



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.

Bidding after 1M-1NT. No Trump defence and play.

City and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 10th April 2023

9		♠ KJ863	Dir: N
		♥ K	Vul: E-W
		♦ AKJ7	
		♣ Q84	
♠ 974	♠ AQT2	17	
♥ J852	♥ 63	5	10
♦ 84	♦ 932	8	
♣ KJ76	♣ A532		
♠ 5			
♥ AQT974			
♦ QT65			
♣ T9			
		♠ NT	
		N - 4 3 1 2	
		S - 4 3 1 2	
		E 1 - - -	
		W 1 - - -	

Board 9 last week showed many North South pairs reaching a doomed 3NT contract but it also contained some interesting points for the defence.

The auction is likely to be uncontested. North will clearly start with 1♠ and South should respond 1NT. It's important to understand that, unlike most NT bids, this response does NOT necessarily show a balanced hand, it's effectively just a catch-all bid because, while South has enough to respond, he doesn't have enough to respond at the 2 level (for which he'd need at least 10+ points). North now has a rebid problem. With 17 points, he is certainly worth at least an invite to game. One possibility might be to bid 2NT. This gets the values across but not really the shape.

Another is to jump to 3♦. This obviously shows diamonds but is an overbid – after all his ♥K could be useless. The bid I actually prefer is 2♦. It's a little conservative but partner is only likely to pass it if they are weak with diamonds. In that case how likely is it you will be missing game?

Natural bidding after 1M – 1NT is tricky. For those who like system there are other schemes available which can improve the range of hands you can show – see advanced section for more.

If North does bid 2♦ what should South do now? Again not simple. His hand has got a lot nicer now because he has found a diamond fit. What's more he has a decent 8 count with an unmentioned 6 card suit when he might have had a bad 5 count. Playing pairs there is also the consideration of preferring to play in a major because it scores so much better. A 6-1 heart fit making 9 tricks scores +140 which is better than a diamond contract making 10 tricks (+130). So maybe South should try 2♥ now? North is likely to pass that though because, from his perspective, South could have 5 points, 6 hearts and no diamond fit. If they stop in 2♥ both partners have been quite conservative but, at matchpoint pairs, that's not a bad thing – in fact on this board it could be very profitable! Another option from South is 3♥ and North should raise that to 4♥ (a singleton honour is often a terrible holding to play NT with as it blocks the suit and there aren't going to be many entries to the South hand). Note how much better a contract 4♥ is compared to 3NT – it just needs the ♥J to come down in 3 rounds while 3NT could easily have at least 5 immediate losers.

Even though 4♥ is better, many NS pairs found their way to 3NT which, considering they have a combined 25 points and only a minor suit fit, is not unreasonable. What about the defence to 3NT?

East should have been put off a spade lead by the opening bid on his right. So he will most likely lead the ♣2. West wins the ♣K and will almost certainly return the suit. Conventionally in these sorts of positions you return your 4th highest to tell partner you have length in the suit. But that could be very silly here. The key card that West can't see is the ♣8. If East has led from ♣A832 then West needs to return the ♣J. That will squash the ♣10 in dummy and ensure the defence take 4 club tricks. However, on this hand when he does return the ♣J it is safe for declarer to cover and set his ♣8 up as a winner.

If West does return his 4th highest it could actually give declarer a nasty guess. On this hand he needs to play low but not if the layout is West holding ♣AKxx and East having led from ♣Jxxx! Then declarer needs to play the ♣Q at trick 2. There's

no real way of telling except perhaps to judge whether you think West is good enough to smoothly underlead the ♠A at trick 2.

Once East wins ♠A he will no doubt play another to knock out declarer's last club. The club he does this with can also be important. See advanced section for more. Declarer should discard dummy's spade since he will be hoping to make the rest of the tricks in the red suits. He will now cash ♥K and then 4 diamonds and what he hopes will be the rest of the hearts. He will, however, be disappointed when the ♥J doesn't appear. That limits him to 4 diamonds, 3 hearts and a club. East West do need to be slightly careful with discards. Both will have to make 2 discards (West on rounds 3 & 4 of diamonds, East on the 4th diamond and the 3rd heart). Both want to keep their club winner and West must cling onto his 4 hearts but he can afford to discard spades. To keep his club East will also have to discard 2 spades. But it doesn't matter what declarer does now, the defence will take the last 3 tricks with ♥J, ♠A and a club.

