

Weekly Wisdom

The Sydney Bridge Centre mini lesson

Staring 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 <u>send questions</u> about hands that you have played. Please use "Weekly Wisdom" as email subject.

Christmas tip - bid 4♠ over 4♥!

City and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 19th December 2022



This will be my last column for 2022 as there is no session on Mon 26th December. Thanks for reading and I hope everyone has a good Christmas break. I'll return with a hand from Mon 2nd January.

Board 18 last week was yet another example of it being right to bid onto 4♠ over 4♥. The normal start to the auction will be Pass, 1♥ and it's West's turn. So much for bidding 4♠ over 4♥, I'd bid 4♠ right now! Several reasons:

Looking at my hand, am I going to be happy to defend $4 \checkmark$ if the opponents get there? Surely not – my hand has a huge amount of shape. So if I already know I'm going to want to bid $4 \bigstar$ later, I am far better to bid it immediately and give the

opponents no space in the auction. If I bid it after they've described their hands more they will be in a much better position to decide whether to double me or to bid on.

Partner is a passed hand so we aren't likely to be missing a slam or anything (had partner not been passed it might be better to start slowly with 1 signst in case partner has a really strong hand).

We are not vulnerable and the opponents are vulnerable. That means even if we aren't making $4 \triangleq$ there's a good chance the opponents will be making $4 \clubsuit$. Also there's a good chance we won't be more than 3 off (-500) which still scores better than $4 \clubsuit$ making (-620).

Put yourself in the opponent's shoes. What is the very bid they will NOT want to hear? $4 \ge 1$ It disrupts their nice quiet auction to $4 \ge .$ Be a nuisance!

Over 4♠ North has a nasty problem. He obviously would have supported hearts at least to the 3 level but bidding 5♥ is now a big decision. A good rule of thumb is to allow opposition competitive bidding to push you one level higher than you would have gone when bidding uncontested but not two levels higher. Here North would probably go to 3♥ uncontested, hence he'd be willing to be "pushed" to 4♥ but 5♥ is too much. It could easily be going off when 4♠ was also going off. In theory it is right to bid 5♥ on this hand but that assumes 4♠ is making. The analysis from Deep Finesse certainly says 4♠ CAN be made but that's no guarantee it will be in the real world - as we'll see later. North may well prefer to pass. South might double 4♠ but has no obvious reason to with his spades sitting under declarer.

It seems quite a few tables were allowed to play 4 v and they almost all made 10 tricks for +620. Usually declarer will just lose 3 diamonds (he'll score 6 trumps, 2 black aces and 2 spade ruffs in dummy). But if West chooses a spade lead declarer might have a chance to make 11 tricks - see advanced section for the play.

How might things go in $4 \triangleq$ (either doubled or undoubled)? North has no reason to lead anything except his partner's suit so trick 1 is likely to go low heart to the Ace and ruff. At this point declarer can actually work out the position of the \blacktriangleleft A, K and Q. See advanced section for how. While it's not especially relevant to this particular hand this sort of "card reading" can be really valuable on many hands as it may help you locate the position of other key cards based on the cards (and hence points) the opponents are known to already have. Declarer will need to lead trumps towards his hand so he may well play $\bigstar K$, $\bigstar A$ and a low trump. South has a choice now. He can win $\bigstar A$ and play a club hoping his partner has the $\clubsuit A$ to give him a ruff. Or he can duck. Ducking is much better partly because he may well score his $\clubsuit Q$ anyway if declarer plays the suit, partly because there's no rush. He has 3 trumps so he can afford to wait. It's not like he can ever get 2 club ruffs as he knows he can't get partner in a 2nd time. In any case for all South knows declarer might be about to play the $\bigstar K$ which will make both his A and Q winners anyway! Finally, he can see declarer doesn't have many entries to dummy so he can't easily return to dummy to lead another spade.

