



## 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 the art of passive defence.

City and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 17<sup>th</sup> April 2023

<b>24</b>		♠ Q5	Dir: W
		♥ Q73	Vul: Nil
		♦ 974	
		♣ A9742	
♠ AK7	♠ T98632	8	
♥ KT952	♥ J64	15	2
♦ KQT2	♦ 83	15	
♣ 8	♣ J6		
		♠ J4	
		♥ A8	
		♦ AJ65	
		♣ KQT53	
		NT	
		N 2 1 - - 1	
		S 2 2 - - 1	
		E - - 3 3 -	
		W - - 3 3 -	

Many defenders get too “active” and lead suits which give tricks away. Frequently, however, the defenders do better to sit back and wait and try not to give anything away.

Board 24 last week was a good example. The auction could be a competitive one so if one side gets pushed to a slightly uncomfortable level of contact then accurate defence is even more important.

West will start the bidding with 1♥. Some Easts might have risked bidding on the first round – either raising to 2♥ or responding 1♠ - no doubt on the grounds that

he has heart support and a 6 card major. Both actions could be dangerous though because they may propel your partner overboard when he thinks you have at least 5 points for your response. East is actually better off passing first (which limits his hand) and coming in later if he can.

Assuming 1♥ does get passed round to South, he is likely to just bid 2♣ although he might start with a double since he would re-open with 2♣ on a much weaker hand than this (see previous columns talking about the “protection” principle). If he does bid 2♣ West should be prepared to have another go even though partner passed the first time – he has a strong hand which will play well if partner has a fit for any of his suits. So he can make a takeout double of 2♣. North is likely to raise clubs (or bid them if South chose to start with a double). At quite a few tables 3♣ seems to have been the final contract. However, assuming West has made a takeout double of 2♣ I think East should be competing to 3♠. Once West doubles there are several reasons for East to bid:

- He knows his partner has extra values for the double
- He knows his side has a double fit.
- His hand will now be worth a fair bit with his long suit (spades) as trumps.
- It's nil vulnerability, mathematically (due to the scoring) the best time to compete at pairs.

So despite the 2 jacks, I'd compete to 3♠.

We'll start, however, by looking at the defence to 3♣ by North South since that was where the majority ended up. It can be seen that Deep Finesse can limit NS to making 2♣ - i.e. 8 tricks. However the vast majority of tables made 9 tricks. Let's see. Assuming West is on lead he will start with 2 rounds of spades. Then he has to switch to avoid giving a ruff and discard. The ♦K is safe at that point, however declarer should duck this. This manoeuvre is known as a “Bath Coup”. By ducking declarer forces West to switch or he will give a trick away leading round to the ♦AJ. This is where the passive defence starts – West should just exit his trump (he should know by now that his partner doesn't have anything useful for him – see advanced section for why).

What will declarer do after drawing trumps? Probably ♥A and another intending to establish the ♥Q or maybe trying another diamond himself. West will win whichever suit is played and should then continue to be passive by simply playing that same suit back again. Don't open the other red suit or that will give declarer a trick. Check what happens in each case:

- If declarer leads ♥A and another, West wins ♥K and exits another to the ♥Q in dummy. Declarer can discard a diamond on this but that's no use to him as it's just his 4th diamond (which he could eventually have ruffed in dummy anyway). He still loses another diamond.
- If declarer plays diamonds, West cashes the ♦10 and ♦Q and gets out his 4th diamond back to declarer's ♦J. Declarer can discard a heart from dummy on that but that's also no use to him – he will still have a heart loser.

All in all the defence should score 2 spades, 1 heart and 2 diamonds. Anyone doing that (NS +90) would have done pretty well today considering a lot of East West pairs were allowing North South to score +110.

I suspect several Wests led hearts and allowed declarer to score the ♥Q in dummy without losing any heart trick. Or maybe they continued diamonds so declarer only lost 1 diamond instead of 2.

