



## 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.

### Disciplined bidding and the importance of safe leads

City (Open / Rookie) and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 28<sup>th</sup> August 2023

<b>2</b>		♠ T64	Dlr: E
		♥ Q987	Vul: N-S
		♦ 542	
		♣ AQT	
♠ K8	♠ AJ53	8	
♥ T654	♥ AJ2	4	14
♦ T3	♦ A9876	14	
♣ J7642	♣ 8		
		♠ Q972	
		♥ K3	
		♦ KQJ	
		♣ K953	
		NT	
		N 1 - - - 1	
		S 1 - - - 1	
		E - 1 1 - -	
		W - 1 1 - -	

Board 2 last week was an example of where selling out to a simple 1 level contract could still score well.

East will open 1♦ and that could well end the auction. South isn’t quite strong enough to overcall 1NT (which normally shows 15-18) although it looks like some did so. He’s also vulnerable which risks going off in hundreds if he gets too high. West might dredge up a 1♥ response but it’s not very appealing – if he had an honour in his heart suit or perhaps an ace it would be more attractive. If West does pass then North doesn’t have anywhere to go either. There are several warning signs for him to quietly sell out to 1♦. His 3 low diamonds is the main one – see advanced section for more.

So what should South lead against 1♦? I was surprised how many seem to have led the ♠2. While 4th highest from long suits is often an effective lead it’s not a good choice here for a couple of reasons:

- It’s known from the auction that East has a big hand and West a very poor one. So it’s quite likely that a lead away from the ♠Q will go round to declarer’s honours and give a trick away (as in fact does happen).
- There is a very attractive and very safe alternative – the ♦K!

When playing pairs you want to generally avoid giving cheap tricks away, so a safe option is nearly always a good choice. A solid honour sequence is one of the safest leads available. It wouldn’t occur to me to lead anything other than ♦K. If declarer ducks (quite likely) it also then enables us to see dummy to make a more informed switch at trick 2.

An opening spade lead runs to declarer’s ♠J whereupon he can cross to ♠K, back to ♥A and trump his 4th spade in dummy with ♦10 (which, fortunately for declarer, North cannot overruff). He will end up losing 2 hearts, 2 trumps and 1 club to make 8 tricks and score +90.

The ♦K works better for the defence. Declarer wins and his best bet is to play ♠K, ♠A and trump a spade in dummy hoping the ♠Q will fall. When it doesn’t this leaves him with a spade loser as there is no other trump in the West hand. He will no doubt play on hearts next hoping to score 2 tricks there (see advanced section for alternative ways to play this suit combination). But that won’t work (assuming the defence just passively play clubs when they win ♥K and force declarer back into his land to eventually lead away from his remaining ♥A2) and he should end up losing 1 spade, 2 hearts, 2 trumps and 1 club to be held to the fairly unusual score of +70. At pairs, that extra 20 points makes a big difference!

What about the North Souths who did bid? Had they stopped in 1NT it might have been alright but several pairs went too high. If North thinks South is 15-18 he may well make an invitational bid. This is another reason why South should not stretch in the first place! Even if it’s right to bid in theory it often goes wrong in practice because partner doesn’t know you have stretched and may well push your side too high.

West should definitely lead ♦10 against no-trumps. With such a weak hand himself it’s clear to lead partner’s suit and try to set that up – partner is the hand that will have the later entries. The defence is then likely to come to at least 2 spades, 1 heart and 3 diamonds (possibly other tricks as well depending on what declarer tries!) Because North South are vulnerable

even going 1 off scored -100 and was therefore bad because it was worse than either -70 or -90. This is an example of where the vulnerability makes a huge difference at pairs – had they been non-vulnerable then a score of -50 would have been excellent!

### *Key points to note*

- If you hold length in the opponent's suit and they haven't bid and raised, there's a good chance partner has length too. That tends not to be good as they may be able to take ruffs in the suit against you.
- Prefer safe leads when playing pairs – try not to lead away from honours round to known big hands.
- Be wary of stretching to overcall when vulnerable – even if it's right in theory it often goes wrong in practice because partner may well invite and push you too high; going off in 100's usually scores badly!
- Don't be afraid to sell out at the 1 level if your hand isn't suitable to bid – sometimes it's the best score available and bidding will just get you into trouble.

### *More advanced*

After 1♦ P P to North, some might consider re-opening with a double just to compete. However, there are a few warning signs:

1. He only has 43 in the majors so if partner bids spades he could land in a 4-3 fit.
2. He is vulnerable so getting too high risks going off in hundreds (-100 may not be good and -200 will invariably be terrible).
3. He has 3 low diamonds. This is a poor holding. With only 8 points himself and fewer than 5 with West it's clear that East has a good hand and South, his partner, must have quite a few points too. So why didn't South bid over 1♦? He isn't likely to have diamond shortage (otherwise he'd overcall or make a takeout double). So if he has diamond length that means two things:
  - He has fewer than 15 points (or he'd have overcalled 1NT).
  - West could well be short in diamonds and any suit contract North South play in might suffer diamond ruffs against it.

Length in the opponents' suit is always a warning sign – especially when the opponents don't raise themselves.

The East West heart suit is a fairly common holding and it's worth understanding the ways of playing it. You generally want to lead towards the ♥AJx with the intention of playing the ♥J. If North has both the ♥K and ♥Q he will have to play one of them and your ♥J10 will now be good for a 2nd trick. Playing low to the ♥J also gains when North has ♥Kx or ♥Qx (the ♥J will lose on the 1st round but on the 2nd round the ♥A will drop the now singleton honour with North and dummy's ♥10 will then be a winner). A lesser known way of playing the suit is to start by leading low away from ♥AJx. This may seem stupid at first glance but the holding this is playing for is ♥Kx or ♥Qx with SOUTH. It gives South the option of taking his honour on the 1st round (but now declarer can finesse against North's other honour) or ducking (whereupon dummy's ♥10 forces North's honour and now the ♥A can drop South's other honour so the ♥J scores too). This way of playing the suit doesn't come up often because it's still not clear what to do on the 2nd round after the ♥10 has been won with an honour. South might have singleton honour remaining but North could have started with both honours all along and now you want to finesse against the other. So it tends to only be used in a case where you might know from the auction (or perhaps the points) that North can't have Hx or can't have both honours.

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)