



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.

More passive leads and opening light in 3rd seat

City (Open / Rookie) and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 11th September 2023

24		♠ Q43	Dlr: W
		♥ T84	Vul: Nil
		♦ A96	
		♣ J964	
♠ A92	♠ T8765	7	
♥ J92	♥ AQ	8	9
♦ 732	♦ QJT	16	
♣ KT72	♣ 853		
♠ KJ	♠ NT		
♥ K7653	N 2 2 2 - 2		
♦ K854	S 2 2 2 - 2		
♣ AQ	E - - - -		
	W - - - -		

After what turned out to be quite an adventurous holiday in Morocco (we were in the middle of Marrakech when the earthquake struck!) I am now back in Australia and able to resume the weekly column.

Most pairs played board 24 last week in 2♥ by South and made 9 tricks on the ♣2 lead.

The auction was most likely 3 passes to South who has a normal 1♥ opening. North will raise that to 2♥ and that will likely end the auction. However see advanced section for possible variations.

What should West lead? I would not consider leading or underleading the ♠A and leading a trump from ♥Jxx is also very dangerous (imagine partner holds ♥Qx – that could easily cost the defence the trump trick they would otherwise have). So it's a choice between the minors.

Although 4th highest of a suit is a common lead, when playing matchpoint pairs you tend not to want to risk giving cheap tricks away. Remember your objective is not the same as it is at teams. At teams you just want to find the best chance to beat the contract and giving an overtrick away doesn't really matter. At pairs, you want to beat the score of as many pairs playing in your direction as possible. Those two objectives are very different! Hence there's a good case for West to lead a passive diamond here and not risk underleading his ♣K in case it costs a trick (which, on this hand, it does).

After a club lead round to the ♣Q declarer will most likely cross to dummy's ♦A to lead a trump towards his ♥K. He will end up losing the ♠A, 2 hearts and 1 diamond to score +140 (his last diamond will be a winner after the suit fortunately breaks 3-3).

The play and defence is more complex on a passive diamond lead. Declarer should win in hand and immediately play spades, attempting to set up dummy's ♠Q to discard his ♣Q. The defence can, however, counter this by winning the 1st round of spades (which leaves the suit blocked for declarer) and playing a 2nd diamond to get rid of dummy's only certain entry – the ♦A. Now, provided when East gets in with ♥A, he plays a club through declarer is going to end up losing 1 spade, 2 hearts, 1 diamond and the ♣K. Holding the score to +110 would have been worth a lot of matchpoints on this particular board given how many pairs were scoring +140!

Finally, suppose East West had competed in the auction and played in 2♠. South has a revolting lead to that contract. There's no passive option available as he holds honours in every suit. I would not consider either black suit so it's a guess between the red suits. He might choose a heart which gives a trick away on this hand. Declarer should still lose 2 spades, 2 diamonds and 2 clubs for -50 but that still scores better than conceding 110 or 140. Even if the defence is perfect (i.e. South leads a diamond and North returns a heart), the defence will still only score 2 spades, 1 heart, 2 diamonds and 2 clubs for +100, again less than they would score playing in hearts themselves. This is another example of how advantageous it is to declare the hand when neither side is vulnerable (see advanced section for more).

Key points to note

- Tend to prefer passive leads at matchpoint pairs – you don't want to give cheap tricks away. You are not necessarily trying to beat the contract, just trying to score better than everyone else sitting in your direction.
- Light 3rd seat openings can make things much harder for the opponents – but you must disclose your partnership style.
- When neither side is vulnerable it's the best time to compete in the auction. Playing the hand is a definite advantage.

More advanced

A common auction probably did start with 3 passes to South. But this hand is a good example of how a light 3rd seat opening bid can make things very hard for the opponents. Imagine you are South and East opens 1♠ in front of you. Now what? There's no particularly nice bid available to you as everything has a flaw:

- 2♥ is risky with such a poor suit
- 1NT shows the strength but has a poor spade stopper
- Double risks partner bidding clubs
- Pass risks missing out on your own contract

Opening 1♠ in 3rd seat by East has many tactical advantages. After his partner passes, he knows it is probably the opponents' hand. The spade suit means he takes up the whole 1 level of the auction. This makes it much harder for the opponents to find their best contract but it's also very hard for either of North South to double a spade contract. The vulnerability on this hand is also attractive – nil vulnerability is the best time to be competing as it's usually beneficial to play the hand (even if your contract fails you are only going off in 50s which will still score better than the opponents making their part-score and, had you been defending instead, you would only be taking the opponents off in 50s). The only real disadvantage on this hand is the poor suit which, if partner does end up on lead, may cause him to underlead a spade honour and cost a trick.

Note – it is important to disclose to the opponents what your partnership style is in these situations because they are entitled to know. Deliberately opening especially light in 3rd seat could be called a “pysche”. That is a perfectly legal thing to do in bridge but it must be a surprise to your partner as well – i.e. partner should bid as if you have a normal opening, he is not allowed to go out of his way to allow for the fact that you may have opened light.

That means a potential risk of opening light is that partner doesn't know whether you have a genuine bid or not so he can take your side too high if he has an invitational hand. There are bidding methods that can accommodate this though – the most common is “Drury” where, after a 3rd or 4th seat 1 major opening, a response of 2♣ is artificial and shows a genuine invite in the suit opened. This allows room for the opener to stop in 2 of their suit if they have in fact opened light. A further variation is “two way Drury” – here a 2♣ response shows a 3 card limit raise and a 2♦ response shows a 4 card limit raise. Of course, as usual with any convention, the partnership then needs to decide what they will do when they hold clubs or diamonds naturally (usually the answer will be to respond 1NT – remember the hand has already passed so it can probably have at most 10 points with the minor).

On this particular hand East will simply raise to 2♠, however. That may well win the board since, the opponents can make 2♥ so, to outscore the 110 they have available for that, they either need to beat 2♠ by 3 tricks or double it and beat it by 2 tricks. Neither is likely in practice. The one pair that did play 2♠ actually managed to make it for a complete top – but even had they gone 1 or 2 off they would still have scored extremely well.

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)