



## 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.

### Deciding how to defend at trick two. Ducking one trick to gain two more!

City and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 8<sup>th</sup> May 2023

<b>19</b>	♠ QJT543	Dir: S
	♥ 3	Vul: E-W
	♦ AKT5	
	♣ 65	
♠ 87	♠ A62	10
♥ 9654	♥ KQ2	2 17
♦ Q9742	♦ J3	11
♣ 93	♣ AKT72	
	♠ K9	
	♥ AJT87	
	♦ 86	
	♣ QJ84	

Board 19 last week had North South playing in spades at virtually every table. With a combined 21 points very few bid game (understandably) but the defence to beat 4♠ is not that easy.

Some Souths may have passed but many will open 1♥ these days. I’m definitely for opening - getting your side into the auction first has many advantages and this heart suit is one you are happy for partner to lead. North responds 1♠ and East has the best hand at the table. Just because the opponents have opened and responded doesn’t mean it is always their hand - especially these days when opener might have

10-11 points and responder only 5! So it’s quite normal to play 1NT as natural and strong here. See advanced section for what it can mean if East was already a passed hand.

South should pass 1NT since he is dead minimum and he doesn’t have spade support. West will also pass (no doubt praying 1NT isn’t about to get doubled!). North has quite a lot of shape so can’t really double 1NT although his side would get very rich if he did! He may just bid 2♠ since he knows partner is weak and there’s a strong NT on his left. That will probably end the auction.

If South did choose to pass originally the auction may actually work better for him. North will open some number of spades and if East wades in with a strong NT overcall his side will be in lots of trouble!

Let’s assume North South are playing a spade contract though. East’s normal lead is a top club to let him see dummy. He’ll regret it when he sees dummy though with the ♣QJ sitting over him ready to become tricks for declarer! He now has to make a decision about how to defend at trick 2 – something that often isn’t easy.

One possibility is to continue clubs and hope partner can ruff the ♣QJ to stop them becoming tricks. It’s easy enough to have partner trump one of them but East can’t get in again quickly to play a 4th club. His only entry is the ♠A but when he wins that partner won’t have any trumps left!

So East’s best plan is probably to shift to another suit but which one? ♥K has some appeal – firstly hoping to set up a trick for his ♥Q but also to knock the ♥A out of dummy before declarer’s clubs are set up (the ♥A will otherwise be the later entry for declarer to get to those club winners). ♥K works very badly here though! Declarer wins, plays ♦AK, ruffs a diamond in dummy, ruffs a heart back to hand and ruffs his last diamond in dummy. He will just lose 2 clubs and ♠A to make 10 tricks. It won’t help East to trump in with his ♠A since that’s a trick he would be making anyway.

Another plan is to try and stop those diamond ruffs by switching to ♠A and another. But this gives declarer a 2nd way of playing the hand. He can draw trumps and lead a club towards the ♣QJ. When East wins ♣K, declarer’s 2 losing diamonds now get discarded on the ♣QJ (the ♥A is still in dummy enabling him to reach them). There is still a way to keep declarer to 9 tricks although it’s not that obvious – see advanced section for details.

Overall East has several choices at trick 2 and this is quite a common scenario in defence. Here he'd like to be able to lead the ♥K and trumps at the same time! But he can only choose one. He doesn't have much to go on here. I think I'd probably try ♥K and would curse when I learned declarer only has one heart!

There is another more advanced option at trick 2 though which will also hold declarer to 9 tricks - see advanced section.

### *Key points to note*

- A 1NT overcall after the opponents have bid and responded at the 1 level should still be played as strong and natural (except by a passed hand of course where it can be used to show a 2 suiter with the other 2 suits).
- It's normal to lead from an AK combination aiming to retain the lead and look at dummy to help decide what to do next. But sometimes that still isn't easy to decide!
- If tricks are about to be set up in dummy that can provide discards, the defence should try to either ruff those winners away or attack an entry that declarer could use later to reach them.
- It can often be right to duck what looks like a certain trick in one suit to stop declarer being able to get later discards - the trick ducked almost always comes back!
- Underleading the ace of trumps can be a powerful technique in defence – it allows you to retain control of the trump suit.

### *More advanced*

If East had already passed as dealer then his 1NT bid now clearly cannot be strong and natural. So a method many pairs play is for 1NT by a passed hand to be "unusual" showing a shapely hand with the other two suits (usually 55). That allows the partnership to compete but doesn't risk getting too high if they are heavily outgunned (as they often will be).

Returning to the defence against spades it takes some quite advanced defence to hold declarer to 9 tricks after starting with a top club but it can be done.

Let's look first at the position when East has switched to ♠A and another at trick 2. Declarer draws trumps. As an aside note that an alert declarer should unblock the ♠K under the ♠A - now when both defenders follow to the 2nd spade he can afford to overtake the ♠9 to complete drawing trumps in his own hand. This is good technique as it gives the defence no further information about his hand. If he won the 2nd trump in dummy he would have to cross to hand with ♦A to draw the last trump. It doesn't really matter here but on some hands playing a round of diamonds when he doesn't have to will give the defenders more information which could help them avoid a problem later. This of course only works when spades are 3-2. If they prove to be 4-1 declarer can't afford to overtake ♠9 but he is still ok. He just remains in dummy, returns to hand with ♦A and completes drawing trumps with his ♠QJ.

After trumps have been drawn and declarer leads a club up East actually needs to duck. Yes that gives up his club trick but it's worth it because in exchange his partner will get 2 diamond tricks! That's not immediately obvious of course. It's perhaps easiest to see by projecting what will happen if he does win ♣K. With the ♥A still in dummy, declarer will definitely score 5 spades, 1 heart, 2 clubs (on which he can discard diamonds) and whatever winning diamonds he has. Ducking means declarer will now win 1 club trick but he also can't get any diamond discards. It's only wrong for East to duck if West has ♦AK available to cash immediately. But how likely is that on the bidding? Besides, if West had that he would surely have encouraged diamonds violently when he made a discard on declarer's 3rd trump? After the club is ducked, declarer eventually has to play diamonds himself and will end up leading from his ♦105 into partner's ♦Q9.

It can often be right to duck like this and appear to give up a trick in a suit as a defender. Another common case is when declarer holds singleton in one hand and leads it towards KQx in the other hand. If the Ace is onside and the defender takes it, the KQ will now provide 2 later discards for losers. If the defender ducks there are no discards. So the trick lost in that suit often comes back in another (and sometimes, like here, it's actually worth 2 tricks). The right play for the defence usually depends on whether they are in a position to immediately cash other tricks. If they are they should win and cash them but, if not, it's almost always right to duck.

The other way at trick 2 to hold declarer to 9 tricks is to switch to a LOW trump! This is an advanced defence but can be very effective. The ace of trumps is a really important controlling card and it can often be right to preserve it to play at a time suitable to you. Here, it keeps East's options open. While it doesn't remove both diamond ruffs it does remove one and it still gives East control of trumps and a way of countering whatever declarer tries. Declarer will most likely take 1 diamond ruff, ruff a heart to hand and lead a club. But now East can afford to win ♣K and switch to ♥K to knock the ♥A. If declarer tries to cash the ♣Q then West can ruff it (only 1 round of trumps has been played at this point) and dummy has no more entries. If declarer instead plays another trump East wins and again play ♥K to get the ♥A out of dummy. This time when he wins ♣K he can play ♥Q trapping declarer in hand where he will eventually lose his 4th round of diamonds. In both these cases the defence win ♠A, ♣AK and 1 diamond.

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)