



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.

Competitive bidding (and how it might vary if partner's a passed hand)

City and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 16th January 2023

15		♠ JT532	Dlr: S
		♥ 6	Vul: N-S
		♦ Q973	
		♣ AT5	
♠ K86	♠ 97	7	
♥ AKJ8432	♥ QT	11	10
♦ 6	♦ K852	12	
♣ 93	♣ KQ862		
		♠ NT	
♠ AQ4	♠ 3	2	-
♥ 975	♥ 3	2	-
♦ AJT4	♦ 3	1	-
♣ J74	♣ 3	1	-

On board 15 last week neither side could strictly make game but at least one pair each way was allowed to.

South will usually open 1♦ and West has a choice about how many hearts to overcall. Had partner been a passed hand, I'd probably jump straight to 4♥. Here, however, partner hasn't yet had a chance to speak so I'd probably start with 1♥ just in case partner has a big hand and we have slam available.

4♥ could well end the auction but over 1♥ North has a fairly easy 1♠ bid (see advanced section for more on this sequence). Now East would like to tell his partner he has some values and he has a convenient way of doing so – double.

This is a “competitive” double which applies after 3 suits have been bid around the table. It typically shows some values, tolerance for partner's suit but not direct support (so usually a doubleton – a hand with direct support would just raise) and the 4th suit (but not strong enough to bid that 4th suit directly as that would show a stronger hand). It's really just another variation of a takeout double – there is no point playing double of 1♠ as penalties firstly because it's usually forcing so the opponents won't stay there; secondly because it's far more frequent that you have a hand like East's that wants to compete but doesn't have an obvious bid to make.

South might raise spades (especially if North has shown 5) and North South may compete up to 3♠ but as soon as West hears about any sort of heart tolerance opposite, I'd be bidding 4♥.

In practice a few pairs reached game level contracts but most played either 3♥ or 3♠, in both cases usually making at least 9 tricks.

It's actually very hard for North South to stop 4♥ making. If North leads a spade (which looks pretty normal if they have bid and raised the suit) then declarer will be able to ruff a spade in dummy. That will give him 10 tricks (♠K, ♠ ruff in dummy, 7 hearts and eventually 1 club). To beat 4♥ the defence have to lead a trump (or cash one diamond and switch to a trump) and then play a 2nd trump when they win the ♠A. That will stop declarer being able to ruff any spades in dummy. Even if the defence manage that, they could still go wrong – see advanced section for more.

The play in spades for North South could also get delicate as well. The most likely start by the defence is two rounds of hearts which declarer ruffs. He will naturally try the spade finesse but when that loses and another heart comes back from West things get quite nasty. Declarer must ruff high to stop East scoring his ♠9 so, not only does that reduce him to 3 trumps, he may have to finish drawing trumps in dummy and will need to return to hand with ♣A. He will also then have no trumps left himself so losing a trick to West would be disastrous as West could cash all his long hearts! Fortunately for declarer the diamond finesse works so he can score 4 diamonds to go with 1 club and 4 spades to make 9 tricks in 3♠. However, the diamond suit has to be played carefully to achieve this – see advanced section for how.

Key points to note

- Whether partner is a passed hand is important when deciding what level to bid. If he can still have a strong hand, pre-empting high is riskier as you might make it harder to reach your own slam should partner have a big hand.
- Competitive doubles are useful to show a hand that has some values but no obvious bid.
- After 1 minor, 1 heart it's useful to play double as 4 spades and 1♠ as 5+.
- If declarer has winners available for discards, the defence need to cash their tricks – and do so in the right order.
- Watch your entries carefully if you need to take a repeated finesse in a suit. You may need to keep a higher card in your own hand to retain the lead to finesse again.

More advanced

Firstly in the auction, after the auction 1 minor, 1 heart overcall many pairs play that a bid of 1♠ shows at least 5 spades and a double shows exactly 4 spades (rather like a double of 1 minor, 1 spade would show 4 hearts). It's useful to distinguish the spade length and, on a hand like this one, it enables South to directly raise spades knowing partner has at least 5. Obviously if you do have that bidding sequence then you don't need to play support doubles from South to show 3 as South already knows how many spades North has. In an uncontested bidding sequence North's 1♠ is 4+ spades so it's useful for South to tell North if he has 3 spades.

There are other bidding methods in use here – for example I've seen a bid of 1♠ used to show 4 plus spades and double deny 4 spades. This can be useful on a hand without 4 spades and without a heart stopper but with a few values that wants to make a bid but doesn't really have anything to say otherwise. Like all bidding methods, it's a trade-off between what you think will come up more often or be harder to bid when it does.

Even if the defence did manage to lead and continue hearts, North still needs to be careful. When West leads a low club towards dummy if he takes his ♣A the defence must now immediately cash their spade winner and their diamond trick. If they go wrong and try to cash two diamonds (say), declarer can ruff and play two more rounds of clubs to discard his spade loser on dummy's ♣Q.

On this hand North could duck the ♣A and win the 2nd round. That cuts off the club winner in dummy so there's no problem and declarer will end up losing 2 spades and a trick in each minor. But what if West's minors had been the other way around (i.e. 2 diamonds and 1 club)? Now North would need to win the 1st round of clubs and cash 2 diamonds. He should get it right, however, if he remembers the auction. Partner opened 1♦. Hence it's not possible for declarer to be 2-1 in the minors as that would make partner 3-4 and he'd have opened 1♣ not 1♦.

When North is declaring spades, he is likely to be forced to ruff 2 hearts which means he will have no trumps left after he draws the opponents' trumps. Because he had to ruff the 3rd heart with the ♠10 in hand, he will probably be in dummy after drawing trumps. He now needs to cross to hand with ♣A and must then play diamonds for 4 tricks. That obviously requires the finesse to work but he also needs to be careful with his entries. Low to the ♦J is no good as, even if it wins, he won't be able to get back to North to repeat the finesse. Running ♦Q is no good either. It will win but on the 2nd round South has ♦AJ10 remaining and declarer will be forced to win in that hand. What he needs to do is run the ♦9 on the 1st round. When that holds he can next run the ♦Q and remain in the North hand once more to take the finesse a 3rd time. This sort of position more commonly happens in no-trumps where declarer can't afford to use an entry to come back and repeat a finesse because that entry might be his last stopper in the suit.

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)