



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.

Defenders' ruffs are right this time! But sacrificing is not.

City and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 22nd May 2023

22	♠ A83	Dir: E
	♥ J94	Vul: E-W
	♦ T74	
	♣ AJ63	
♠ Q97	♠ KT42	10
♥ KT2	♥ AQ865	12 12
♦ KQ3	♦ KT42	6
♣ Q987		
	♠ J65	
	♥ 73	
	♦ AJ98652	
	♣ 5	

Last week I talked about a hand where it was right for the defence not to take a ruff available to them. This week we'll look at a more common type of hand where it most definitely is right for them to take their ruffs!

Most East West pairs ended up in 4♥ on board 22. East will open 1♥, South will most likely make a weak jump overcall of 3♦ to try and get in the way (assuming he is playing that method – see advanced section for some other options). In an uncontested auction West's hand is quite a close decision – it's a maximum for a game invite or a minimum for a game force. Over the 3♦ bid, however, West needs to decide whether

he should just show a raise to 3♥ or a game raise to 4♥.

When the opponents have taken space away in the auction, you sometimes have to stretch a bit to show support. Here there are weaker hands which he would still like to compete to 3♥ on. So if he does that on those hands, he needs to show a game raise on this one. Despite his poor shape he has 12 points and his ♦KQ are sitting over the suit in the south hand.

Whilst he could just bid 4♥ himself a better bid is 4♦, a “cue raise” showing a good raise to game with values (4♥ would then tend to show a more distributional raise to game). This distinction can be important for partner later. See advanced section for more.

It looks like a couple of tables then pushed onto 5♦ as North. Although sacrificing can be profitable when at favourable vulnerability, there are limits! On this hand there are several reasons for North not to push on:

He has plenty of defence – if partner has a singleton in either black suit (quite likely when he has made a pre-emptive jump) then 4♥ can go off.

He has poor shape and lots of losers so there's a big risk 5♦ doubled will cost too much.

So, assuming 4♥ is the final contract, what about the defence? South has an easy lead of his singleton – trying for ruffs is usually a very effective defence. In fact the weaker your hand the better – because that increases the chances that partner has the entries you will need him to have to be able to give you ruffs. For example the lead will work perfectly here when partner holds the ♣A and even if he doesn't hold that but does hold the ♥A he will still get in in time to give you one ruff.

South will be delighted when North wins the ♣A at trick 1. Even though he can't see the ♣4 or ♣2. North should be pretty confident the lead is a singleton – a hand that has pre-empted is more likely to be short in a side suit. Besides, from his perspective giving partner some ruffs is looking by far the best chance for the defence.

When North returns a club for the ruff this is a standard position for a suit preference signal. To be totally clear North should return the ♣J, his highest available club, to clearly indicate to partner that he wants the higher side suit (spades) returned. South should ruff, lead a spade to the ace and receive a 2nd club ruff. That's the 1st 4 tricks for the defence! Had North had the ♦A or perhaps even been void in diamonds, he should return his smallest club asking for the lower side suit.

4♥ seems to have made at quite a number of tables. Some tables led the ♦A – this hand is a very good example of why leading unsupported aces is such a bad thing to do! Here declarer ruffs it, draws trumps, and can now discard 2 losers on the ♦KQ in dummy. If he gets everything right, he will discard two spades, then run the ♣7 to finesse against North's ♣J – that will lead to 11 tricks losing only the black aces. Even if he doesn't guess the clubs correctly he will still only lose 2 clubs and the ♠A and make 10 tricks.

Key points to note

- When the opponents interfere over your bidding it is often worth stretching a bit to show support.
- In competitive auctions try to distinguish between hands with points and hands with shape – that may help partner make a decision later in the auction.
- Leading a side suit singleton against a suit contract is an attractive option (especially from a weak hand) to try and get ruffs.
- Leading unsupported aces, especially from a long suit, is generally a bad thing to do.
- When giving partner a ruff, use suit preference signals to ask what suit you want partner to return (a high card asks for the higher of the other 2 side suits, a low card asks for the lower).
- Don't sacrifice if your hand has decent defensive prospects or has lots of losers.
- Understand your partner's style when pre-empting – it also makes a huge difference in deciding whether to sacrifice.

More advanced

Many pairs these days play weak jump overcalls as a pre-emptive weapon to make it harder for the opponents to bid accurately to their contract. The South hand here is a good example. Traditionally, however, jump overcalls were played as strong. That's very rare these days but some pairs, however, do still like to keep their jump overcalls a bit stronger. You frequently hear pairs playing "intermediate" jump overcalls. The key there is to agree what you both mean by "intermediate" – I've seen many some idea what partner has when he makes the bid.

It's also sensible to vary your jump overcalling style based on vulnerability. At favourable vulnerability like this hand, I'd have no qualms making a weak jump overcall on a 6 card suit. But at equal vulnerability or whenever you are vulnerable yourself, it pays to be a little more cautious! Just like for simple overcalls, having a decent quality suit is a big factor.

The cue raise concept is an essential competitive bidding tool. By distinguishing hands with values from hands that are just jumping to game with shape, it helps partner know whose hand it generally is. That will help him judge whether to bid on or double the opponents if they do bid more themselves. If partner holds a really strong hand it may also enable the pair to reach slam. On this hand none of that matters – East is minimum so he would just bid 4♥ over a 4♦ cue raise. Holding only 5 trumps and quite a few black suit losers himself he also shouldn't go on to 5♥ if North does choose to bid 5♦ - he should leave that decision to his partner (and on this hand West has a very easy double of 5♦ holding only 3 hearts and what are probably 2 defensive tricks in diamonds).

Sacrificing at pairs can of course be profitable in the right circumstances but in general players try it too much. Remember there are three conditions that all need to be met before a sacrifice is worthwhile:

The opponent's contract (assume game) has to be making.

Your own sacrifice contract needs to be going for a penalty (assume doubled) of less than the value of the opponent's game.

The field needs to be bidding the game (no point going -300 against a possible -620 only to find most of the field is not bidding game and only scoring 170!)

Here neither (a) nor (b) are met so 5♦ doubled meets the fate it deserves – declarer will just make 5 trumps and 2 black aces. 4 off and -800.

Of course it's not always easy to judge these things at the table but the North hand here contains two large warning signs against bidding 5♦. Its two aces are good defensive cards and, as we have seen, whenever partner has a singleton in either black suit (surely very likely after a pre-emptive weak jump overcall?) they are enough to beat the contract. Furthermore, it has a lot of losers so, even if 4♥ is making there's quite a good chance that a 5 level contract will go for too much.

Another really important factor when deciding to sacrifice is knowing what your partner's style is. If they are quite happy pre-empting on bad 6 card suits then you should be even more wary of bidding further! But if they always tend to have their bid, you can be more confident bidding on. In fact knowing this style is applicable far beyond just in deciding whether to sacrifice or not. The more you play bridge the more you will find that style and general partnership understanding is actually far more important than lots of fancy bits of system!

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)