ K854	♦ Q32	7	
♣ 9	♣ T7		
		♠ 7	
		♥ QT	
		♦ JT76	
		♣ KJ8542	

#### BOARD 4

Board 4 shows the value of competing when the hands fit well (which is far more important than high card points). After pass from West, North has a normal 1♣ opening. East can make a takeout double of that. Even with only 11 points because all his points are in his long suits and he has the right shape (including both majors so the chances of his side having a major suit fit is good). South's bid depends on your agreed bidding methods but I'd bid 3♣ which is a weak pre-emptive raise of clubs. Holding only one spade, South knows East West probably have a fit there so 3♣ makes it harder for them to find it. It shouldn't work on this

hand, however, because West should compete to 3♠. Yes, even though he only has 8 points. Again the reasons are:

- he has 5 spades which means there's a good chance of a 9 card fit
- all his points are in his long suits
- all his points are in suits partner has implied something (values in the opponents' suit tend not to be as useful - especially not when declaring)

That could end the auction - neither North nor East have anything beyond what they have already shown so should not bid again (this is a very good general principle - don't "bid your hand twice"! ). South might consider going on to 4♣ but that may depend how many clubs his partner's 1♣ guaranteed. If it was 4 then he knows they have a 10 card trump fit whereas if it could be 2 then it might only be an 8 card fit. That's a very big difference in the potential trick taking power of the two hands. Today 4♣ would work well as it makes losing only 1 spade, 1 heart and 1 diamond.

East West can actually make 4♠(!) even though it looks like they could easily lose 2 hearts, 2 diamonds and 1 club. It's a very lucky layout of the cards that in fact allows them to limit their losers to 1 heart, 1 diamond and 1 club. The play in diamonds to do that is easier to see - declarer must lead a low diamond from West. North cannot play ♦A or that will allow declarer to score both the ♦K and the ♦Q separately. So he ducks and East's ♦Q wins. Now on the 2nd round of diamonds declarer ducks in both hands and North is forced to play his ace, thus letting West score the ♦K as well. It's only because North has exactly ♦Ax that this works (but see advanced section for why it's not as unlikely as it might initially seem here).

In hearts it's not nearly as clear to find the right play to only lose 1 heart - see advanced section for more discussion.

Of the tables who did play in spades, no-one made more than 9 tricks but they still scored well (even if they went off in 4♠ for -100) because a lot of tables were scoring 130 NS playing in clubs.

5		Dir: N	
		Vul: N-S	
♠ 4			
♥ A986432			
♣ Q9863			
♠ AT98752	♠ KQJ63	6	11
♥ KJT72	♥ Q6	11	11
♦ K	♦ Q75	12	12
♣ K	♣ J72		
♠ 4			
♥ A9853			
♦ KJT			
♣ AT54			
♠	♥	♦	NT
N	6	6	-
S	6	6	-
E	-	-	5
W	-	-	5

## BOARD 5

OK let's move to board 5. 7510 shapes are very rare. Having two in the one hand is even rarer. With shape like that one can usually expect some fireworks! Let's see what might happen.

I'd pass first as North (it's easier to come in later and show these weak but really shapely hands - perhaps with an unusual 2NT type bid). East might well open 1♠ as he has 11 points and a nice suit he wants partner to lead. South might double that (even with 5 hearts overcalling 2♥ with a suit that bad is very dangerous especially when partner is a passed hand - he could be walking into a bloodbath).

When West has recovered from the shock of hearing partner open his 7 card suit(!) he should decide how he will raise. I'd certainly be considering slam though - after all just give partner ♥Ax and ♣A and you'll make 13 tricks easily. You don't even need the ♠K (see advanced section for why). With just one of those aces you'll still make 12 tricks. The chances of partner having them are quite good too considering he opened at the 1 level. West should either show a strong spade raise (2NT perhaps) or maybe bid 4♦ (a splinter showing spade support and shortage in diamonds). Using blackwood isn't effective - if partner shows you one ace, it might be the ♥A (gold), the ♣A (useful) or the ♦A (useless)! On this hand you need to know WHICH key card(s) partner has, not HOW MANY.

North of course should also now come to life. Partner has implied something in both minors with a takeout double of 1♠ and you have Q to 5 in one and A to 7 in the other! Here North should bid 5♦ (although see advanced section for another option if his minors were closer in length). East definitely has nothing extra for his 1♠ so passes, likewise South has a regular takeout double but nothing more so he should pass 5♦ and it's back to West.

West definitely does have something extra and will keep going. I'd bid 5♥. This must logically be a slam try in spades (he is bidding on but if he only wanted to play 5♠ he'd just bid that). By bidding 5♥ he is trying to get East to appreciate how valuable the ♥A will be if he holds it.

