



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.

Defence – When to go passive and what card to switch to

City and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 23rd January 2023

9		♠ A	Dir: N	
		♥ Q652	Vul: E-W	
		♦ QJT84		
		♣ K54		
♠ J7	♠ T6543	12		
♥ A43	♥ KJ87	15 7		
♦ A652	♦ K	6		
♣ AQT6	♣ 987			
		♠ KQ982		
		♥ T9		
		♦ 973		
		♣ J32		
			♠ ♦ ♥ NT	
			N - - - -	
			S - - - -	
			E 3 1 3 2 3	
			W 4 1 3 2 3	

Board 9 last week was a hand where some patience was required by the defenders when taking their tricks. Going "passive" in the defence at the right time can be worth lots of tricks. Many defenders cash honours too quickly and all that does is set up tricks for declarer that he shouldn't make. Let's have a look.

The normal start to the auction will be 1♦ P 1♠. West has the best hand at the table and now might consider bidding. He has two reasonable bids although both have a flaw.

1NT is one option. Here it's like an immediate 1NT overcall showing 15-18 balanced. Ideally he'd have a stop in both the suits the opponents have bid and of

course here he doesn't have a spade stop. Nevertheless it's still the most descriptive bid (especially with the spades being ♠Jx – it doesn't need much from partner to help provide a stop). 1NT could well win the auction here. North is minimum and may pass, East will no longer want to transfer to spades after South has bid the suit so he may also pass (it would be risky to try stayman since, if partner doesn't respond 2♥, he doesn't really have anywhere to go).

Another option for West is double. The flaw this time is it implies 4 hearts that he doesn't have. It will work OK when partner has 5 hearts but on quite a few of those hands partner may have already overcalled 1♥. So there's a good chance it will propel his side to a 4-3 heart fit. Today that works OK but there will be plenty of times when it doesn't – especially if partner doesn't have anything in diamonds (the defence will lead diamonds and may later then be able to force partner to trump from his 4 card trump holding and lose control).

A third option is pass and hope the opponents get into trouble. I suspect several Wests did this because quite a few Norths played in 1NT. That's a reasonable rebid for North after 1♠. Especially at matchpoint pairs where it could score much better than 2♦. After 1♦ P 1♠ P 1NT no-one would have any reason to bid again (but had West doubled then I would have bid 2♥ as East).

Let's look first at the play and defence to 1NT from North. If the defence get it right the contract is in big trouble! Most Easts led the ♥7. It's certainly reasonable not to lead a spade since South has bid them. But there's a good case to go passive with a club lead. Playing matchpoint pairs (i.e. most club duplicate sessions) you tend to want not to give away cheap tricks and a heart lead has a greater risk of that. Also East knows things aren't sitting well for declarer. Neither spades nor diamonds are breaking and he will probably expect to score his ♦K via a losing finesse. I'd have tried the ♣8 lead (the middle card from 3 low often referred to as MUD – "Middle Up Down").

The defence are still in good shape after a heart lead though. West will win ♥A and should return the ♥4 to East's ♥J. Now is a key moment. Some Easts probably cashed the ♥K at this point but that just sets up declarer's ♥Q. But East can work out it's likely to be right to go passive and exit a club. See advanced section for how. If East does switch to clubs West should insert the 10 (or run partner's 9) to force declarer's ♣K and retain communication with his partner. He doesn't want to win ♣A as he can't then lead the suit effectively again. How does he know not to play the ♣A? Because East should switch to the ♣9. Generally when we switch suits in the middle of the hand we lead a low one to imply we have something in the suit and a high one to say we don't. Once declarer has won the ♣K he will no doubt cash the ♠A but he can't reach

dummy's ♠KQ so will have to start on diamonds. But East wins ♦K and leads another club for West to cash that suit. Then, if East has refrained from cashing the ♥K earlier, West can now put through a heart for 2 more tricks. And there's still the ♦A to come! 9 tricks for the defence (4 hearts, 2 diamonds and 3 clubs. 1NT NS 3 off for EW+150). One pair achieved this – well done.

Let's look now at the East West pairs who played in 2♥. I imagine West made a takeout double after 1♦ P 1♠ so East naturally bids his 4 card heart suit. Most Souths led the ♦9 against that and most declarers seem to have gone off. However they can effectively play the same way as described above. Win ♦K then lead a heart to dummy and take a heart finesse. At this point run the ♣9 (just like an East should in defence). As declarer East can only see the West cards so he is effectively taking a double finesse hoping that South has at least one of the ♣K and ♣J.

North wins ♣K and can cash a spade but can't reach his partner's hand so will presumably next lead another diamond. Now declarer wins in dummy (pitching a spade) and takes a 2nd heart finesse to complete drawing trumps. Then he can cash his clubs to end up with the same 9 tricks mentioned above. This time that would be worth +140.

Finally, although no-one seems to have played here, what might happen if West plays 1NT? North has a clear ♦Q lead and the play should be quite similar again. Win in dummy but this time declarer might immediately run the ♣9 (hearts are not trumps so there's no urgency to play them). After that the play should be much the same. North can get his diamonds set up but not before declarer has 9 tricks.

Key points to note

- Playing pairs you should tend more towards passive than active leads. Especially so when you know suits aren't going to break for declarer. You don't want to give a cheap trick away.
- When returning the suit partner led, play your 4th highest from an original holding of more than 4, play high from a remaining doubleton (i.e. an original holding of ♥xx).
- When switching suits as a defender mid-hand, lead a low one to show interest in the suit, lead a high one to deny interest in the suit (either because you have nothing in it or because you want partner to switch to something else if he gets in).
- Watching the pips carefully can help identify what the possible combinations of the suit are around the table. Often you can work it out fully. If not the bidding may help determine which is more likely.

More advanced

Defending 1NT from North, after a heart lead and heart back to the ♥J how can East work out not to cash the ♥K? One thing is to look very closely at the pips played. Trick 1 is likely to be ♥7,9,A,2. Trick 2 is likely to be ♥4,5,J,10. East should note that the ♥3 has not been seen yet. Given the convention is to return original 4th highest from a holding of 4, and top of a remaining doubleton from 3, what are the possible combinations of hearts round the table? If partner started with 4 hearts he would return his original 4th highest. The only way the ♥4 could be a 4th highest is if he started with AQ64 or possibly AQ643. The former would give declarer ♥532 and for him to have concealed the ♥3. Possible but unlikely. Partner having a 5 card suit is also extremely unlikely. Why? Because East knows partner has quite a few points (declarer is 11-14, dummy is 6 and he has only 7). Surely with a 5 card heart suit West would have overcalled 2♥? Even with 4 hearts he might have made a takeout double after south's 1♠ bid. Further, holding AQxx West might have chosen to put in the ♥Q at trick 1. If the ♥K is over him it will score anyway, if it's not then he knows his partner has ♥K.

So all that should point East to working out West's holding is most likely to be ♥A43. With the 109 falling in dummy it means his remaining K7 sit over declarer's Q6 and to play the suit again will give declarer a trick he's not entitled to. Therefore he should switch. Looking at dummy, clubs look a lot more attractive than spades!

I said when you switch suits mid-hand you generally play low to encourage the suit and high to discourage it. It's important to appreciate you don't always have to tell the truth! Most of the time when you switch to a high card you are doing so because you genuinely have nothing in the suit and you don't want partner to return it. But occasionally you might have something in the suit but you want partner to switch to something else. So you might deliberately lie and lead a high card to try and steer partner towards the switch you want. The aim is to get partner to do what you know is right for the defence. Sometimes there are different ways to achieve that!

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