



## 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.

### When NOT to give partner a ruff!

City and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 15<sup>th</sup> May 2023

<b>8</b>	♠ A63	Dlr: W	
	♥ J4	Vul: Nil	
	♦ A973		
	♣ KT32		
♠ KT7542	♠ 98	12	
♥ Q52	♥ 8	5	12
♦ 852	♦ KQJT	11	
♣ 4	♣ AQ9875		
	♠ QJ		
	♥ AKT9763		
	♦ 64		
	♣ J6		

	♠	♥	♦	♣	NT
N	-	1	3	-	2
S	-	-	3	-	2
E	-	-	-	1	-
W	-	-	-	1	-

Board On board 8 last week many pairs reached 4♥ and plenty made it even though it can be beaten. Often the defence taking some ruffs is a good thing for them but on this hand, unusually, that's not the case. Let's have a look and see how they can work it out.

First the auction. West will most likely open a weak 2♠ which will be passed to South. He will probably bid 3♥ (4♥ is a bit much given the ♠QJ could be worthless). As North I'd now bid 3♠. If partner can bid at the 3 level, I am happy to bid to game, especially with two aces. 3♠ is primarily asking for a spade stopper or for partner to

describe his hand further. Yes you do have a spade stopper yourself and it might be right to bid 3NT but often you will want a double stopper and, as here, you have heart tolerance so it's a lot better to play in hearts when partner has at least 6 of those. South of course will bid 4♥ on this hand.

If West passes initially North will probably open 1♣ which means East can't really bid. South will start with 1♥ and North will rebid 1NT. West now might bid clubs (passing first over a suit and then bidding on the next round is natural). South will then rebid some number of hearts. With at least 9 hearts (North will have at least 2 for the 1NT rebid) I'd bid 4♥ but that's quite aggressive given South has 2 losers in every side suit.

Against 4♥ West will, perfectly reasonably, almost certainly lead his singleton hoping to score some ruffs and East will win the ♠Q at trick 1. Now is the key point of the hand. The first thing East should work out is that West definitely has led a singleton (see advanced section for more on this). So it's very tempting to cash the ♣A and give partner a ruff.

BUT(!) just like declarer should pause for thought at trick 1, so should the defenders! East should ask himself what tricks are they going to make? He can see 10 clubs so he knows he has 2 club tricks but that's all. His partner might have a spade or trump trick but is unlikely to have both if he opened a weak two. So it looks like the defence will need some diamond tricks too.

Try think ahead about what's going to happen if you do give partner the ruff - declarer won't have any clubs left himself on the 3rd round so there's no guarantee he will ruff - he can (and should) just discard a diamond (which is a trick he was going to lose anyway) and West has to ruff.

That will be 3 tricks for the defence but now what about a 4th? Further reflection reveals there are two problems with giving West a ruff:

- The ruff comes at the cost of West's trump trick - his ♥Q will now drop under declarer's ♥AK.
- The ruff sets up the 4th club in dummy. That means declarer now won't need to take the spade finesse. He can win ♠A, draw trumps and later cross to the ♦A to discard his losing spade on the ♣K.

What East should do is NOT cash the ♣A or give his partner a club ruff but instead switch to the ♦K. This knocks out the ♦A from dummy before his ♣A is removed and it sets up whatever diamond tricks the defence have. West should signal count on the diamond so East then knows how many the defence can cash. Declarer may try ♥AK but when the ♥Q doesn't drop he is doomed. Even with a successful spade finesse he is still left with inescapable losers in trumps, diamonds and clubs. The key for the defence was to simply set up their diamond trick - the ruff is an illusion!

### *Key points to note*

- Declarer should always stop and think at trick 1. So should the defenders! They should think about where their tricks might come from.
- Try to think ahead and project what will happen if you make a certain play.
- Giving partner ruffs can be good but not if:
  - a) it comes at the cost of partner's trump trick
  - b) it sets up winners for declarer that he will be able to use later.
- Often it's not worth giving partner just one ruff, it is necessary to be able to give him two.
- Check the cards played at trick 1 carefully - you can often work out what the possible layouts are in the suit based on what partner will and will not have led from.

### *More advanced*

First let's consider the situation at trick 1. The only 3 clubs East can't see are the 4,6 and J. When partner leads the 4, he won't have done that from J4 or 64 (the standard lead is top of a doubleton). So the only possibilities are West has led from J64 or singleton 4. Had it been the former, declarer would be void and would have ruffed the ♣Q at trick 1. When he follows suit it means partner's ♣4 must have been singleton. Hence East knows his ♣A will be a trick.

Note, however, how different the situation might be if the 6 and 4 had been reversed. Suppose West leads a singleton ♣6. Declarer will then hold J4. At trick 1 he should smoothly play the ♣J under the ♣Q and conceal his 4. Now East cannot tell if West has led from 6 or 64. It's then very dangerous for him to try and cash ♣A because if he's wrong declarer will trump and the ♣K and ♣10 have been set up in dummy. So East will almost certainly switch. There are lots of opportunities for false cards like this by declarer.

There are, of course, times when it is right for defenders to take ruffs. On this occasion if East could get in again quickly (eg if he held ♦A) then he should definitely give partner the ruff. Now he can get in and play a 4th round of clubs. On this hand that would give West a trump promotion (he'd have ♥Qx at that point which, if he was on lead, declarer could draw - but he's not on lead so when East plays another club West will score another trump whatever declarer does). It's the fact that East CAN'T get in quickly again and the threat posed by the 4th club in dummy that should point him to the right defence on this hand.

There are many hands where it's right for declarer not to ruff himself but just discard a loser. The defence will then have to use one of their trumps which may later cost them a trick. Sometimes another option for the defence is to give a ruff but to do so without cashing their top cards to give up control in the suit. That's no good on this hand because declarer only has 2 clubs himself so East wouldn't then score his ♣A. But had East only held 5 clubs it would be good defence. Retain the ♣A, give the ruff and signal for a diamond switch (by playing his lowest club for partner to ruff). That allows the defence to take all their tricks. Of course underleading the Ace is only viable if East can be sure his partner's lead is a singleton - it would be pretty embarrassing if West did follow to the 2nd round!

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)