



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.

Part score play and (not) covering honours

City and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 13th March 2023

7	♠ A532	Dir: S																														
	♥ 74	Vul: All																														
	♦ KQ																															
	♣ KJ762																															
♠ Q87	♠ K9	13																														
♥ Q952	♥ KJ6	5 13																														
♦ JT	♦ A95432	9																														
♣ T985	♣ Q3																															
	♠ JT64																															
	♥ AT83																															
	♦ 876																															
	♣ A4																															
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	♠	♥	♦	♣	NT																											
N	3	-	1	3	1																											
S	3	-	1	3	1																											
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Board 7 last week was usually played in a spade partscore by North which should make 9 tricks although some tables only made 8. Let's see how the hand will most likely be bid and played.

The normal auction starts with two passes to North who will open 1♣. East has a normal 1♦ overcall and then it's South's turn. Although he could just bid what he'd have responded had East not overcalled (1♥) he has a better option now – double. This should show exactly 44 in the majors (with a 5 card major South just bids that first). West doesn't have anything to say so North can now bid 1♠. He isn't quite strong enough to jump to 2♠ which he could do with a few more points. His ♦KQ

are also not worth a full 5 points now East has overcalled the suit. East can't really bid again as his diamond suit isn't strong enough. South may now raise spades so the pair will usually alight in 2♠.

East has a revolting lead to that contract! Nothing looks appealing so it's usually a case of just eliminating the worst options. A club or a spade lead look particularly bad as clubs is declarer's first bid suit and the ♠K is highly likely to be a trick provided I don't touch the suit. So I would be choosing between the red suits. Most players at the table chose the ♦A. That was OK today but would have cost a trick had North just had ♦Kx. A heart lead is also safe today because partner has the ♥Q but might easily not have been! Personally I would have chosen a heart as I believe leading unsupported aces tends to cost more. Also, South has shown hearts in the auction so there's a chance the ♥AQ are sitting over East anyway – in which case leading the suit early on is good as it forces declarer to decide whether to risk the finesse before he knows much about the hand.

There is, however, another argument for leading the ♦A which is the possibility of giving partner a diamond ruff. This certainly has merit. Partner didn't raise diamonds so he's very unlikely to have 3 and could just have one. What's more East has the ♠K so if he starts with ♦A and another there's a fair chance he may get in with that to lead a 3rd round of diamonds to perhaps allow partner to overruff dummy.

Turning to declarer now, how should 2♠ be played? I would start with crossing to ♣A and leading the ♠J. West should not cover this (see advanced section for more on covering honours in this sort of situation) and it will then run to East's ♠K. He will no doubt exit with another red suit.

At this point declarer should start trying to set his club suit up by playing ♣K. When the ♣Q drops that's good news and it means that just ruffing one club in the South hand will now set the remaining 2 clubs up as winners. East cannot ruff in effectively as South can just overruff his ♣9. Declarer therefore ruffs his club loser and returns to hand with ♠A. That leaves one top trump out but declarer can just play winning clubs. His only losers are 2 trumps, a heart and the ♦A which should mean a score of +140.

This hand is a combination of setting up a side suit but also drawing enough trumps in the process. Note that declarer didn't immediately cash the ♠A but played his clubs to ruff one in dummy first. Effectively the ♠A is one of the entries back to his hand to take the club ruffs (remember had the ♣Q not luckily dropped, declarer would have wanted to ruff 2 clubs in the

south hand to set up the 5th - that would have required another entry back to his own hand). Playing ♠A and another earlier is dangerous because it could mean the defence can draw 2 more rounds and leave declarer short of trumps. It is OK today though as East wins ♠K but can't play another.

Key points to note

- After 1♣ 1♦ it's useful to play double as showing exactly 44 in the majors
- When on lead where nothing looks appealing, try a process of elimination and lead what looks the "least bad" option!
- In a 4-4 trump fit with only the Ace it's often a good idea to maintain control by ducking the 1st round and cashing the Ace on the 2nd round to leave just one winning trump out
- Declarer should always be mindful of setting up his side suit – most commonly by ruffing losers in dummy. But he needs to be sure he has enough entries back to his hand to be able to lead that suit AND then get back to it later to cash the established winners.
- As a defender when there are touching honours in dummy it's generally right to cover the 2nd of them but NOT the first. Covering immediately can often give a trick away (see advanced section).

More advanced

Why might declarer lead ♠J from dummy? A couple of reasons – firstly he wants to retain trump control and not immediately play the ♠A (if the defence can play 3 rounds of trumps they are then in a position to force the North hand to ruff a red suit and declarer may then never be able to reach his long clubs); secondly it might tempt West to cover when he shouldn't – for example if East has a singleton honour and West covers the trick might go ♠JQAK! It's important to appreciate declarer has no spade "pips" (he is missing the 9, 8 and 7) so there's little point trying to promote his lower spades into tricks. In fact this is very similar to a trump holding of Axxx opposite xxxx. Usually with that holding it is right to duck the first round completely and then cash the Ace on the 2nd round. When the suit breaks 3-2 that just leaves one winning trump out but declarer may be able to then play on side suits and not allow the defence to use that trump to draw a 3rd round (which takes out 2 of declarer's trumps for the price of one defender's). It also keeps control if trumps happen to break 4-1.

We are usually taught that we should cover an honour with an honour. But, as usual with bridge, there is no hard and fast rule that always applies! The risk of his partner having a short honour is one of two reasons why West should NOT cover in this situation. The 2nd reason is that fact there are 2 touching honours in dummy. You should generally cover the 2nd of touching honours but not the first. See what happens here if West does cover. Declarer wins the ♠A and plays another which East has to win. Now South's ♠10 will draw West's ♠8 and the defence only win one spade trick. If, however, West lets the ♠J run to East's ♠K, then the defence will definitely score a 2nd trump trick because East has ♠9 and West has ♠Q8 remaining over South's ♠10.

There are many similar situations where covering the 1st of touching honours costs a trick. A classic is this combination:

Declarer has QJ9x opposite Axx. Suppose the defender sitting over the QJ9x holds Kxx and declarer leads the Q.

If the defender covers immediately declarer can next finesse against his partner's 10 and lose no tricks in the suit. But if he waits and lets the Q hold now declarer can't do anything. The defender will cover the J on the next round and promote his partner's 10 into a trick. Not covering means the defence make a trick in the suit.

Although most pairs played in spades, one East West pair did reach 3♦. On the face of it that appears to only be going 1 off (losing 2 major aces, 2 clubs and a trump) but in fact it should go 2 off. The reason is South's ♦8! If declarer is allowed to just play trumps enough times he will be able to play ♦A and another to knock out North's trump trick. Then his ♦9 will draw South's ♦8. However, if the defence get it right they should have cashed their clubs before this point. If North now plays a 3rd club, South's ♦8 is promoted into a trick before declarer can draw it. One pair scored a top board for defeating 3♦ by two tricks for +200 so well done if they found this defence.

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)