



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.

Responding to takeout doubles (normal and protective)

City and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 20th March 2023

24	♠ QJ984	Dir: W
	♥ KQ74	Vul: Nil
	♦ A95	
	♣ 9	
♠ AK732	♠ T5	12
♥ A5	♥ T82	13 2
♦ Q43	♦ 872	13
♣ 532	♣ Q8764	
	♠ 6	♠ NT
	♥ J963	N 3 5 5 4 4
	♦ KJT6	S 3 5 5 4 4
	♣ AKJT	E - - - -
		W - - - -

Last week on board 24, despite have a combined 25 points, a 4-4 heart fit, and 11 tricks available, only 1 pair bid to 4♥ with the majority of pairs playing in 2♥. Let's see what might have gone wrong.

West has a normal 1♠ opening bid (although it's also suitable for a weak NT opening if playing that). Even though North has a decent hand, he can't really bid when West opens his best suit. He should pass as will East. South now has a pretty normal reopening takeout double of 1♠. West has nothing to add and the spotlight returns to North. I suspect this is where most pairs went wrong – many probably bid 2♥ and ended up playing there. Why is that wrong? Because responding to a takeout

double is not the same as responding to an opening bid or overcall from partner. With those you can pass if you have nothing – but most of the time you can't possibly pass the double when you have nothing as the contract is almost certainly going to make! (On this particular hand passing is actually a reasonable option because you do have plenty of spades and values – see advanced section for more on that).

But imagine for a moment that some of your spades were clubs – say you had ♠984 ♥KQ74 ♦A95 ♣QJ9 – if partner is making a takeout double of spades then you are hardly likely to want to defend 1♠ doubled as the opponents almost certainly have at least an 8 card fit in the suit while you probably have a heart fit. Or suppose you had the same hand shape but no points at all – say ♠984 ♥9874 ♦1095 ♣1093. This is even worse – now 1♠ doubled is likely to make with several overtricks!

Therefore the key point is you may have to bid something in response to a takeout double even if you have no points at all! It is totally different to when partner has bid a suit – there you can usually just pass if you have nothing. So with the 3433 zero point hand above, unpleasant though it is(!), you will still have to bid 2♥ over partner's double.

What does that mean in practice? Well, if you are going to bid 2♥ on ♠984 ♥9874 ♦1095 ♣1093 and also on the hand here (♠QJ984 ♥KQ74 ♦A93 ♣9) how on earth is partner going to be able to tell the difference? He can't of course. So what's the solution? You have to do more when you DO have values.

A common scheme when responding to a normal takeout double is that minimum bids (e.g. 2♥ here) show about 0 to 8 points. A jump (e.g. 3♥ here) shows about 9 to 11 points. With more than that you either bid game yourself, or you cue bid the opponent's suit to show a good hand and find out more. Note I said over a “normal” takeout double. That would be if North had doubled immediately over 1♠ and South was responding. Here the situation is a bit different because 1♠ was passed round to South who made a re-opening double. That can be done on fewer points to keep the bidding open in case partner has a reasonable hand he couldn't bid with (see columns on 14th May 2022 and 26th Feb 2022 that talked about protection). Therefore North should mentally deduct a bit from his hand – here he should treat his hand as about a 10 count not a 12 count. Which means, if he doesn't want to defend 1♠ doubled, he should jump to 3♥ over the double.

North jumping helps South. He now knows North has some values so he can consider going on. Here he should do so for two reasons:

- a) He has quite a bit more than he might have. Just as North should mentally deduct a couple of points, South should do the opposite so here he should regard his 13 points as more like 15 - that's enough for game when partner jumps. Another way of thinking about it is he might have reopened on as few as 8-9 points but he actually has 13.
- b) Almost all the opponents' strength is known to be in one hand (West). This makes it harder for the defenders and frequently allows contracts to be made on fewer values than usual.

Therefore South should bid onto 4♥.

