



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.

Opening leads and defence

City – Monday Morning 12th June 2023

11		♠ K6	Dir: S
		♥ A9832	Vul: Nil
		♦ A97	
		♣ 854	
♠ QJT97543	♠ 82	11	
♥ KT6	♥ Q	7 8	
♦ J7	♦ K86542	14	
	♣ K963		
		♠ A	♠ ♥ ♦ ♣ NT
		♥ J754	N 3 3 4 - 3
		♦ QJT3	S 3 3 4 - 3
		♣ AQT2	E - - 1 -
			W - - 1 -

Board 11 last week was mainly a question of opening leads and subsequent defence.

But let's first consider the auction. South opens the bidding and, as discussed in the 29th May column, it's best to choose 1♦. That way if partner responds 1♠ he can rebid 2♣ since he is not strong enough to reverse with 2♥ (that would force partner to go to 3♦ if he just wanted to give preference to diamonds and the South hand isn't strong enough for that when partner could have as few as 5 points to respond). Some players might decide to open 1♣ with the intention of rebidding 1NT over 1♠. Personally I don't like doing that with a singleton (especially not with a singleton ace) but, as

mentioned before, 4441 hands are awkward and you invariably end up having to lie in some fashion, it's just a question of about what!

On this hand none of that matters since West will surely jump to 4♠. Now it's over to North. Although no table seems to have done so I would be very tempted to double 4♠. I am looking at what is very likely to be 3 tricks myself and partner has opened the bidding so it would be pretty unlucky if he can't contribute any tricks!

Of course you need to know whether double is penalties or takeout. Some pairs continue to play takeout even at higher levels but by the time you reach 4♠ that's less useful. I tend to play doubles as takeout through 4♥ (to enable you to find your own 4♠ contract) but more penalty orientated above that.

Let's now turn to the defence against 4♠. What should North lead? As is often the case this is a process of elimination. Even if partner opened 1♦ I would still lead a club. You clearly aren't going to lead a spade away from ♠Kx (even though it happens to be safe on this hand). Leading or underleading an unsupported ace against a suit contract is usually also a very bad lead (far too often they just set up tricks for Ks or Qs that would not otherwise have been tricks). So that only leaves clubs!

Having decided on a club, which one? From 3 small some pairs lead “top of nothing”. That can help partner identify if you have an honour but not how many you have. The downside is it can also lead to partner thinking you have a doubleton and trying to give you a ruff. A more common method is “MUD” (Middle Up Down). With that on this hand you lead the ♣5 and play the ♣8 on the next round. Now partner knows you don't have a doubleton.

A club lead works well here. South wins ♣Q and should continue with the ♣A – after all from his point of view North could easily have led from ♣54 and want a ruff. The ♣A is also safe to cash – see advanced section for why. When he sees the ♣8 at trick two, he knows that won't work and he needs to switch. So what then? It looks like he wants to try and stop declarer trumping a heart loser in dummy so the ♠A seems right. Then he should try ♦Q for two reasons:

- Partner might have ♦A and not ♥A. Now you want to cash your diamond trick before declarer can play ♥A, ruff a heart in dummy and discard a diamond loser on the ♠K.
- There's no rush if partner has ♥A as declarer can't immediately reach dummy.

South can also be fairly confident that partner has ♦A and not the ♥AK – see advanced section for why.

The ♦Q switch works nicely. Declarer can't really gain by discarding on it so he'll probably ruff and play a heart but now North can win ♥A and, no doubt to South's pleasant surprise(!), cash ♠K. This removes all of dummy's trumps and leaves North a safe exit with the ♦A. Although dummy now has several winners in it, declarer can't get to them and will have to lose another trick to the ♥J. 3 off and -500!

Most tables only took 4♠ 1 off though. The ♦A lead was probably the cause a couple of times. Declarer trumps and might lead a heart. North wins and can shift to clubs but the defence are no longer able to play both their trumps since North can't get in again after South takes ♠A. That enables declarer to trump his heart loser in dummy. In fact if South doesn't take both his clubs, declarer can then also discard a club on the established ♦K.

The ♥A isn't a good lead either as again it's now impossible for North South to play both their trumps before declarer can ruff his heart loser in dummy.

Another thing that might have gone wrong is declarer leading ♠Q from his own hand and North covering, thus crashing his partner's ♠A! It's definitely not right to cover here - see advanced section for why not.

Key points to note

- Opening leads are frequently a process of elimination - after removing what are usually very bad leads, only one suit might be left!
- Leads or underleads of unsupported aces are generally poor leads.
- MUD (middle up down) is a common lead from 3 small - it avoids partner mistaking your holding for a doubleton.
- If partner doesn't lead your suit, it's very likely he holds the unsupported Ace in the suit.
- The only point to covering honours as a defender is to promote lower cards in either your or your partner's hand. If that's not possible from the bidding then it cannot gain to cover.

More advanced

At trick 2, South can be confident the ♣A will cash. Why? Because of a close examination of the missing clubs. Suppose trick one goes ♣5,3,Q,7. If declarer only had one club that would mean North has led the ♣5 from ♣J854. Likewise if trick one went ♣5,3,Q,J that would mean North has led the ♣5 from ♣8754. But neither of those are consistent – in the 1st case North would lead the ♣4, in the 2nd case (playing 4th & 2nd leads) he would have led the ♣7. So the only holdings left are North leading from ♣J85 (with declarer having false carded and played the ♣7 from ♣74) or ♣854 or ♣54. It's a good example of how closely a good defender needs to examine the pips to see what holdings are still possible.

After cashing ♣QA, ♠A South needs to decide what to switch to. He should realise he hasn't been able to get any signal from partner (who had to play ♣8 to show the MUD at trick 2 and had to play ♣5 at trick 3). It's often worth considering if partner has had a chance to signal or not. When he hasn't you just have to resort to logic. As is often the case it's a question of working out what losers might run away and what ones can't. Here the risk is a diamond loser running away on the ♠K so that's the suit South should switch to. Even though the defence don't actually have a diamond trick here, it still works as the best defence.

I said earlier that South can be pretty confident North does hold ♦A and does not hold ♥AK. Why? Because he led a club. Assuming South opened 1♦ then the only reason North would prefer to lead from nothing in another suit instead of your suit is if he held the unsupported ♦A. Likewise surely if North held both the ♥AK he would have led one of those? It's often possible to work out where the honours are in a suit based on what partner did NOT lead just as much as from what he DID lead!

Although it's not that likely to happen on this hand, what would you do as North if you led ♦A, declarer ruffed and led ♠Q? Covering with ♠K on this hand would be very embarrassing! It can't be right to cover for two reasons:

- If declarer had the ♠A, surely he'd either lead it himself or he'd try to reach dummy to take a finesse?
- The only purpose of covering is to promote lower cards in either your own or partner's hand. But here how can that be possible? Declarer must have at least 7 spades to bid 4 himself so partner has at most two and quite possibly only one!

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)