



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.

Don't bid your hand twice!

City and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 20th February 2023

22	♠ 84 ♥ QT94 ♦ A98 ♣ AKJ2	Dir: E Vul: E-W
♠ K76 ♥ AK8753 ♦ KQ ♣ 98	♠ JT93 ♥ 2 ♦ 6543 ♣ T764	14 15 1 10
♠ AQ52 ♥ J6 ♦ JT72 ♣ Q53	♠ NT ♥ NT ♦ NT ♣ NT	3 3 1 1 3 3 3 1 1 3 - - - - - - - - - -

Board 22 last week was a potential trap for East West with several pairs playing in hearts going several off.

The auction will normally start Pass Pass 1♥. North doesn't have quite enough to overcall 1NT (which would usually be 15-18) so he should pass as of course will East. A few tables passed out 1♥ but at this point South should reopen with a takeout double. He's about as maximum as he can be for his original pass and he has a suitable takeout shape. Acting in the pass out position is sometimes called “protection” and this hand is a good example of that. You are “protecting” your side's ability to make a contract because, as here, your partner may have had to

pass with quite a reasonable hand. So it's quite reasonable to re-open with a weaker hand than usual - you are effectively bidding some of partner's hand for them. Even if I wasn't a passed hand originally I would still reopen with a double. In fact I'd also do so with a couple of points fewer. The other hand should, however, take that into account and mentally deduct a little from their hand when bidding on.

This is the point that I suspect some Wests made an error and bid 2♥. This is extremely dangerous for several reasons:

- partner has already passed your opening bid so he is known to have very little;
- you have no guarantee of a heart fit;
- your right hand opponent has made a takeout double so he is fairly short in hearts which means your left hand opponent is very likely to have them sitting over you;
- your heart suit quality isn't great;
- you are vulnerable so even 1 off doubled or 2 off undoubled will score -200 which will be bad.

Bidding 2♥ here is an example of a common error where a player effectively bids their hand twice. You've already shown an opening bid with hearts when you open 1♥ – yes you are certainly a little better than you might be but not significantly so.

What should North do if West does bid 2♥? There's a very good case to double. This one is usually penalties (you couldn't bid over 1♥ originally so you can't suddenly have a takeout double now - besides partner has already made a takeout double anyway). There is, however, another possible meaning for double - see advanced section.

The North South pairs who did double 2♥ (or in one case 3♥) scored extremely well on this hand usually taking a penalty of at least +500 which outscores what they could score in 3NT anyway.

What about if West passes? Now I'd probably jump to 3NT as North. You can't have a stronger balanced hand (that would have already overcalled 1NT). You might consider just bidding 2NT to allow, as I said above, for partner being light for their reopening double. Here South should raise that to 3NT anyway as he too is maximum for what he has shown so far. It's also worth bidding more aggressively in situations where one opponent has opened and the other has passed as you can often make game with fewer values than usual - see advanced section for why.

If East West do end up playing in hearts they should make 6 tricks. North has an easy club lead and the defence should just play more clubs forcing declarer to ruff. The defence will definitely take 2 clubs, 2 hearts and ♦A. As long as they just keep throwing declarer back in his own hand he will have to lead away from his ♠K so will lose 2 spades as well. It would be a mistake for the defence to play spades themselves as that is effectively allowing declarer to lead up to his ♠K when he doesn't have an entry to dummy to do that himself.

In fact declarer has to be careful not to lose control. If he makes the mistake of playing 3 rounds of trumps himself he will only make 5 tricks. He will run out of trumps before he has any spade tricks set up so the defence will then score some diamonds too. Declarer needs to cash ♥AK but then leave North's winning trumps out and start playing spades.

3NT by North will make easily on a heart lead. West cannot do better than play 3 rounds of hearts. That gives declarer 1 spade, 2 hearts, 1 diamond and 4 clubs immediately. That's 8 tricks and as soon as he leads diamonds the queen will appear and he can quickly set up more diamonds to end up with 10 tricks.

It's a bit more challenging on ♠J lead though. Declarer is at risk of losing 2 spades, ♥AK and a diamond. But 9 tricks can still be made - see advanced section for how.

Key points to note

- After a 1 level opening bid is passed round to you, don't be afraid to reopen quite light. Your side can easily still be making a contract (sometimes even game). You are protecting your partner who may have had to pass on quite a decent hand.
- Be very wary of bidding a 2nd time yourself if partner has passed your opening - you need a very good hand to do this safely. Don't bid your hand twice - you risk a large penalty!
- When dummy has almost nothing the defence should try to keep throwing declarer back into his own hand. Don't take finesses for him that he can't otherwise reach dummy to take.
- When one opponent has passed his partner's opening bid all the strength is known to be in one hand. This means game will frequently make on fewer points than usual (22-23 points rather than the more usual 25-26).

More advanced

When North passes over 1♥ and doubles 2♥ on the next round, many pairs play that as penalty. It is also possible to play it as "responsive" - that's basically showing a hand with values but no clear direction. Usually it would have 3 of the other major (with 4 you'd just bid that major). That would mean a hand with a penalty of hearts has to pass again and expect partner to re-open again. Not ideal - if South has already re-opened with a double once, it's hard to see him wanting to do so a 2nd time! The advantage of responsive doubles is allowing you to find your best fit more effectively (they are also more frequent than penalty double hands) but they do make it harder to penalise the opponents when they go wrong. This situation is definitely worth discussing with your regular partner.

I'd be jumping to 3NT as North if West passes. Trying to take a penalty of 1♥ is a bit much. Even if partner has reopened with as few as 8 or 9 points it's frequently the case that game makes with fewer points than usual when the opponents have opened and passed. That's because virtually all the strength is known to be in one hand so declarer tends to know which finesses are likely to work and it also means the same defender will be getting on lead and having to lead away from his high cards, often having to give tricks away.

This in fact is what happens in 3NT on ♠J lead. How should North play 3NT then? He needs to win the ♠A immediately. If he ducks or takes the finesse he will go down as he will lose 2 spades, ♥AK and ♦A. When he wins ♠A though he just sets about hearts. West gets in and cannot effectively attack spades without giving the ♠Q a trick. He also doesn't have the 4th spade so, even if he sets East's ♠10 up the defence can never get East in to cash it. The best they can do is take ♠K, ♥AK and ♦A. This play by declarer is quite findable after the auction here because the opening bid marks pretty much all the points with West. Therefore the finesse is known to be very unlikely to work, and it's also very unlikely East can get in to lead a spade through again.

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)