



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.

Competitive bidding; what to do when every bid choice has flaws.

City (Open / Rookie) and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 21st August 2023

8 ♠ 964 ♥ 84 ♦ 9852 ♣ A965	♠ AKQT ♥ K95 ♦ J764 ♣ 72	<i>Dir: W</i> <i>Vul: Nil</i>																														
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Board 8 last week was a typical part score battle. The side holding the spade suit can make things very difficult for their opponents.

West will pass and North, playing Standard, will open 1♦ (those playing 4 card majors may prefer 1♠ and the hand is obviously also suitable for a weak NT if playing that).

East then has a choice of actions over 1♦, each with some flaws. He could overcall 1♠ (but obviously has a very poor suit and not one he wants partner to lead), or overcall 1NT (which shows the strength but the diamond stopper is very poor), or possibly make a takeout double (but partner will bid hearts more often than not and that might lead

to a silly 4-3 heart fit with a 5-4 spade fit available).

Generally if all your bidding choices have some flaws it's a case of choosing the least bad. A good guide is if a possible bid has two flaws then you should look elsewhere and prefer one with only one flaw.

Over a 1♣ or 1♥ opening I'd prefer 1NT. That really only has one flaw – the unshown 5 card spade suit but it has two other good features – a good description of strength and a good stopper in opener's suit (note ♥Axx is a far better stopper than ♦KQ because the Ace gives you control of the suit). But over 1♦ I would prefer 1♠. This time 1NT has two flaws – an unshown 5 card major AND a poor stopper. 1♠ only has one flaw – the poor quality suit. But the spade suit is so valuable in competition that it's worth getting in.

After 1♦ 1♠ South should double. Usually this shows exactly 4 hearts but it can also show hands with longer hearts that are not good enough to start with 2♥ (which would typically show 10+ points).

At this point many Wests would pass. If he does North will most likely rebid 1NT with his good spade stopper. South might choose to leave that but should probably bid 2♥ to show he had 5+ hearts originally. North will happily pass that knowing partner has less than 10 points (because he didn't bid 2♥ the first time).

However, a much better bid from West over a double is a raise to 2♠. Yes he only has 4 points but observe how much harder this makes things for North South by the space it consumes. North can't really bid over 2♠ at all and it's by no means clear for South to do so either (3♥ is now risky as there's no guarantee North has a balanced hand so he doesn't have to have any hearts at all). West might actually buy the contract in 2♠.

West's raise is an example of good competitive bidding. An immediate raise of partner's overcall just denies the ability to make a “cue raise” (a hand with support worth about 9+). So it can be any hand less than that and really just shows the fit. It's especially valuable when holding spades as it takes the whole level of bidding away from the opponents.

What about the play? Let's start with 2♠ by East. South has a natural ♥Q lead. Just because partner opened 1♦ doesn't mean it is right to lead a diamond from a holding headed by an unsupported ace. Do you always have the A or K in a suit you open? No, neither do I! Leading a diamond today is OK but a lot of the time will cost a trick – declarer could easily have ♦K for example.

Declarer's best bet is to duck ♥Q smoothly. South might now think his partner has ♥AK and play a 2nd round. This would allow declarer to win and take a heart ruff in dummy. If, however South switches accurately to a trump, North can play 3 rounds to remove all dummy's trumps and then continue hearts. This should set the defence up to score 3 spades, 2 hearts and ♦A. However, South has to be careful – see advanced section for why.

If North South play a heart partscore this can make 9 tricks. It's most likely to be played by South on a spade lead (one of the downsides of overcalling!). Declarer's instinct may be to immediately discard his two diamond losers on the top spades but this may not be best on the hand. If he does that and then leads a club hoping to eventually score a club ruff in North, the defence can counter that by leading trumps whenever they get in. Now declarer should lose 4 clubs, 1 heart and 1 diamond. If instead declarer choose to discard 2 clubs, he should now end up with 9 tricks, losing 2 clubs ♦A and 1 heart). There's a case to do this too - see advanced section.

Some tables played in 1NT - by either side! EW should go comfortably off in NT as their spade suit will take ages to establish and the defence will get their tricks going sooner. NS on the other hand can make 2NT. If the defence don't knock the ♦A out of the South hand declarer can set up 4 hearts to go with 3 spades and ♦A. If the defence do knock out ♦A in time, then they can hold up ♥A and cut South off. But declarer should still be OK – see advanced section for more. In practice the defence are more likely to start with 3 rounds of clubs but anything East does at that point is going to help declarer.

Key points to note

- Sometimes all bids are flawed – try to choose one that only has one flaw not two.
- After 1minor 1♠ overcall double either shows 4 hearts or a weaker hand with longer hearts that doesn't have enough to start with 2♥. If you start with double and later bid hearts that is what you are showing.
- Don't be afraid to raise in competition with not much – especially when holding spades, it makes life much harder for the opponents.
- An unsupported ace is still usually a bad lead even if it's a suit partner opened.
- When declaring and you have a choice of what to discard, it's usually best to discard something that will always be a loser. Then you may have a chance of avoiding a loser in another suit.

More advanced

When paying in spades let's suppose South starts with ♥Q ducked and then finds a trump switch for North to draw 3 rounds. When declarer wins the ♥A, he will no doubt play ♠J to draw the last trump. South's problem is that he has to make several discards on the trumps while all this is going on. He needs to cling to all 4 of his clubs (if he doesn't declarer will be able to overtake the ♣J and score 4 clubs (discarding his other heart loser on the now winning ♣9). The sight of 4 clubs in dummy sitting over him should lead him to get it right though – it is amazing how often it is wrong to discard from a 4 card suit. Because there is no other entry in the West hand declarer will probably try overtaking the ♣J himself hoping the suit will break 3-3 to enable him to discard his remaining heart loser – but no luck today.

A good declarer playing in hearts should recognise that competent defenders will not allow a club ruff. Therefore he's better off discarding 2 clubs (which will be definite losers) and instead hoping the diamond suit can produce another trick. That comes to fruition here when the lucky ♦KQ position shows up but it would also work if East had ♦Kx or ♦Qx (play low to the ♦10 which loses but now the ♦A drops the other honour and dummy's ♦J is a winner).

Note that when good defenders play trumps they will start by switching to a LOW one from either hand. That way, whichever of them gets in next can play a trump to the A and a 3rd round to remove all dummy's ruffing power. On this hand where East has all the values that doesn't matter. He can start with ♥A and another knowing he is almost certain to get in next himself to play the 3rd trump. Had the defence's points been more evenly spread, however, it would have been important to start with a low one so that if West got in next he would still have a small trump to play.

If NS are playing no-trumps and the defence attack diamonds and then duck the ♥A to cut off the heart winners in the South hand declarer will be concerned but will in fact still be OK. East's ♦KQ holding means declarer will be able to reach the heart winners after all with the ♦10. So the best the defence can do is score ♥A, ♦Q and 3 clubs (but of course this time it's

declarer who also needs to cling onto the 4 clubs in the South hand to prevent the defence being able to overtake ♣J to score 4 club tricks!) Holdings of 10xxx in bridge are often amazingly valuable!

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)