



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.

Mini splinters and double fits

City (Open / Rookie) and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 14th August 2023

22		♠ Q862	Dlr: E
		♥ A4	Vul: E-W
		♦ 64	
		♣ AT863	
♠ A43	♠ T7	10	
♥ QJ85	♥ K963	16	8
♦ KQJ75	♦ AT32	6	
♣ K	♣ J72		
♠ KJ95			
♥ T72			
♦ 98			
♣ Q954			

Last week board 22 was another where East West had a vulnerable game available but few bid it.

East and South will both pass and West will open 1♦. North can't really bid over that (a takeout double is too dangerous with only 2 hearts and 2♣ with a poor quality 5 card suit and only 10 points is also asking for trouble). East responds 1♥ and the key to the auction is West's choice of rebid.

Some seem to have raised to 2♥ and that will most likely end the auction. A better choice is 3♥. West has 16 points and, even though the singleton club king isn't

necessarily worth much, the club shortage is valuable. His hand is definitely worth more than a minimum raise to 2♥. As discussed last week when playing teams, and especially when vulnerable, it's worth pushing to reach game. Hence the more aggressive 3♥ bid is better.

Another possible rebid that some might consider is 3♣. The normal treatment of a sequence like 1♦ - 1♥ - 3♣ is natural and strong. But some pairs choose to instead play this as a “mini splinter” (i.e. it shows shortage in the suit and is like a raise to 3 of partner's suit). These can be very useful because they pinpoint where partner's points are likely to be – which allows the other hand to judge much better how well the two hands will fit together.

But, as with any convention, there are downsides as well (the main one being you have to play 1♦ - 1♥ - 2♣ as forcing). Also, this hand isn't so suitable with the club shortage being the singleton king. See advanced section for more discussion on both these points.

If West does raise to 3♥ should East go on to 4♥? I think most definitely yes. It's not so much the points (although he does have 8 when he might have only had 5) but the double fit. West opened 1♦ so East knows they have a double fit (which West doesn't know about) and those tend to always play well. After West bids 3♥ from East's perspective it's very likely that they will have 5 diamond and 4 heart tricks so that only requires one more trick to make game. Which is highly probable since the 3♥ rebid shows better than a minimum. See advanced section for why 5 diamond tricks is a reasonable assumption.

There isn't much to the play of 4♥ on the hand. The most likely lead is a spade and declarer just wins and starts on trumps. 10 tricks should result - losing 1 spade, 1 club and ♥A. One of East's clubs is ruffed in the West hand and the other is discarded on the 5th diamond.

Key points to note

- When vulnerable playing imps, there's a lot to gain by bidding and making game. It's therefore worth being more aggressive in the bidding.
- Using jump rebids as splinters is not standard but, by agreement, can help identify whether hands fit well or not – useful to bid good games or slams.

- It's not usually a good idea to describe singleton honours as shortage and make splinter bids with them. It just causes partner to misjudge how well the hands fit together.
- Hands with double fits tend to play well - if this is diagnosed during the auction it's worth bidding aggressively. But of course if there is a double fit for one side, that means there is for the other side as well. They might have a cheap sacrifice available.

More advanced

The uncontested bidding sequence 1♦-1♥-3♣ is most commonly played as a strong hand (often game forcing). That also means the sequence 1♦-1♥-2♣ is not forcing.

An alternative agreement is to play these jump rebid sequences as splinters showing a raise of responder's suit - usually to at least the 3 level (so a hand worth 15+). The idea is to more accurately describe your hand so responder is in a better position to judge how well the hands fit in order to bid game or possibly even slam. As usual, a splinter is useful because responder then knows values in that suit are often useless and values in other suits are even more valuable. That's why this hand, even if you had agreed to play the method, isn't really suitable for a 3♣ splinter rebid. Describing the singleton king as shortage is misleading and won't help partner judge well. For example suppose partner holds QJxx. That's actually quite good opposite singleton K because 2 tricks will be set up once the A has been knocked out. But opposite a small singleton or a void, QJxx is basically useless.

As with any convention there are some downsides, however. Much of the time that downside comes from no longer being able to use a particular bid as natural. This time, it's more about losing a non-forcing option.

If you use 3♣ as a mini splinter then with clubs you have to rebid 2♣ on all strength of hands. Hence 1♦-1♥-2♣ has to be forcing. When it's non forcing responder can pass with a weak hand which prefers clubs and a raise to 3♣ is then invitational. But if 2♣ is forcing that's not possible. Therefore responder might be forced to raise to 3♣ on a minimum 5 count in case opener has a really big hand. Which in turn means it's easy to get too high.

I said after 1♦-1♥-3♥ it's highly likely there will be 5 diamond tricks. That's because when West rebids 3♥ he is showing a hand worth about 15-17. But if his hand had been balanced in that range he would have already opened 1NT. Hence he must be unbalanced and will therefore nearly always have at least 5 diamonds (although a 4441 shape is also still a possibility here, albeit that's a much less common shape).

Of course if one side has a double fit that means so do the other! On this hand East West have a double red suit fit and North South a double black suit fit. If they could diagnose that, they would have a cheap sacrifice in spades or clubs over 4♥. On the likely heart lead spades will make 9 tricks (yes it can be held to 7 but that's after an unlikely club lead, West immediately taking ♠A and then underleading his diamonds twice to East to receive two club ruffs). Clubs also makes 9 tricks losing a spade, a heart and two diamonds. In both cases that's a lot better score than -620. But -300 would still have scored badly here as so few pairs reached game so the most common score was -170 rather than -620. It's another example of a sacrifice which is right in theory but wrong in practice! In fact no North South pair played a contract at all, because there's no easy way of them getting into the bidding.

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)