



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.

Trying to take the maximum number of tricks at pairs

City and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 9th January 2023

8		♠ A6	Dlr: W
		♥ 653	Vul: Nil
		♦ A73	
		♣ A9753	
♠ 92	♠ QT8754	12	
♥ K92	♥ Q7	8	5
♦ QJT42	♦ 865	15	
♣ QT4	♣ J8		
♠ KJ3			
♥ AJT84			
♦ K9			
♣ K62			

On board 8 last week NS could make a game quite easily. But the number of tricks is very important at pairs. 10 is easy, 11 is what should happen and 12 is possible for an advanced declarer if the defence slip up. Let's see.

Starting with the auction, it will normally begin Pass 1♣ to East. He may well bid 2♠ (weak jump overcall) now. This certainly has risk (partner has already passed so East knows his side is outgunned). On the other hand it takes a lot of bidding space away and may make it hard for North South to find their best contract. Besides, it may not be easy for them to penalise 2♠ even when it's right to do so. At favourable vulnerability it would be clear (you can afford to be 3 off and -500 will still score better than conceding game to the opponents) but at equal

vulnerability it's more marginal. East has a lot of losers and this time -500 will score worse than any game the opponents can make.

In practice South might be tempted to try and take a penalty over 2♠ but most people play double as takeout here so he'd have to pass and hope partner reopens with a double. That's far too risky here when he knows his side has game values (he'd look very silly if partner passed 2♠ out!). So in practice his best bid is 3♥ (game forcing with at least 5 hearts). This doesn't preclude playing in 3NT because if North can't raise hearts he can bid 3♠ to ask for a stopper. On this hand North has an easy raise to 4♥ though (aces tend to be good for suit play). If West does raise to 3♠ and North passes South can still bid 3NT on the next round.

What about the play in hearts? If partner did bid 2♠ West has no reason to lead anything other than ♠9 which declarer will run to his hand and win the ♠J or win the ♠Q with the ♠K. He will obviously now want to start drawing trumps. Some players probably played ♥A and another and at teams that's quite reasonable (you will most likely lose 2 hearts and a club but your game is still safe). But at pairs it's worth trying for more. Declarer can cross to ♦A (see advanced section for why it's better to play to the ♦A and not the ♣A) and lead a heart to the J and K. West may well play a 2nd spade now as it's a safe exit to dummy. Now declarer leads a 2nd heart and when the Q pops up declarer now has 11 tricks quite easily (3 spades, 4 hearts and AK of both minors).

Today the pairs who just bid 3NT did well because no-trumps makes the same number of tricks as hearts and, crucially at pairs, scores 10 points more! So the pairs who scored 460 got a top. This happens because there's no need to ruff a spade in dummy and North South have double stoppers in each of the other suits. But it's hard to diagnose and I'd probably have settled for 4♥.

There is, however, a chance for 12 tricks. The most important card in East's hand turns out to be the ♦8! See advanced section for what I mean.

Key points to note

- Weak jump overcalls can be a useful pre-emptive weapon (especially in spades as they take a lot of bidding spade away from the opponents).
- But they still have risk, especially at equal vulnerability since a penalty of 500 is too much. East should be wary here as he has 9 losers.
- Over pre-empts, there's often still room to look for no-trump and major suit games.
- Playing off long trumps can often cause the defence impossible discard problems. Cards may be promoted into winners. It costs nothing to try this even if declarer doesn't really know how that's happened!
- More advanced declarers should consider the possibility of squeezing a defender. To do that requires some study and knowledge about how basic squeeze positions work.

More advanced

I said declarer should cross to dummy with $\spadesuit A$ not $\clubsuit A$. There are two reasons for this:

- a) he has 8 clubs and only 5 diamonds so there's more risk of a club ruff when West wins a trump. If, unluckily, spades were 1-7, now East could give West a spade ruff as well and declarer might find himself losing 3 tricks.
- b) the $\clubsuit A$ may be an important entry for later (see below).

I also said the most important card in East's hand is the $\spadesuit 8$. This is actually the only thing that stops declarer making 12 tricks! Let's see why. Suppose the play went as I described earlier (\spadesuit lead won in hand, \spadesuit to A, \heartsuit finesse losing, \spadesuit to A, 2nd \heartsuit). After declarer completes drawing trumps he could continue to cash his trump winners and the $\spadesuit K$. East has to make 3 discards on the long trumps and they all need to be spades. If he lets go of one of his "useless" diamonds watch what happens. Declarer discards 3 clubs from dummy and hangs onto the $\spadesuit 7$. He comes down to this position:

Dummy. $\spadesuit 7$ $\clubsuit A97$.

West. $\spadesuit Q$ $\clubsuit Q104$

Declarer. $\heartsuit 4$ $\clubsuit K62$.

What can West discard when declarer leads $\heartsuit 4$ and discards $\clubsuit 7$ from dummy? He needs to keep the $\spadesuit Q$ to stop the $\spadesuit 7$ becoming a winner in dummy. Therefore he will most likely discard a club. But now both West and East only have two clubs so when declarer plays $\clubsuit A$, $\clubsuit K$ he will find his $\clubsuit 6$ has become a winner! West has been "squeezed" in the minors and couldn't make any discard without giving away a trick.

West started with 3 clubs so only he could stop the $\clubsuit 6$ becoming a winner. To do that he needed to cling onto all 3 of his clubs and throw his $\spadesuit Q$ away. That's why East's $\spadesuit 8$ is crucial. He needs to keep it so he can beat the $\spadesuit 7$ in dummy! Now West can afford to discard the $\spadesuit Q$ and he is not squeezed.

It's important to appreciate declarer may well not know his $\clubsuit 6$ has become a winner. The point is it costs him nothing to play this way in case something good happens! Playing off long trumps can often cause the defence a lot of problems. Sometimes they will make a mistake discarding, sometimes there may be nothing they can do as they will have been genuinely squeezed. Or, as here, one defender may make a seemingly innocent discard which then causes his partner to be squeezed later.

Note that a squeeze requires a few things to operate:

- a) at least one threat (a card that would become a winner if the opponents discard in that suit). Here that's the $\spadesuit 7$ and $\clubsuit 6$. So it's important for declarer to discard clubs from dummy and hang onto that $\spadesuit 7$.
- b) an entry (this is why it's important to leave the $\clubsuit A$ in dummy - if the defence keep their clubs and discard their diamonds then the $\spadesuit 7$ will be a winner. But that's only useful if declarer can still get to it!)

- c) no free discard (that usually means declarer needs all the rest of the tricks - otherwise West would have a spare card somewhere that he could discard).

Be aware that knowledge of these sort of positions is very advanced stuff and you can play bridge perfectly happily and extremely well without ever worrying about anything here! Those interested can look at some books on squeeze play. It's certainly satisfying to bring something like that off at the table.

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)