



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.

Competitive bidding and defending from different viewpoints

City and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 27th February 2023

14		♠ QT2	Dir: E
		♥ 9	Vul: Nil
		♦ AJ53	
		♣ AJ976	
♠ K953	♠ A876	12	
♥ AQJ62	♥ K873	10	10
♦ T94	♦ 862	8	
♣ T	♣ K4		
	♠ J4	♠ NT	
	♥ T54	N 3 2 - -	
	♦ KQ7	S 3 2 - -	
	♣ Q8532	E - - 2 2 2	
		W - - 2 2 2	

Board 14 last week was a typical partscore hand which could see both sides competing in the bidding. Winning the auction also had some advantage because it wasn't easy for either defending side to find the right plays needed to defeat the contract.

Looking first at the auction East and South will both pass but West should definitely open 1♥ in third seat. It's very attractive to do this as it pinpoints a good lead for partner and gets his side into the auction first. As North I would now make a takeout double. Yes that's not perfect because I only have 3 spades and partner would usually expect 4. But I have too much to pass and overcalling 2♣ could be

dangerous because I only have 5 clubs and their quality isn't that great. Besides, doubling keeps open more possible places to play and if partner has a few values with 5 spades it will put our side in a good position to outbid heart contracts from East/West.

At this point East should obviously raise hearts. Most pairs these days play immediate raises after a double as pre-emptive in nature. A bid of 2NT can be used to show a good raise. Given East is already a passed hand, he could also use a convention known as Drury. This would involve bidding 2♣ or 2♦ to show a good heart raise. See advanced section for more details about why this might be useful.

Whatever East does he should be prepared to compete to at least 3♥ since his hand is about as strong as it could be for his initial pass and, assuming the pairs is playing 5 cards majors, he knows there is at least a 9 card heart fit.

If East doesn't raise immediately to 3♥ then South will be able to bid 3♣. He too will want to compete opposite a takeout double from his partner as his hand is looking very suitable:

- All his values are in suits partner has implied
- He has 3 small hearts opposite what is quite likely to be a singleton in partner's hand so he should be able to trump his heart losers in partner's hand.

The tricky decision will be whether to go as far as 4♣ over the opponent's 3♥. In theory that's the wrong decision here because both 3♥ and 4♣ should go off according to the Deep Finesse analysis. But of course that's not so easy to do in the real world as we'll see shortly! Given the nil all vulnerability I would be very tempted to go to 4♣.

Let's now look at the defence. First to a heart contract by West. North doesn't have an attractive lead against that. If his partner has been able to bid clubs in the auction he may well start with the ♠A. That doesn't do any immediate harm but he now needs to switch to a diamond otherwise one of declarer's diamond losers will be discarded on ♣K. That's not easy to find from the North hand and quite a few pairs allowed 3♥ to make. Pairs with some good defensive signalling agreements may be able to solve this though – see advanced section.

If North South manage to cash their 3 diamonds they should defeat 3♥ because now the only thing declarer can discard on the ♠K is his 4th spade which isn't any use to him – he will still lose a spade (assuming of course North keeps hold of all 3 of his spades).

Looking next at a club contract by North South, this time it's East West who have to be careful. Declarer should only make 9 tricks (losing ♠AK, ♥A and ♣K) but the defence need to cash both of their spades because if they don't, one of South's spade losers will be discarded on North's 4th diamond. However, this is far from easy for East West to ascertain – although, interestingly, the problems are different depending on who is declarer.

If South is playing the hand then the North hand is visible as dummy. Therefore:

- a) EW can see the singleton heart so they know a 2nd heart won't win a trick
- b) EW can see the diamond suit in dummy which could eventually provide a discard
- c) But West can't see the ♦KQ so leading away from the ♠K could easily cost a trick (imagine if East has ♦K and South has ♠A instead). It's easier for East as he knows any diamond finesse is working so the threat of the long diamond in dummy providing a discard is real.

If North is playing the hand then the South hand is visible as dummy. Therefore:

- a) EW cannot see the diamond length with North so it may not be obvious that they need to play spades quickly.
- b) EW cannot see the singleton heart in North. Assuming East leads a heart, West may not know for sure that a 2nd heart isn't cashing and might just continue with those. This is where it's very useful to be playing a method of raises where West knows whether East has 3 or 4 hearts from his bid.

Equally of course, declarer can't see through the back of the cards. If the defence don't cash the spades then his winning play today is NOT to take the club finesse but to just cash ♣A and then play diamonds. When East has to follow to 3 rounds, declarer can discard one of his spade losers on the 4th diamond before East can ruff in with the ♠K. But why should declarer do that? He would look very silly if West had ♣Kx to start with. So he might well cross to his ♦K in order to take the club finesse especially as it's through the opening bidder. When East wins ♣K it's now much clearer to play spades having already seen ♦K in declarer's hand.

Key points to note

- Opening light in 3rd seat makes a lot of sense, especially if it indicates a good lead for partner.
- Generally prefer to make a takeout double (even with only 3 of the other major) to overcalling a bad 5 card minor.
- Don't be afraid to compete aggressively in the auction (especially when no-one is vulnerable). Even if you reach a contract that should go off, in practice it's often hard for the defence to be accurate.
- Bidding methods to show the size of your fit (like Bergen raises) can be very useful.
- Always consider as defenders what signals partner might be able to give; or be trying to give.

More advanced

There are a few methods of raising majors. A popular one is Bergen raises where bids of 3♣ and 3♦ both show 4 card support for the major but different strengths (typically 3♣ is 6-9 and 3♦ is 10-12). Alongside this many pairs also play the sequences 1♥ - 2♠ and 1♠ - 3♥ as limit raises but with only 3 card support. Being able to distinguish between whether partner has 3 or 4 card support can be very valuable – not only in deciding how far to compete in the auction but also if the side ends up defending as they now know how many tricks in the suit they can cash.

As a passed hand the "Drury" convention lets a pair allow for the chance of a 3rd seat opening being lighter than usual. Traditionally a 2♣ response is an artificial response showing a hand worth a raise to 3 of the major (with either 3 or 4 card support) – but it's allowing partner the chance to just rebid 2♥ if he has opened light.

A further variation is "two way Drury" where a 2♣ response is a good 3 card limit raise and a 2♦ response is a good 4 card limit raise. That also gets the size of the fit across but of course comes at the cost of the loss of another natural bid. Playing Drury you may end up having to respond 1NT on hands that would otherwise have been able to bid their minor (assuming you remember you are playing it – if not you could have unpleasant surprise when partner alerts your 2♣ bid and jumps to 4♥!)

Signalling in defence is a very broad topic and there's no possible way anyone can get all the hands right. There are hands where an attitude signal is vital, others where knowing the count is critical and some where a suit preference card is best. It's definitely valuable to know what signal partner is giving though and which one is most useful. Here if North leads the ♣A against 3♥, once ♣Kx becomes visible in dummy the most useful signal is now suit preference. Attitude in the club suit is already known and count is irrelevant because there are no more winners for the defence to take. A pair on the same wavelength here might then see South play the ♣2 to signal a preference for diamonds over spades (the 2 side suits). That may allow North to find the critical diamond switch.

There's less opportunity for East West when defending a club contract here. If East leads a heart and West continues one, both West and East can certainly play high hearts as declarer ruffs to indicate spades not diamonds. As we saw earlier that may already be too late if declarer elects not to take the club finesse. But if he does, and East gets in with ♣K he should now be able to find the spade switch.

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)