



## 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.

## High level competition and differences when bidding as a passed hand

City and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 6<sup>th</sup> March 2023

<b>16</b>		♠ J9	Dir: W
		♥ AQ765	Vul: E-W
		♦ T94	
		♣ KQ7	
♠ T87532	♠ AQ6	12	
♥ K	♥ J3	10	15
♦ QJ8	♦ AK765	3	
♣ A84	♣ JT5		
	♠ K4		
	♥ T9842		
	♦ 32		
	♣ 9632		
		♠ ♥ ♦ ♣ NT	
		N 1 - 3 - -	
		S 1 - 3 - -	
		E - 4 - 4 1	
		W - 4 - 4 1	

Board 16 last week involved some potential high level competitive decisions and a chance for a passed hand to get involved again.

West is dealer. Some might consider 1♠ or 2♠ but I prefer pass at this vulnerability. You only have 10 points and 3 of them (♥K) could be worthless. Plus it's not like you really want to indicate a spade lead to partner! However, at more favourable vulnerabilities I might well open 2♠ as it's an effective pre-empt.

North has a normal 1♥ opening (although it's also suitable for a weak NT opening - yes, even with a 5 card major - see advanced section) and then East has a decision

to make. He certainly is worth a bid but the choice is between double or 2♦. (In fact the decision is very similar to the hand in last week's column). Many players will overcall 2♦ but I prefer double. It keeps more options open. With only 5 diamonds (and not great quality ones) 2♦ could go very badly if South is sitting with some diamonds over you. 2♦ does, however, have the advantage that it indicates a good lead. Double is less helpful to West about what suit to lead.

Whatever East chooses to do South's next bid should be 4♥. This is a quick pre-emptive raise given there is a known 10 card fit. It's what is known as a "two way shot". It might make if North has a big hand, or it might be a cheap save if North has a minimum hand. More importantly it puts the most pressure on East West as it takes so much bidding space away.

If East doubled then West should probably now bid 4♠. From his perspective the pair will also have a 10 card fit (he would expect East to have 4 spades the vast majority of the time when he doubles 1♥). All his minor suit honours are also likely to be useful. It's harder if West has overcalled 2♦. Bidding 5♦ feels too much - his hand has a lot of losers. What's more East West are vulnerable so there's a greater risk of them being doubled and going off any number doubled is likely to score badly (even 1 off doubled for -200 will score poorly if North South are not making game; 2 off doubled for -500 will score badly even if they are making game).

It may seem surprising but there's a case for West to bid 4♠ anyway even if East overcalled 2♦ - see advanced section for why.

If East West do reach 4♠ should North South bid on? On this hand in theory yes (4♠ is making for -620 and 5♥ is only 2 off for -300). But in practice I doubt I would do so on either hand. Neither has a shortage and both have what look like some defensive tricks. What's more East West have already been forced to make a guess at a high level. Why should they have guessed right? 4♠ could be going off. When you've forced your opponents to make a guess like that you generally shouldn't bid again. You want to try to avoid taking the last guess on a hand. Otherwise you just give your opponents a 2nd chance to make the right decision. -300 is better than -620 of course but it's a lot worse than the +100 you might be getting!

Lastly let's look at the play on this hand. Playing in hearts North South will pretty much always make 9 tricks losing 1 spade, 2 diamonds and 1 club. If East West play in spades or diamonds they can be held to 10 tricks (losing ♠K, ♥A and a club). However, the defence need to play clubs before their ♠K is knocked out. If they fail to do that then declarer can make 11 tricks because the club losers from one of the hands can be discarded (West's clubs can go on East's diamonds if playing in

spades, East's clubs can go on West's spades if playing in diamonds). Both defenders should, however, recognise the risk posed by the long suit in dummy providing discards and find the club switch in time.

### *Key points to note*

- poor 5 card suit.
- Don't be afraid to quickly pre-empt the bidding when you know your side has a good fit. It's puts pressure on the opponents.
- Try to avoid taking the last guess on a hand.
- As a defender when there's a long side suit in dummy there's a risk it will provide discards for declarer's losers - you may need to quickly attack another suit before your tricks there run away.
- A passed hand can often make informative bids later in the auction without fear of partner going overboard (see advanced section).

### *More advanced*

I said the North hand is suitable for a weak NT opening. Many players are reluctant to do this with a 5 card major. While there are obvious possible downsides I find it's generally better to not worry about it and just open the hand if it's in the right range. Yes occasionally you will play in 1NT with a 5-4 heart fit. Such is life! But more often you will gain. Firstly because the weak NT is a good pre-empt which makes it hard for the opponents to compete. It cuts out the entire 1 level so it's riskier for them to come in at the 2 level. Secondly because of the inferences of your rebid. If you open 1♥ and partner bids 1♠, 2♣ or 2♦ what will you rebid? You can't rebid NT (playing a weak NT opening, this shows 15+ balanced which you are nowhere close to). So you tend to have to rebid 2♥. But that doesn't tell partner anything more about your hand (you already showed 5 hearts when you opened 1♥). It's better to be able to have a 2♥ rebid show 6. You ideally always want your rebid to say something new about your hand.

If you do include 5 card majors in your 1NT opening, some pairs also use more complex variations of stayman to be able to find out if partner does have 5. While that's obviously possible I think it makes far less difference than many think. If you continue to just use simple stayman, the obvious downside is you might miss a 5-3 fit. But a fair proportion of the time that will still be fine played in no-trumps (and you have an unexpected extra length trick that the opponents are not expecting); also sometimes it's good to avoid the 5-3 if it breaks badly! In no-trumps, you may be able to look elsewhere for tricks so the bad break may not matter - but you can't avoid the losers if the suit is trumps.

In the auction P 1♥ 2♦ 4♥ I said there was a case for West to bid 4♠. On this particular hand, given the vulnerability, this is admittedly a bit dubious but at any other vulnerability it's definitely a good idea. However, it's important to appreciate what a 4♠ bid shows in this context. What it is NOT is a unilateral desire to play in 4♠. That cannot make sense. Why not? Remember West passed as dealer. What possible hand could he have that wants to play 4♠ now which couldn't open any number of spades as dealer? There isn't one. The only logical meaning for 4♠ now is that it ALSO shows diamond support but is offering 4♠ as an option in case East prefers that (on this hand of course he does). So 4♠ shows a hand that's prepared to go to 5♦ if partner can't stand spades. That's why it's dubious on this particular hand at unfavourable vulnerability because, as discussed earlier, 5♦ is going a bit too far. But the principle is a useful one to remember. Once you are a passed hand, you are limited. Hence there is often a lot of scope to make informative bids like this without risk of partner going overboard.

Remember of course this is all because West passed first. If he hadn't and the auction had just gone 1♥ 2♦ 4♥ then NOW 4♠ is indeed just a big natural spade hand (how else is West meant to bid if he has a big hand with 8 good spades?).

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)