It looks like all tables gave up at the 5♠ level but there's a good case for North to have another go as well - even when vulnerable. Once a fit has been found a hand with this much shape is incredibly powerful and almost anything could be making. High card points honestly become almost irrelevant when there is so much shape around. North might try 6♣ this time to give partner another option (he could have doubled on a 1435 shape for example). Will West give up over 6 minor? He shouldn't! He has no idea if 6 minor is making but he knows 6♠ can be at worst 2 off and could easily still be making. The key to these freak hands is to declare whenever possible - often you will have far less defence than you expect (which is why doubling is fraught with danger as well). As West if North South bid 7 minor and partner doesn't double it then I'd seriously consider bidding 7♠(!) - for exactly the same reasons. Yes, sometimes if you bid on you are converting +100 to -300. But other times if you pass you might score -1370 (or -1540 if you double!). The cost of being wrong is so much greater you just don't want to take the risk. Bidding on like that is known as "taking out insurance".

There isn't much interest in the play. Certainly not for East West who just lose 2 aces playing in spades (provided of course the defence cash the ♣A in time - if they don't all 3 of East's clubs can be discarded on West's long hearts). North South just lose 1 club but they do have to play diamonds correctly to be able to pick up East's ♦Q. This should be fairly easy to do. It only matters if diamonds are 3-0. When West bids so high, if any hand has a void it's more likely to be him. Hence declarer should start with ♦A.

Every table played in a spade contract East West, most at the 5 level, some doubled (making for +650 or in one case making 12 tricks for +750).

## Key points to note

- Compete aggressively if all your values look like they are in suits partner has shown and you have nothing in the opponents suit. Such hands fit well and often make more tricks than you might expect even without that many points. This is especially true if you have at least a 9 card fit.
- Pre-empt as responder if you know (or strongly suspect) the opponents have a fit they haven't yet found (especially a major suit fit).

- Don't "bid your hand twice" - if you don't have anything beyond what you showed previously and partner hasn't made a forcing bid then you generally shouldn't bid again.
- On freak hands declare whenever possible - yes potentially even at the 6 or 7 level. It's less costly than risking conceding a making contract the other way, especially doubled. High card points are almost irrelevant when evaluating hands like this - shape beats points any day!
- When it looks like you have losers in a suit consider if there's any lucky layout of the cards that might allow you to escape one of those losers. It costs nothing to try.

### *More advanced*

On board 4 it's plausible to play diamonds the right way for a few reasons:

- North has opened the bidding and South has made a pre-emptive raise. That makes it much more likely North has the ♦ A.
- North opened 1♣ not 1♦ so he could easily be short in diamonds.
- Once you place ♦ A with North declarer's only chance is to try for this. If it doesn't work he hasn't lost anything - he was going to lose 2 diamonds anyway (experienced players won't just play an ace into thin air, they will wait to use it to beat a king or queen).

How can the hearts be played? It depends who plays the suit first. A plausible line of play is two rounds of clubs, trumps and then the diamonds as above. That would leave North on lead and he'd probably play a low heart which declarer ducks to South's ♥Q. South can safely exit a diamond and West now has to decide what to do in hearts. On this hand he needs to run the ♥J. Whether or not North covers, South's ♥10 falls and East's ♥9 becomes a winner. But declarer can't see through the cards. It would be perfectly plausible (and in fact the better play) to lead a low heart and finesse the ♥9. This is playing North for ♥K10xx and South ♥Qx which is more likely than the holding which actually exists (there's only one holding of exactly Q10 with South, there are 3 holdings of Qx).

Incidentally how should West play trumps? He should start with low to the K. North might have all 4 spades but South almost certainly won't when he bids 3♣ instead of 1♠. Then he should follow up with ♠Q and ♠A so he ends up in the right hand to start diamonds.

If declarer did have to play hearts himself he must lead a low heart away from the ace! What can South do? Playing the ♥Q gets us back to the position above. Or he plays the ♥10 but now after ♥10, ♥J, ♥K declarer can play A9 for two tricks.

On board 5 more observant readers may notice that, from West's point of view, the only cards I considered he needed East to hold for a grand slam were ♥A and ♣A. I made no mention of the ♠K or ♠Q which are normally critical for slam bidding. That's because on this hand West has 7 card support and hence knows there is at least a 12 card fit. So even if East doesn't have ♠K it will be the only trump the defenders hold and will fall under his ace!

I said North should bid 5♦ after (1♠) X (spade raise) comes back to him. This is reasonable because he has 7 diamonds and 5 clubs. Had, however, his minors been more equal in length a good bid would be 4NT. This is NOT Blackwood - how can a passed hand opposite what could be a minimum takeout double suddenly want to ask for aces? 4NT here would show both minors and ask partner to bid his better one (effectively the same as a 2NT "unusual NT" overcall over a 1 major opening but at a higher level). This allows the partnership to play in their best fit when partner has 4 or 5 of one minor and only 3 of the other which is perfectly plausible for a normal takeout double of 1♠. Here, South would bid 5♣.

In the suggested auction, West will bid on over 5♦ and North might now try again with 6♣. When he does that there is an additional inference available to South - which is that North's diamonds are a lot better than his clubs. That's because he didn't bid 4NT the first time, he showed a distinct preference for diamonds - but now is still offering clubs. Had his minors been much the same, he would have bid 4NT previously. Hence South should only stay in clubs if his clubs are a lot better than his diamonds.

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)