



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 with 4441 shapes and responding to takeout doubles

City and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 29th May 2023

15	♠ 762	Dir: S
	♥ 95	Vul: N-S
	♦ KT873	
	♣ J43	
♠ KT3	♠ J85	4
♥ AQ82	♥ T74	15 5
♦ AQ92	♦ J54	16
♣ 87	♣ KT95	
	♠ AQ94	
	♥ KJ63	
	♦ 6	
	♣ AQ62	
	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ NT	
	N - - - -	
	S - - - 1 -	
	E 1 1 1 - 2	
	W 1 1 1 - 2	

Board 15 last week was a partscore hand which ended up being played in all sorts of different contracts but it had a few points of interest in both the bidding and play.

If playing 5 card majors South will no doubt open 1♣. Some 4441 shapes can be difficult to bid and it's important to plan ahead. Imagine that partner responds in your singleton (they usually do!) and work out what your rebid is going to be. See advanced section for more details. If playing 4 card majors, South might open 1♥.

Over 1♥ West will usually bid 1NT (15-18 or thereabouts) and that should end the auction. Over 1♣ West should make a takeout double, North will pass and it's over to East. It looks like one table passed the double and that resulted in 1♣ doubled making an overtrick for an unusual score of 340. That's a good indication of why it's not right to pass on these sort of hands! Responding to a takeout double is very different to responding to an opening bid - primarily because you can't just pass when you hold nothing. You are forced to bid something even with a very bad hand like this one. See advanced section for some further implications of that. The time you can pass the double is if you genuinely want to defend 1♣ doubled - so normally on hands with a lot of clubs and enough points so that your side has the majority.

So if East cannot pass what can he do? One bid he might consider here is 1NT. He has a club stop and he doesn't have another suit he can easily bid. Usually, however, 1NT is played as fairly constructive in these sort of auctions (typically about 8-11). That's because bidding 1NT on a very weak hand opposite a minimum takeout double can get into a lot of trouble (on this hand it's ok because West has more than a minimum and the cards sit quite well for East West but imagine if West had 11-12 point and East only 1-2. 1NT doubled would not be fun!)

So if we rule out 1NT as well then all that's left is to hope for the best and bid one of his 3 card suits! I'd probably just bid 1♦. That's the least encouraging thing he can do - if he bids a 3 card major he risks partner getting too excited when he holds a big hand thinking there is a major suit fit. If you have to lie in the bidding it's generally better to lie in a minor than a major.

1♦ should end the auction. North especially will be happy to play there as it's about the only denomination where his hand is worth something!

Against 1♦ South has a horrible lead - I'd try a trump, the least bad option (a singleton trump isn't generally a good lead as it can often pick up an honour in partner's hand but leading aces into thin air or underleading aces against suit contracts are both even worse choices and a heart away from our honours isn't appealing either). When declarer plays low from dummy at trick 1, North shouldn't rise with the ♦K, he should just innocently play the ♦3 and let East win the ♦J. This means he retains ♦K10xx sitting over dummy's ♦AQx so he will make at least 2 trump tricks, quite possibly 3. Also if declarer plays another diamond he will then get an unpleasant surprise! 1♦ will probably scrape home though as all the major suit cards lie well. Declarer just takes one major suit finesse, then leads clubs from dummy. The important principle is to lead up to honours wherever possible. On this hand South will have to help declarer each time he gets in.

If West is playing 1NT, North should probably NOT lead a diamond – he has no entries so it's very unlikely he can set up his long suit. He is better off trying to lead partner's suit as partner's hand has more values. I'd lead the ♣3. Although better than a diamond that still doesn't work particularly well here either as South will still get stuck on lead a lot to have to lead away from his honours.

The play will actually end up being similar in both 1♦ and 1NT since no-one is in a position to draw trumps and no-one has much of a shortage to be able to take many ruffs.

Key points to note

- 4441 shape hands can be awkward to bid. Think ahead and assume partner is going to respond in your singleton – then work out what you will then rebid.
- Responding to takeout doubles is very different to responding to an opening bid because you can't just pass with nothing.
- Because you may have to make a minimum bid with nothing, you need to jump when you do hold some values to help partner know what to do when he holds more than a minimum takeout double.
- In the play always try to lead towards honours and not away from them. Remember the defenders will often have to help you when they are on lead.
- If you hold a very weak hand as a defender it's often a good idea not to lead your own long suit since you won't have the entries to establish it – it's better to try and find partner's suit.

More advanced

It's common to open the lower of 2 four card suits. But when you hold a 4441 shape there are some extra considerations. These hands can be awkward to bid and you usually end up having to lie to an extent – it's just a question of how! It's all about planning your rebid and considering how strong you are.

If you are strong enough to reverse (i.e. rebid a second suit that is higher than your first) then you can typically just open the lowest of your 4 card suits and rebid a higher one.

Note that to reverse over a 1 level response you need to have a good hand - at least 16 points. That's because partner is forced to go to the 3 level if he wants to go back to your first suit. Given he might have as few as 5 points to respond, you need to be stronger to allow for this.

If you aren't strong enough to reverse you may need to open a higher suit to enable you to then rebid a lower one.

A 4414 shape as we have on this hand is not a problem. Open 1♣ and rebid 1♥ over 1♦. But other 4441's can be - if you are playing 5 card major openings here's a summary of how I'd recommend bidding each of the 4441 shapes when partner responds in your singleton (obviously there is no problem if they respond in one of your other suits):

- 4441: Open 1♦. If strong enough to reverse over 2♣ (14+ over a 2 level response) rebid 2♥, if not strong enough rebid 2♦ over 2♣ (yes I know that's rebidding a 4 card suit - it's the least bad option).
- 4414: Open 1♣ and rebid 1♥ over 1♦.
- 4144: Open 1♣ and rebid 1♠ over 1♥.
- 1444: If strong enough to reverse over 1♠ (16+ over a 1 level response) open 1♣ and rebid 2♥ over 1♠. If not strong enough to reverse open 1♦ and rebid 2♣ over 1♠.

If you are playing 4 card majors or a 4 card heart suit you can open 1♥ on a 4441 (rebid 2♦ over 2♣) or 1444 (rebid 2♣ over 1♠). But be aware that both these rebids imply you held 5 hearts originally so they also can lead to problems! There aren't any perfect answers when bidding with 4441 hands.

On this hand East is forced to dredge up a response to his partner's takeout double (we've already seen passing it results in -340!). It's important to understand that a minimum response to a takeout double might have to be done on zero points. That has knock on implications. If you DO have some values you need to jump the bidding. A minimum bid usually shows about 0 to a bad 8 and a jump a good 8 to 11. Think of it from the takeout doubler's point of view. It's OK with a minimum takeout double (11-13) as you will just pass next but if you have a bit more (14-17) it's impossible to know what to do if partner is going to make the same bid holding 0 points and 11 points! That's why partner needs to jump with some values. Now with a stronger hand you know it's OK to go on.

Frequently you see players making a minimum response to a takeout double on hands with values and completely minimum takeout doubles bidding again. It's OK when both players do this at the same time. But it can go badly wrong if they don't:

- Making a minimum response with values risks missing game when partner passes with a few extra values.
- Bidding again with a minimum takeout double risks getting way too high when partner did have to respond on nothing.

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)