



## 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 after partner's 1NT opening

City – Monday Morning 5<sup>th</sup> June 2023

<b>8</b>		♠ T9542	Dir: W
		♥ Q62	Vul: Nil
		♦ K97	
		♣ 93	
♠ K843	♠ KQ3	5	
♥ QJT654	♥ AJ5	9	17
♦ K84	♦ 82	9	
♣ K84	♣ AQJ72		
♠ AJ876			
♥ T97			
♦ A3			
♣ T65			

Board 8 last week was a fairly routine game for East West but contained some interest in the bidding.

West as dealer should pass. Even if you have a weak 2♦ available it's not a good idea holding a 4 card major on the side. North will also pass and East will probably open 1NT (15-17) although it's a very nice 17 count with a good 5 card suit and some might upgrade it and treat it as worth 18 (I'd certainly do that if the 5 card suit was a major). If East does upgrade and open 1♣, South should then overcall 1♠ and that will probably lead to NS competing all the way to 4♠. Over 1NT, however, South should pass (his hand isn't nearly worth a 2 level overcall) and it's now over to West to decide how to respond. Holding a good 9 points opposite 15-17 he will want to force to game, the only question is which one? 3NT, 4♥ or 5♦ could all be right. In fact slam might even be an option if partner happens to have exactly the right cards.

There are several different ways of bidding these sorts of hands and it often depends on agreements.

There are two main approaches

- start with Stayman to check for a heart fit and, failing that, play 3NT.
- show diamonds via a transfer and then bid hearts.

One key thing to know in your partnership is what bids means after a stayman response. For example after 1NT-2♣-2♠, what does 3♦ mean? It can be played as forcing and strong or it can be played as weak. Either method is playable – the key thing is for you and your partner to know which it is you are playing!

See advanced section for more discussion on some of the bidding methods in use here.

Regardless of bidding methods here, without a heart fit, East West are likely to end in 3NT. South will almost certainly lead a spade to the 9 and Q. What now for declarer? He has 1 spade, 2 top hearts and (barring a very unlucky 5-0 break) 5 clubs. Hearts or diamonds could provide more tricks but there's a risk of allowing North on lead as he can lead another spade through your remaining ♠Kx. This is likely to be fatal because the ♠A is almost certainly with South (North would surely have played it at trick one if he held it). Accordingly South is the safe hand – if he is on lead your spade is protected. That gives a clue to the best option. Run your long clubs and then try ♥K and a heart finesse. This leads to 9 tricks.

Deep Finesse can make 10 tricks. But that's because he “knows” the heart finesse works. So he can play a club to the ♣K, an immediate heart finesse and, with hearts 3-3, is then in a position to score 4 hearts, 5 clubs and 1 spade. In the real world it's better to cash your long suit first as it will cause the defenders some discard problems. But that means you can't get back to the 4th heart in dummy.

### Key points to note

- Don't usually open a weak 2♦ with a side 4 card major – you might miss a much better contract played in the major (maybe even game),

- In the play one defender will often be the “safe hand” – i.e. when that hand is on lead you still have a stopper in a suit. If you have to lose the lead, try to do so to that hand.
- Beyond stayman and transfers, other bids over 1NT are often not discussed very well by partnerships. Being able to transfer to the minors is very useful.
- Agree what bids after stayman responses mean – are they weak or forcing? This has knock-on implications for lots of other bidding sequences which more advanced partnerships should discuss.

### *More advanced*

Bidding in response to 1NT is an area often overlooked by players. Everyone plays stayman, almost everyone these days plays transfers (at least to the majors) but most people don't discuss much beyond that.

Major suit transfers (2♦, 2♥) are almost universal but things vary after that. Some pairs play “Four suit transfers” where 2♣ is a transfer to clubs and 2NT is a transfer to diamonds. Others use 2♣ as a “range probe” (in response 2NT is min, other bids are non-min and natural) with 2NT as a transfer to either minor (opener must bid 3♣ which responder passes or corrects).

Personally I prefer the 4 suit transfers method because that allows room for responder to make an intermediate bid (1NT-2♣-2NT or 1NT-2NT-3♣) instead of just completing the transfer. That allows you to play one route as a “super-accept” and the other as neutral. There are variations for what players define a “Super-accept” to be but its primary aim is to identify that you may be able to run the minor.

That can make a huge difference. Imagine a hand with KQxxxx and no other entry. If partner doesn't have the ace, you may score as few as 1 trick in this suit (opponents will hold the ace up until the other hand is out of the suit). And you usually just want to play in that suit so your hand is worth something. Conversely if partner does have the ace then you have a good chance of 6 tricks! Finding out about the missing honour can enable you to bid a good 3NT with very minimal values. That's the reason I prefer a super accept in a minor to guarantee a top honour in the suit (my partner and I guarantee at least the Queen but not more than a doubleton – but we don't super-accept on something like 4 small in the suit since that may well not help the whole suit run for no-trumps).

The key to bidding the West hand over 1NT is agreeing with your partner what it means to bid stayman and then bid 3♦ over 2♣. Is that bidding sequence strong or weak?

There are two basic schools of thought and, as usual, there are pluses and minuses to both.

One school of thought plays it as weak (so 1NT-2♣-2♠-3♦ would typically show a weak hand with 6 diamonds and 4 hearts). If you are doing that then with this hand you can show the diamonds first (with a transfer) and then bid 3♥ naturally. This simply shows 5+ (usually 6) diamonds, 4 hearts and a game force. With a weak hand this method allows you to try and find a major suit fit if you have one and still get out in 3 minor if you don't. But that hand type doesn't come up very often and it's for this reason that many pairs adopt the other school of thought.

The other school of thought plays 3 minor after stayman as forcing. If you are doing that then with this hand you start with stayman and then bid 3♦ over either 2♦ or 2♣. The downside of that is with a weak hand with a long minor and a 4 card major you can't afford to look for the major fit in case partner gives a stayman response you can't handle. So you typically have to just transfer to the minor and give up - which risks missing a major suit fit if you do have one. On the other hand it keeps the bidding lower and leaves more room to explore potential slam going hands. It also allows you to play a bid of 3M after a transfer to a minor as something else (it's not needed as natural because that hand now starts with stayman). A frequent agreement is shortage (e.g. 1NT-2NT-3♦-3♠ shows a game going hand with diamonds and a spade shortage). That helps partner evaluate their hand well and establish whether the pair should play 3NT or play in the minor suit.

Like everything, it's a trade-off. Some hands will suit one method, some will suit the other. As usual it's far more important to have discussed the situation so you both know what the bidding sequences mean than what the agreement actually is.

Just one small point in the play. On this hand playing diamonds is too risky because North could easily get on lead. But consider the problem from North's perspective if declarer was brave enough to lead the ♦Q from dummy. How many

Norths would actually cover it with the ♦K to gain the lead to play a spade through? It will look to him as if declarer is taking a finesse and there is no point covering. It would be a very tough problem! On some hands, a deceptive manoeuvre like that could be a key play. Here it is far too risky – declarer could look completely stupid if North had ♦A, won that and played a spade though – when all the time declarer had 9 tricks available in hearts and clubs!

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)