



Weekly Wisdom

The Sydney Bridge Centre mini lesson

The Sydney Bridge Centre runs a morning session on Monday in both venues in City and Canada Bay. They play the same hands and we run inter-venue competitions from time to time. Julian Foster (many times NSW representative) will be analysing an interesting hand from each Monday morning session. 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.

Combining chances in the play, evaluating your contract in pairs and playing accordingly.

City and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 6th February 2023

24	♠ AK7	Dir: W
	♥ 82	Vul: Nil
	♦ 64	
	♣ K97654	
♠ JT652	♠ Q83	10
♥ K764	♥ A953	6 9
♦ 75	♦ QT9	15
♣ Q8	♣ J32	
	♠ 94	
	♥ QJT	
	♦ AKJ832	
	♣ AT	

On board 24 last week despite holding a combined 25 points only 2 pairs out of a combined 22 tables across the City and CBC sessions reached game. Let's see what might have gone wrong.

West will normally pass unless he has a weak opening bid available that shows both majors. North might consider opening - he has 10 points and a 6 card suit but there's no shortage and the quality of his clubs isn't very good so I'd pass. I presume that's what everyone did since there's no way South will stay out of game if North does open!

East might be tempted to make things harder with a light 3rd seat opening (see advanced section for more on this) but, in practice, doesn't have a clear choice so I suspect most passed. South of course has an easy 1♦ opening. Assuming West doesn't overcall 1♠ North now has to respond. Playing a 2 over 1 game forcing system North will have to respond 1NT but otherwise he can bid 2♣. This is natural and at the 2 level shows 10+ points (obviously cannot be much more than this here give he couldn't open the bidding).

At this point South should be the one driving to game. He has 15 and he knows his partner has 10-11. A jump to 3♦ at this point is game forcing because he's showing extras beyond a minimum opening. Perhaps some players only bid 2♦? Perhaps some jumped to 3♦ but North passed?

Over a 1NT response it's not as easy. This is one of the downsides of the 2 over 1 system - the 1NT response becomes much wider range. From South's perspective North could have anything from 5-11. Nevertheless, he still has a nice hand with a good diamond suit so he should jump to 3♦. This time North is the one who should bid onto game as he knows partner is 15+ and he has 10 (maximum for the range he's previously shown).

In both cases after South jumps to 3♦ what should North do? The best bid is 3♠. This shows values in spades and a stopper for no-trumps. Now South, holding a heart stopper himself, can bid 3NT. Note there isn't much risk from North's perspective of having South raise spades. Why not? Because South is very unlikely to hold 4 spades - if he did he could have rebid 2♠ rather than jump to 3♦.

Turning now to the play I'll look first at diamonds since that's what most pairs did play in. After a spade lead (most common and perfectly reasonable) declarer wins ♠A. The simple line is to take a trump finesse, draw trumps and then establish the clubs (A,K and a ruff in hand). Return to ♠K and run the rest of the clubs discarding hearts. That will actually be all 13 tricks (♠AK, 6 diamonds and 5 clubs)! But there is a catch with this line. What if the diamond finesse loses and the defence return another spade? That takes out the ♠K in dummy before the clubs are set up. Declarer would then have to lose 2 hearts and be held to 10 tricks. There's a way of combining these chances though - see advanced section.

The play in no-trumps also revolves around entries on a spade lead. It might seem intuitive to play on diamonds immediately but in fact declarer should win ♠A and immediately play clubs. Why play on clubs first? Because it gives two chances instead of one. If clubs are 3-2 he can knock out the last one and now is safe for at least 9 tricks (2 spades, 2 top diamonds and 5 clubs). He doesn't then need to worry about whether the diamond finesse is working or not. If the clubs prove to be 4-1

declarer gives up on those and takes his other chance which is to finesse the ♦J and hope diamonds are 3-2. This also works today and he makes 6 diamonds and his contract easily. The key is that the chance in clubs requires losing a trick first while the chance in diamonds does not. The opportunity to lose a trick safely is now while declarer still has a spade stop. If declarer tries the diamond finesse immediately and it loses the defence will knock out his other spade and then he has no opportunity to try clubs at all. He is then reliant on diamonds playing for 5 tricks along with ♠AK and ♣AK.

Key points to note

- Always keep in mind if you are minimum or maximum for what you've already shown in the auction. When you know the partnership has game values it's your responsibility to force the bidding.
- Opening light in 3rd seat can be very effective but it's important to disclose your agreements to the opponents and for partner to bid normally over it.
- When declaring try to look for more than one chance and then play so that if one doesn't work you still have time to try another.
- At pairs you are in a contract you don't think the field will be in, you may want to adjust your play a bit. Play safely if in a better contract than the field. Perhaps play slightly against the odds if in a worse contract.

More advanced

Opening light in 3rd seat has become increasingly common. It's tactically sound because 3rd seat already knows it's the opponent's hand so opening makes it much harder for them to find their own contract. It's not without risk of course - how does your partner know you aren't the one with the really big hand? Partner therefore has to respond normally.

It can also cause some angst because it's important to describe to the opponents what your style is here - many pairs don't do this and the opponents are then entitled to assume the bid is normal. Also, opening extremely light is making a bid that is known as a "psyche" - a gross distortion of your strength or shape. A psyche is a perfectly legitimate tactic at bridge (even though you may hear many players claim otherwise!). But what is NOT legitimate is for the other hand to bid abnormally to take into account that their partner could have psyched.

In diamonds declarer might consider not taking the diamond finesse and cashing the ♦AK. If the ♦Q drops, he draws the last trump, sets up the clubs and makes 13 tricks. If it doesn't he now sets the clubs up and loses to the ♦Q while he still has the ♠K in dummy. The defence should at this point cash their hearts of course but, if they don't, he'll still make 12 tricks.

There's another more advanced reason declarer might try this line too. When he sees dummy he will no doubt be disappointed as it looks like his side have missed game and he's stuck playing in 2♦ or 3♦. If he judges that the rest of the pairs will be in 3NT then he has no chance of beating their score if 3NT makes. So his only chance of beating those pairs is if 3NT is not making (or not making on normal play). The normal play in diamonds is to finesse (it's the better odds) which is no doubt what many players in 3NT will do (even though we saw earlier that it's safer to play on clubs first). Therefore, this is when you might consider deliberately playing against the odds and cashing ♦AK instead of finessing. Effectively declarer is hoping that the diamond finesse is NOT working so that pairs in 3NT might go off (which they will if the defence led hearts and they are 5-3). By deliberately doing something those pairs won't do he gains when West has ♦Qx. This gives him a chance of some matchpoints. If his line fails and 3NT was making (i.e. the ♦Q was onside anyway) then he hasn't lost much as he was getting a bad score anyway.

Note this depends entirely on declarer's judgement about what his contract is like compared to the rest of the field. If he thinks he is in the normal contract he should just try to make the most tricks. But if he's in a bad contract he should try to give himself a chance of some matchpoints by playing for a position that's different to the field.

There's an opposite side to this as well. If you are in a really good contract that you don't think the field will reach then you should play safely to try and make it whenever possible. Say you reach a good 6 minor slam that you think most pairs won't reach. Risking an overtrick now is silly because just making the slam will be a huge score.

This kind of thinking is unique to matchpoint pairs and it's one of the things that, in my opinion, makes it a much better game than teams (but also a harder one!). There are so many more dimensions to it.

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)