What about if East West did compete to 3♣? South will no doubt lead ♣K. On seeing dummy he may well continue a 2nd club to force declarer to ruff. After ♠AK draw all the trumps, declarer is now trapped in the West hand. He will no doubt play ♦K and, for exactly the same reasons as earlier, South should duck which leaves declarer stuck in dummy. He only has red cards left there so his best bet is to play another diamond (to at least set up a way to get back to his hand with diamond ruffs). But now he will not have any more diamonds tricks and will eventually have to lose 2 hearts. When South gets in, he can now just safely lead clubs as there are no more trumps in dummy to threaten a ruff and discard.

### Key points to note

- It's not a good idea to stretch too far to respond (you risk partner getting too excited with a big hand!) Sometimes if you pass, you will get a chance to show your hand later in the auction safe in the knowledge you have already limited your values extensively with your original pass of partner's opening.
- Even with very few values don't be afraid to compete when you find your side has a big fit (or a double fit) and the vulnerability is right.
- Most of the time you want to be passive in defence – i.e. don't risk giving cheap tricks away. Switching suits too often usually just gives tricks away.
- Be aware of the "Bath coup" – ducking with AJx(x) when your left hand opponent leads the K (showing KQ). This forces him to switch suits or give away a trick.
- Partner NOT signalling for any particular suit usually sends a message in itself – i.e. that he has no preference. That information can be just as useful to a good defender!
- A useful leading method is K asks for count, AQ for attitude.

### More advanced

Passive defence is definitely a very valuable skill at bridge (especially playing matchpoint pairs). It applies to the opening lead as well - be more including to make safe passive leads than aggressive leads which risk giving a trick away (e.g lead J109xx in preference to Kxxxx).

I remember years ago reading a claim that every time defenders switch to a new suit they give away ½ a trick on average! I have no idea how that claim was arrived at but there's definitely some truth in it. So many defenders panic and either try to cash tricks into thin air, or underlead honours in the (often futile) hope that partner has something in the suit.

There is great skill in working out when the defence DO need to be aggressive and try to set up and take their tricks before it's too late (generally if declarer has a side suit he can discard losers on or one he can set up quickly to do the same), or whether they should sit back and give declarer nothing (generally if they know things aren't breaking or the auction sounds like the opponents have stretched or been pushed).

The other side to the equation as declarer is that it's very annoying playing against defenders who don't give you anything!

Here West can get all the information he needs to know from his partner's signals. When your side have bid and raised a suit, with the top cards it's often right to seek a count signal from partner so you know how many rounds you can cash. A useful method to do that is a convention where the lead of a King asks for count and the lead of an Ace or Queen asks for attitude. This means with a KQ holding you might choose to lead the Q because you want partner to encourage you if he has the A or the J.

So here I would lead the ♠K to ask partner to give count. When East shows an even number, West can work out it almost has to be 6. After all if partner only had 4 that means declarer would have had 4 as well – but surely then he'd be more likely to have made a takeout double of 1♥ rather than bid 2♣?

Having had a count signal, West now cashes the ♠A. On this trick, having already given count, East's card should be suit preference. A high spade would say he liked hearts (higher side suit), a low spade would say he likes diamonds (lower side suit). On this hand of course East doesn't like either red suit! Therefore he should play a non-descript middle spade (probably the 6) on the 2nd round. This time it's the LACK of a signal that also sends a message that he doesn't have a preference, something West probably already suspects since he's looking at so many values in the red suits himself!

That 2nd round spade card should warn West to go passive after ♦K and sit back and wait for his tricks. When declarer plays a red suit, East should give count in that suit as well. This also helps West who will then be able to count out the full shape of the hands. From here he can work out that just returning the same suit declarer played will not give anything away as declarer has no useful discard available to him.

It's largely the same story if East West are playing in spades and North South are defending. North's club on the 2nd round is useless to the trick itself (declarer has already ruffed in dummy) so it should be suit preference. Here he might choose to go neutral and not signal hearts (if declarer had ♥A it could give everything away). Likewise he should give count when red suits are played – this will allow South to avoid being endplayed.

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)