



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.

Taking your ruffs – as declarer or as defender

City and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 1st May 2023

24		♠ QJ984	Dlr: W
		♥ KJ65	Vul: Nil
		♦ JT9	
		♣ 5	
♠ T32	♠ 6	8	
♥ T9732	♥ A4	7 14	
♦ 87	♦ AK542	11	
♣ AK3	♣ QJT98		
		NT	
♠ AK75	♦ ♦ ♦ ♦		
♥ Q8	N - - - 2 -		
♦ Q63	S - - - 2 -		
♣ 7642	E 5 4 1 - 2		
	W 5 4 1 - 2		

Board 24 last week was a common competitive type of hand which then required accurate defence to beat the contracts either side might reach.

The normal start to the auction is P P 1♦ P 1♥. At this point North should overcall 1♠ - it's important to bid if you have spades since you may well be able to win a competitive auction. That's especially true when no-one is vulnerable at pairs. East will rebid 2♣, South will raise to 2♠ which will probably come back to East. Given the vulnerability he should have another go with 3♣ (now showing at least 55 shape since he has now bid clubs twice but first opened 1♦). South may choose to compete

to 3♠ although he may also sell out to 3 minor given how many losers he has. If he does pass, West should leave 3♣.

Against 3♣ South will presumably start with spades. The hand should now play for 11 tricks. Declarer trumps the 2nd spade, plays ♦AK, ruffs a diamond in dummy, draws trumps and ends up just losing a trick in each major. Several pairs seem to have only made 9 tricks so possibly they just drew trumps first and then had a diamond loser? Today diamonds are 3-3 so it's all nice and easy but it's still ok if diamonds are 4-2 (see advanced section). Declarer should, however, ruff the diamond in dummy with the ♣A or ♣K - partly to ensure he can't be overruffed if North only had 2 diamonds but also to unblock the clubs. He has every club down to the 8 between the two hands so the AK are effectively worth the same as all the clubs in declarer's hand. See advanced section for how this could cost you if suits didn't split so well.

Against 3♠, the defenders need to also find their diamond ruff. East should lead a top diamond. Whenever you hold an AK combination it's seldom wrong to lead it. It gives you a chance to look at dummy and plan your subsequent defence from there.

A useful method to play is A attitude, K count (see advanced section for more information). Either way when East cashes his top diamonds West should show his doubleton and get his ruff. When East plays the 3rd round of diamonds for West to ruff he should lead the ♦5, his highest remaining, to signal his entry is in hearts. It makes no difference here but it's good practice to still signal accurately. West should make things easy for his partner though and cash the ♣K before returning the heart. This simply indicates that he has the ♣AK so West could cash the defence's other club trick if it's available. Defence is all about helping partner, or at least trying to!

Key points to note

- The spade suit is very valuable as you can outbid the opponents at the same level. It's definitely worth getting into the bidding with spades whenever you can.
- When ruffing losers in dummy, it can often be right to trump high - either to avoid being overruffed or to keep entries back to your hand.
- On lead as a defender leading from an AK holding is very sensible. It usually holds the trick and lets you see dummy to plan your later defence.
- In defence playing A for attitude and K for count can be very helpful on many hands although, like everything, it does also have its downsides.

More advanced

Suppose diamonds had not split 3-3. It still doesn't matter. The correct plan in clubs on two rounds of spades is to ruff, ♦AK, diamond ruff high, heart to ace, diamond ruff high, return to hand with a trump to draw trumps (declarer holds all the lower intermediates). The 5th diamond is now a winner so you make 3 diamonds, 2 diamond ruffs in dummy, 5 clubs and ♥A for 11 tricks.

Note it's important to trump high in dummy to unblock the clubs so you can later return to hand with a low one. If you didn't do that you then have to cash ♣AK and lead another suit to get back to hand which will force one of your own long trumps. If trumps broke 3-2 it wouldn't matter but here they break 4-1 and South now has more than declarer!

I like the A attitude, K count method. It allows you to get the signal you feel you want. Typically you might lead a K from a solid holding like AKQxxx where you just need to know how many rounds of the suit you can cash. From a holding of AKxxx you would tend to prefer the A. Now you will find out if partner has the Q or a doubleton (they should encourage with both those holdings in a suit contract).

But like any method there are downsides. With a holding of KQ10x (say) you probably now want to lead the Q so that partner will encourage with the A or the J. Otherwise you risk falling for the Bath coup (where declarer holding AJx ducks and a continuation is then giving a trick away). However sometimes partner can't tell what you are leading from - you would also lead the Q from holdings like QJ10xx, QJ9x, etc. Hence he might think declarer has the K and put his A up, thus wasting two of the defence's honours on the same trick.

Plus there are of course occasions when you lead requesting one signal and, once you see dummy, you immediately wish you had asked for the other! Finally, it's worth noting that when you lead an honour against a suit contract and dummy has a singleton in that suit, then suit preference is the most useful signal to give. So that should then take precedence over what you originally asked for.

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)