Lastly – what order should declarer cash his 4 diamonds in? You might think it's a stupid question as he has 4 tricks in the suit regardless. True but there is a point to it! See advanced section for the answer.

Key points to note

- A 1NT response to an opening bid doesn't have to be balanced – it just denies enough values to bid at the 2 level.
- After 1M – 1NT natural bidding isn't great so it can be useful to have some systemic methods.
- When defending watch the spot cards. You may need to switch to a higher card than usual to squash cards in dummy in the hope of promoting other winners.
- When cashing a suit, it can be advantageous to play the cards in an order to force one defender to discard twice before they see any from their partner (see advanced section).

More advanced

There are several artificial bidding methods available after 1M -1NT. "Gazilli" is one where opener rebids 2♣ with a lot of hand types and responder then shows the nature of his 1NT bid. This allows you to ascribe more specific meanings to jump rebids, etc. There is plenty of information on the internet for those interested.

A method I play with my regular partner that I like is transfer rebids. Rebids of 2♣, 2♦ and 2♥ are all transfers showing the suit above (so after 1♠ -1NT, a 2♥ rebid is showing a natural 2♠ rebid – i.e. at least 6 spades). A rebid of the opened major shows clubs but is not forcing. The big advantage of the method is that opener can now show a much larger range of hands. Jump rebids can now be game forcing (because invites go via a transfer rebid first).

Responder basically bids as if opener had bid naturally. So he completes the transfer if he would have passed that rebid. Otherwise he bids what he would have done anyway. Here for example the auction might go 1♠ – 1NT – 2♣ (showing ♦) – 2♥ (as discussed above - what South would have bid over a natural 2♦ rebid) – 2NT (extra values invite).

Turning to the card play now:

Suppose for a moment that West did have ♣ AKxx. How can he know it's safe to return a low club at trick 2 and not cash the ♠A? Because he has seen his partner lead the ♠2 showing 4. That means declarer has 3 clubs. Hence there's no risk that declarer has ♣Qx (when leading a low club at trick 2 would be very embarrassing!). Declarer should probably go up with the ♣Q though – he should reason that, with his actual holding, West would return the ♣J as it may be the only genuine way to take 4 tricks. So when West doesn't do that, he must have a different holding. But of course there is an element of bluff and double bluff to these positions though!

When East knocks out the last club, he can use either of his two remaining clubs to do so. Therefore the card he plays should have a suit preference message – here he'd play the highest of his remaining clubs to try to signal spades (even though that's pretty obvious looking at dummy!) Bear in mind, however, sometimes he will just want to unblock his higher club so that he can get his partner to win the 4th round of clubs to put a spade through. It's only in this particular situation where his two remaining clubs (♣5 & ♣3) are both lower than West's remaining two (♣7 and ♣6) that the card can be suit preference. Largely irrelevant on this particular hand but the signal could be vital on other hands.

So what about the order of cashing the diamonds? On the face of it, it sounds a ridiculous question since declarer obviously has 4 tricks. Yes but it's a subtle point of technique to make things harder for the defenders. Start with ♦AK to which both defenders follow. Now declarer should lead ♦J from his hand. When East follows he should overtake with ♦Q and then cash the ♦10. But if East shows out, declarer should stay in his hand and lead the 4th round from there. The key is the discards the defenders have to make. What declarer wants to do is force the hand with 2 diamonds to discard TWICE before it sees ANY discard from its partner (which could be a helpful signal). When East follows to the 3rd round, West will have to discard on this trick. Therefore declarer wants to be in the South hand to lead the 4th round from there and make West discard a 2nd time before he sees East's 1st discard. Conversely, if East discards on ♦J then declarer should retain the lead and lead the 4th round from North so that this time East will have to make a 2nd discard before seeing one from West. Often this will make no difference at all of course – but just occasionally the defender will struggle for a 2nd discard and may have to guess because he hasn't seen a signal from his partner yet. Subtle but it costs nothing to declarer and it's creating those little extra chances for the opponents to go wrong that separates experts from average players.

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)