



## 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 unusual no-trumps and suit preference signals

City and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 27<sup>th</sup> March 2023

8	♠ JT872	Dir: W
	♥ AKQ9	Vul: Nil
	♦ K54	
	♣ 9	
♠ 65	♠ KQ53	13
♥ A9872	♥ JT87	8 13
♦ KJT854	♦ J	6
	♣ AQ73	
	♠ A964	
	♥ 432	
	♦ QT63	
	♣ 62	

Board 8 last week included a hand which, ironically, is easier to show after passing first.

The West hand has lots of shape but really isn't suitable for an opening unless you are playing a method where an opening bid of 2NT shows at least 55 in the minors (see advanced section for more on that and a suggested defence against it). With a hand like this it's actually much easier to show both suits later.

North has a normal 1♠ opening which means East, despite having quite a nice hand, doesn't have a bid at that stage. South will now raise spades in some fashion -

either directly to 2♠ or perhaps via a Bergen raise (most likely 3♣ which shows 6-9 points and 4 card spade support – 3♦ would show 10-12 points and 4 card spade support).

Now is West's chance. Clearly with such a shapely hand he wants to get into the action. Having passed initially he can now use a convention called the unusual no-trump. Over 2♠ he can bid 2NT. That cannot possibly be natural since he passed initially so it's used to show a distributional 2 suiter with both minors - exactly the same as it would do if bid directly over an opening bid of 1♠. It's now a very good description of his hand as it's limited by dint of the initial pass. It's often easier to show 2 suited hands in this way.

What about over a 3♣ Bergen raise? Even though it's a level higher, West can effectively do the same and bid 3NT. Again it can't possibly be natural when he couldn't open the bidding. On this hand he is not vulnerable, he has some extra shape and a void so he can risk going to the 4 level. Had he just been 1255 then 3NT would be too much though.

It's also worth knowing what a double of a 3♣ Bergen raise would mean in your partnership - see advanced section for some ideas.

North doesn't have many extra points but a known 9 card spade fit and 5431 shape might encourage him to go onto 4♠. East then has a decision. Does he double 4♠ or bid 5♣ now he knows partner has at least 10 cards in the minors? It's close. On balance I think I prefer double. His spade values aren't going to be much use in clubs as they are known to be opposite at most 1 spade with partner (in fact if there's been a Bergen raise on his left then he knows the opponents have 9 spades so partner is void). Also, if the ♠A is on his right (more likely on the auction) he could easily be scoring 3 trumps (♠KQ plus a diamond ruff). Today, in theory at least, bidding onto 5♣ is better as you can score +400 when you can only get +300 from 4♠x. But, as so often is the case, theory and practice are not the same!

How should East defend 4♠x? First off is to lead his diamond aiming to get at least 1 diamond ruff. His initial disappointment at seeing ♠A sitting over his ♠KQ will be offset by partner turning up with ♦A. However, even if partner didn't have ♦A it will often be OK anyway (East can always get in in spades so he will then hope partner has ♣K to put him in with that for his ruff).

So the defence to 4♠ should go ♦J to ♦A, then ♦2 return for the ruff. Note the ♦2. This is a classic suit preference signal position. The card you lead to give partner a ruff is a signal showing your entry for him to get you back in for a 2nd ruff. So

here the ♦2, your lowest, signals an entry in the lowest side suit (clubs). Had West held ♥A he would return the ♦9, his highest, to signal his entry in the higher side suit instead.

East should trust his partner's signal and immediately underlead his ♣A to West to get a 2nd diamond ruff. That's 4 tricks and his ♠KQ is worth 1 more for +300. That actually scores quite well since not many East West pairs bid and made 5♣.

It looks like quite a few pairs didn't manage this defence and some actually allowed 4♣x to make. It certainly requires East to trust partner's signal and underlead his ♣A. He cannot afford to play ♣A first because declarer will ruff the 2nd round and the only chance of an entry to West's hand has gone.

What about the play in 5♣ by East? This hand is a good example of why leading unsupported aces or under leading aces is a very bad idea! ♣A is a particularly disastrous lead here. Declarer can ruff, cross to hand with a trump and discard both his losing hearts on the ♠KQ. He can actually make all 13 tricks now! Underleading ♣A is nearly as bad as declarer has nothing to lose by discarding a heart from dummy at trick 1. So South should not touch spades. Assuming West has shown both minors then a heart lead looks normal and that will let the defence cash their 2 tricks there. But that should then be all they get as declarer can start ruffing diamonds in his own hand and eventually set up his 5th one.

A trump lead or switch trying to reduce diamond ruffs is another reasonable shot but it doesn't work here - see advanced section for why.

### Key points to note

- The unusual no-trump is a bid of no-trumps where it's impossible for NT to be natural to show a 2 suiter, usually with both minors. It's most commonly 2NT but can be any level if you have a sufficiently shapely hand.
- Suit preference signals are essential for defenders when giving partner ruffs. The card you return for the ruff signals your entry (lowest card = lowest side suit, highest card = highest side suit).
- Judging whether to double or bid on at high levels is always hard. Generally values in the opponents suit should point towards defending, especially if they are opposite known shortage in partner's hand.
- When a 2 suiter has been shown and the opponents pick one suit, it may be worth leading trumps to try and reduce declarer taking ruffs and setting up the other suit.
- When the defenders have bid and raised a suit but don't lead it, the opening leader very likely has the unsupported Ace.

### More advanced

Over Bergen raises its worth discussing what double means. You could play it as showing the bid suit but many pairs these days just play it as takeout of the major. After all the bidding has effectively gone 1M P 3M.

I mentioned some pairs play an opening 2NT as weak with both minors (they usually then include their large balance hand in a multi 2♦ opening or something). 2NT is quite an effective pre-empt so it's worth discussing what to do over it. Double is usually played as a strong NT interested in penalty (a double of 3 minor is then penalty). Pass and then double of whatever minor they try to stop in is takeout. Bids of 3♥ and 3♠ are just natural. That leaves overcalls of 3♣ and 3♦. A handy method is to play those as showing both majors with 3♣ having better hearts and 3♦ having better spades.

Against 5♣ the defenders need to take their hearts immediately because, if they don't, declarer can lead the ♠K through South and take a ruffing finesse which will set up ♠Q to discard one of the heart losers. However, South shouldn't make this easy. He knows he has ♠A but declarer doesn't so, given South can see the void in dummy, he should play low smoothly on ♠K. Declarer might now decide North has ♠A and ruff in dummy anyway. Having said that, declarer should almost certainly play South to have ♠A. Why? The fact that he didn't lead the suit initially. It would be normal for South to lead spades, the suit the defenders have bid and raised. When he doesn't do so, there's a strong inference that he has the Ace and not the King as this is about the only holding where a good player would definitely not lead the suit.

To have a chance of beating 5♣ the defence need to play two rounds of trumps – that would mean only 2 of West's diamonds can be ruffed in the East hand and declarer would then have to lose the 4th round of diamonds. Having taken 2 hearts, North's best switch is a trump for this reason. In fact South might view to lead a trump initially. He would reason

that East has chosen clubs so is quite likely to be shorter in diamonds and want to ruff dummy's known side suit in his hand. The fact he himself holds 4 diamonds may also encourage him to lead a trump to try and reduce those ruffs in the hope of scoring his 4th round diamond winner.

This time, however, trump leads are no good because South has the 2nd trump and he can't get in again to lead it. One round of trumps isn't enough because declarer can still then ruff 3 diamonds in his hand to set up his 5th diamond. So 5♣ cannot be beaten.

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)