



## 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.

## Competing for the partscore

City (Open / Rookie) and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 18<sup>th</sup> September 2023

<b>27</b>	♠ JT75	Dir: S
	♥ Q75	Vul: Nil
	♦ T2	
	♣ A973	
♠ A863	♠ KQ94	7
♥ A32	♥ T4	11 10
♦ 543	♦ QJ97	12
♣ KT5	♣ Q42	
♠ 2	♠ - - - - NT	
♥ KJ986	N - - 2 - -	
♦ AK86	S - - 2 - -	
♣ J86	E - 1 - 2 -	
	W - 1 - 2 -	

The last board last week, no 27, showed once again the advantage of competing at pairs when no-one is vulnerable.

The normal start to the auction (assuming playing standard 5 card majors) will be 1♥ P 2♥. Although East has a reasonable shape to make a takeout double of hearts, it is very risky for him to do so. After all South might be sitting there with 19 points and about to bid game – if that is the case he will very likely be able to extract a heavy penalty! Most Easts therefore passed and, with a minimum opening bid, so does South. That seems to have ended the auction at a lot of tables.

2♥ should end up making 8 tricks - losing 1 spade, 1 heart, 1 diamond and 2 clubs. Even if the defence start with ♥A and another trump, declarer can still ruff one diamond in dummy and will just lose the 4th round. If they don't lead trumps declarer can immediately ruff a diamond but he can't get back to hand quickly to ruff another – which gives the defence a 2nd chance to now play ♥A and another. It's possible the defence will go wrong and allow 9 tricks to make, either by not playing trumps at all or by playing the ♣K or ♣10 prematurely (which will cost one of their club tricks).

As West against 2♥ I would be choosing between leading a low trump (perhaps trying to stop ruffs or just getting sight of dummy to be able to decide better what to do next) or a passive diamond. I wouldn't risk opening either black suit. Today, as long as West doesn't lead the ♣K or ♣10 it doesn't actually matter. There are still only 8 tricks for declarer.

But should North South be allowed to play in 2♥? No, definitely not! After South has passed, West now knows his partner must have some values - North only raised to 2♥ and South made no try for game. Therefore it's safer for West to compete with a takeout double. Yes I know he has a 4333 shape but, at this vulnerability, it's really important to compete and not let the opponents have a nice easy ride to play in their heart fit. He is already known not to have a "normal" takeout double because he could have done that over the original 1♥ opening and didn't so partner can take that into account.

Even if the opponents suspect the double may not be the perfect shape, it still gives them the problem of having to decide whether to defend or to bid onto 3♥. Today West's action pays dividends as his partner can bid 2♠ and they have found their 4-4 fit. North South might now choose to bid on but their chances of scoring +110 in 2♥ have now vanished. In fact, East West can make 2♠ so the best North South can do is bid onto 3♥ and score -50 or -100 if doubled. The latter is known as the "par result" (see advanced section).

There's another reason for West to bid as well - once the other side has an 8 card fit, then your side almost always will as well. If they have a 9 card fit then you are certain to have at least one 8 card fit. See advanced section for why, and for more on the "par result" concept.

If East West do manage to play in 2♠, it should also make 8 tricks. The defence might start with ♦AK and a ruff but they can't get South in quickly again to play the 4th round of diamonds. The ruff turns out to be with North's likely trump trick so declarer should end up losing ♥A, ♦AK and a ruff and the ♣A.

When playing the club suit declarer needs to either start with low to the ♣Q and then low back to the ♣10 or low to the ♣10 immediately. Effectively this is finessing against South's ♣J and will lead to 2 club tricks. It's nothing more than the usual principle of leading up to honours rather than playing the honour itself. +110 East West was a very good score since many other pairs sold out to 2♥ and scored -110. But even going 2 off (undoubled) in 2♠ would still have been better (-100). The board has effectively been won when West competes over 2♥.

### *Key points to note*

- Unless you know things are breaking very badly, don't normally let the opponents play quietly in their 8 card fit at the 2 level! Compete and make them decide whether to defend or be pushed to the 3 level.
- Nil vulnerability is the most attractive vulnerability to compete (game all vulnerability is the least attractive).
- Always lead up to honours if possible, don't lead them out directly.
- The "par" result is the score achieved when both sides reach their optimum contract. It often changes depending on vulnerability.

### *More advanced*

After an auction where the opponents have shown a fit, how can you tell that your side will almost always have a fit somewhere as well? Some simple maths! If they have 8 cards in one suit, that means you only have 5. You and your partner have 26 cards in total but only 5 in one suit. That leaves 21 cards for the other 3 suits. The only way they can split in a way where you do not have an 8 card fit is 7,7,7. For example one hand might be 3334 and the other 2443. But that's one specific combination and would be pretty unlucky. On any other distribution you will have an 8 card fit somewhere. When the opponents have a 9 card fit, that only leaves your side with 4 and hence 22 cards in the other 3 suits. The most even way to divide those is 8,7,7 - i.e. this time you must have at least 8 in at least one other suit. This is why it's a lot safer to compete in the auction than it might at first appear.

The "par" result on a hand is the score achieved if both sides do as well as they can. Here East West can score +110 in 2♠. North South can do slightly better than -110 if they bid onto 3♥ and get doubled for -100. That's as good as either side can do because East West can't make 3♠. So the par result is 100 to East West.

Of course that doesn't mean that the par score will get you many matchpoints! Sometimes hardly any pairs reach par. This hand is one where many North Souths were allowed to play 2♥ for +110. Hence those that did play 3♥ going off were unlucky and scored badly.

Note the vulnerability is very important both in competing and in identifying the par score. Suppose both sides had been vulnerable here. Now the par score changes to 110 to East West for 2♠ making. That's because, this time, if North South bid to 3♥ they could be doubled for 1 off and -200. Thus scoring -110 is better for them.

Nil vulnerability is the best time to compete because, even if you don't make your contract, you are usually going off in 50's (in practice in most regular standard games it's rare to be doubled in part scores) and that still scores better than the opponent's contract would have done. Conversely when you are vulnerable you are going off in 100's so it's often more appealing to defend.

Many people assume that vulnerable against not is the worst time to compete but that's not actually true. The worst is when both sides are vulnerable. The reason is that by bidding on in this situation you are not only risking going off in 100s yourself but you are ALSO giving up the chance that you might have been taking them off in 100s.

In a previous column (11 November 2020) I looked at a scoring chart (focusing on playing or defending 1NT) where it illustrated this in some detail:

<https://www.sydneybridgecentre.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Wednesday-Wisdom-17113-BBO-on-11-November-20.pdf>.

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)