What about the play in 4♥? East will almost certainly lead ♠10, his partner's suit. After West wins ♠K he doesn't have anything good to do – probably the best is ♥A and another. But declarer should easily come to at least 10 tricks (3 trumps in one hand, 1 ruff in the other, 3 or 4 diamonds, 3 clubs). He may have to guess who has the ♦Q but, as the opening bidder, West is far more likely to have it. In fact, having found out West has ♦Q declarer can work out that East probably has ♣Q – see advanced section for how.

Key points to note

- Responding to a takeout double is not the same as responding to an opening bid or an overcall. You might have to bid something on no points at all as you can't pass the double (they'll probably play there making!) whereas you could pass a bid or overcall.
- When responding to a double you need to jump to tell partner you have some values (9+) - remembering you might have had to bid with nothing at all.
- When protecting the auction (i.e. after 1A P P) mentally add a couple of points to your hand. When responding to a protective bid, mentally deduct a couple to compensate.
- The only time you might pass partner's takeout double is if you do want to defend their contract doubled – i.e. you have lots of trumps and some values (you effectively convert the double to penalties). The vulnerability and quality of your trumps are important factors in deciding whether to do that.
- Counting the points and shape of an opponent's hand and comparing it to what they did or didn't do in the auction might help you deduce where a missing card is (see advanced section).

More advanced

So having said that you normally need to bid something in response to a takeout double, when might that not be the case? It's when you consciously DO want to defend the opponent's contract doubled. Here that's looking quite tempting! North has 5 decent trumps sitting over West and plenty of points. He needs to judge whether the penalty his side might get from 1♠ doubled is going to be more or less than they might get from their own contract. The quality of the trumps is an important factor here (e.g. defending with A5432 might only be worth 1 trick, defending with QJ1098 is guaranteed 3 tricks). The other critical factor is the vulnerability. Here neither side is vulnerable. That means if North South are making game they will score +420 or +450. So they will need to defeat 1♠ doubled by 3 tricks to get +500 to do better. If they are not making game they will only be scoring +140 and now they need to get +300 from 1♠ to do better.

Had North South (only) been vulnerable I think it would be clear to bid to their own contract (they might be making +620/650 and getting an 800 penalty at the 1 level is hard). Had East West (only) been vulnerable I think it would be clear to defend (now North South only need 2 off to score +500 and beat their own game score or 1 off for +200 to beat their own partscore). At equal vulnerability it's closer. But I think there are two factors in favour of passing the double:

- a) South might have re-opened on as few as 8 points to protect the auction so there's a chance North South won't be making game – but surely scoring +300 from 1♠ doubled is still likely.
- b) Even if North South are making game, some pairs may well not bid it (the case here!) With those North South pairs scoring +170 instead of +420 then +300 will still be very good!

Passing is definitely the winner today. Perfect defence can actually hold declarer to 3 tricks (♠AK and ♥A) which would be +800! But even +500 is enough for a top score which was achieved by one pair – well done. Incidentally if you do decide to defend, what should you lead? Usually trumps. By deciding to defend you usually want to draw declarer's trumps as you think yours are better than his. So I'd lead ♠Q. Seeing the ♠10 doubleton in dummy is delightful for North who can squash that on the 2nd round with his ♠J to set up his ♠9 and ♠8.

If North does end up playing 4♥ how should he play after the expected play to the 1st 3 tricks (♠K, ♥A and another)? A simple route is to draw the last trump and play a diamond to the 9 (playing the opening bidder to have the ♦Q). That will lead to 4 diamonds, 3 hearts, a spade ruff in South and at least 2 clubs. But I said he can now work out East has the ♣Q – how? Card reading! Count the shape and points. West has shown up with ♠AK, ♥A and ♦Q. That's 13 points. What's more he has a balanced hand (after 3 rounds of diamonds have been played he will be known to have 5 spades, 2 hearts and 3 diamonds). So if he also had ♣Q that would give him 15 points and he'd surely have been opening 1NT not 1♠. Therefore, declarer can fairly confidently play a club to the ♣J on the 1st round. [This of course presumes (a) that East West play a strong NT; and (b) they still open it with a 5 card major. Those are things that should be on the opponents' system card but declarer can also ask as he is entitled to know East West's methods.]

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)