Say declarer wins the AJ in hand. Now what? He will want to get to dummy to lead another spade so he'll have to try to do that in clubs. North plays low smoothly and declarer has to guess. Surely he'll try the AJ? After all South opened the bidding so is more likely to have more points (hence more likely to have AA). If that happens South wins AQ and gets out a heart forcing declarer to ruff in his hand again. Now he is going to lose 2 more spades (either by leading the suit himself, or by playing clubs and allowing South a ruff with AQ). The AA also has to be lost so that will be 1 off in AA. But that's still a good score for East West since North South can make 620 in hearts. Once again bidding AA in competition over $A\Psi$ is right as it so often is!

Several tables did make 4 (some doubled). I imagine South got a club ruff early on. But that means when declarer does lead spades from dummy South will only have AQ doubleton left and will then only make the A. Taking ruffs is often effective defence but not here - this time the defence are better to wait!

Of course if declarer does happen to guess to play the *****K he will be rewarded today with the *****Q dropping and being able to now play spades for only one loser. That will actually enable him to make **11** tricks!

Key points to note

- Bidding 4♠ over 4♥ in competitive situations is right amazingly often.
- If you think you will bid over their contract later then it's usually better to bid to that level straight away and put maximum pressure on the opponents will now have to guess.
- Consider the vulnerability and your shape when deciding whether to bid. But a 6-4 or 7-4 hand has a lot of trick taking power so it is often worth bidding.
- When the opponents compete in the bidding, it's reasonable to allow yourself to be pushed one level higher than you'd normally have bid but not two levels.
- Consider what honour cards the defenders have played to a trick often you can work out the whole layout of the suit just from the one trick!

More advanced

How can West as declarer "read" the position of the heart honours if trick one goes low to the Ace and ruff? Like this:

- a) it's normal convention for defenders to play the cheapest card they need to. So if South had ♥AK he'd play the ♥A at trick 1 not the ♥A. Hence North has ♥K.
- b) in a suit contract its normal to lead low from one honour but with two honours to lead top of that sequence. So if North had ♥KQ he'd have led the king. We already know he has the ♥K from South's ♥A at trick 1. Hence South has the ♥Q.

Of course a separate inference available to West straight away in a suit contract is that South has ♥A - because North would never underlead it.

You might think the defence will not play the cards this way to allow declarer to draw these inferences? Occasionally that's true but most of the time it's more important for defenders to be honest and help each other - especially early in the hand. They are at a disadvantage because they can't see each other's hands. So their cards early on are usually pretty reliable.

How might West try to make 11 tricks in hearts on a spade lead? He can attempt a partial elimination. The play goes spade to the AQ, $\forall A$ (finding out they are 0-3), AA, club ruff to hand, AA discarding a club, spade ruff in dummy and club ruff in hand (having seen West show out of hearts there is no danger of an overruff). Now cash $\forall Q$ leaving $\forall K$ in dummy

and leaving one trump with East. Then lead a low diamond. What can the defence do? If West wins ♦K and plays another declarer ducks. East can't overtake as that would set up dummy's ♦Q. Now West is stuck on lead holding only black cards. He has to give a ruff and discard so declarer can ruff with ♥K in dummy and discard his last diamond from hand. When he gets back to hand he can draw East's final trump.

What if West plays \bullet J instead of \bullet K? As long as declarer ducks it's no better. West can cash \bullet K next but is then in the same position. Of course this is a lucky layout but it costs nothing to try - declarer normally has 3 diamond losers anyway! Note it's the spade lead that helps this. Without that, declarer would need to ruff two spades in dummy and 3 clubs in hand to eliminate those suits.

BUT (!) there's a catch in all this – have you spotted the error in my analysis above? It's because spades are 7-2. If declarer ruffs his 3rd spade low, East can overruff with his ♥10. If instead declarer ruffs high, he can complete the elimination of the black suits but the later end play on West is now no longer effective. He can exit a spade and with the ♥K no longer in dummy, East can overruff dummy and declarer can't effectively discard his 3rd diamond after all.

Nevertheless, even though it doesn't work on this hand an advanced declarer should always bear in mind the possibility of eliminating suits to limit what the defenders can safely exit when on lead. Even if it doesn't gain a trick directly, it may force the defence to play another suit and reveal what cards they hold there. That in turn help declarer get a key decision right elsewhere.

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