



## 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.

### When to go quietly in the auction.

City and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 4<sup>th</sup> December 2023

<b>22</b>		♠ AT8	Dir: E
		♥ KT63	Vul: E-W
		♦ AJ9832	
♠ 65	♠ KQ732	12	
♥ Q2	♥ A985	9	14
♦ AKT875	♦ 92		5
♣ 765	♣ KQ		
		♠ J94	
		♥ J74	
		♦ QJ643	
		♣ T4	

Board 22 last week was a hand to go quietly on. Most tables seem to have bid too high in both directions so there weren't many contracts making.

East has a normal 1♠ opening to which West will respond 1NT (not having enough to bid 2♦). North probably overcalls 2♣ and East completes the description of his hand with 2♥. Some might consider passing with a relatively balanced hand and values in clubs but I would always show my 2nd suit – it's important to realise that partner doesn't have to be balanced for a 1NT response, he just has a hand that isn't strong enough to bid at the 2 level. Therefore on a good day he might even have 6 hearts! West will most likely now just give preference back to 2♣ although he might

consider 3♦. Personally I think 2♠ should end the auction but it doesn't seem to have done so at many tables. It's dangerous for North to bid again on his own though - he has length and values in the opponent's suit and his club suit isn't that robust so he could easily run into trouble. East has no reason to move over 2♣ and South has no reason to bid at all. However, several north south pairs ended in 3♣ (one in fact in 4♣).

So let's first consider the defence to a club contract. East should lead the ♠K (see advanced section for why). Declarer wins but can't get to dummy so will probably resort to playing ♣A and another – especially as he will know a spade ruff is a danger. But 2 rounds of clubs are still not enough to prevent that ruff on this hand. West no doubt will then try (unsuccessfully) to cash the ♦A. Declarer still can't reach dummy so will have to lead hearts from his own hand and could end up losing as many as 1 spade, 3 hearts, 1 club and 1 spade ruff for 2 off (say declarer plays a low heart to the ♥J and ♥Q, now East's remaining ♥A98 are worth 2 more tricks). But 3♣ made once or twice though on the ♦9 lead. Now the defence don't have time to get their spade ruff and they can be forced to give declarer at least one trick in the majors (see advanced section for more).

Next let's look at North South defending against a spade contract. South will almost certainly lead ♣10 to the ♣A. North will probably return ♣2, a suit preference signal for a diamond return just in case partner can ruff it (that's highly unlikely when declarer plays ♣Q under the ♣A of course but it still tells his partner what return he wants if South does happen to get in). At this point declarer should lead a heart towards dummy's ♥Q trying to set up a heart ruff in dummy. When North wins ♥K he could prevent that by playing ♠A and another but that allows declarer to draw trumps and play on diamonds which will lead to at least 8 tricks (4 spades, 1 heart, 2 diamonds and 1 club). So he might prefer switch to a small spade instead. That achieves the goal of reducing the heart ruff potential in dummy but keeps control of the trump suit. See advanced section for how this improves the defence.

If declarer decides to try and reach dummy with a diamond in order to lead trumps through North's presumed ♠A things will turn very ugly for him when North ruffs! Now North can play another club which declarer will have to ruff high to prevent South getting in to give North a 2nd diamond ruff. Not only does that mean he has lost the chance to take a heart ruff in dummy it also means he will lose at least 2 trumps as well.

Although South has no real reason to lead a diamond that would be quite effective against a spade contract too. North can ruff and play ♣A and another himself. Declarer will no doubt try a heart again but when North wins the ♥K a 3rd club is unpleasant for declarer since again he has to ruff high to prevent South getting in for a 2nd diamond ruff.

Overall this is a hand where you want to defend. Neither side has a good fit and both have values in suits the opponents are bidding. North definitely has reason to suspect this with his major suit holdings. East does as well as he knows there is no fit for his side once partner returns to 2♠ and he has lots of club values.

### Key points to note

- A 1NT response to a 1 level opening bid does not necessarily show a balanced hand, just a hand not strong enough to bid at the 2 level. Over 1♠ especially that could include length in either red suit. Therefore it's usually right to bid a 2nd suit over it if you have one as there could still be a big fit.
- The ace of trumps gives you control of the trump suit and it's often right to retain it when defending.
- Be wary of bidding on if you hold length or values in the opponents' suit(s) and do not have a fit yourself. These features tend to point towards defending.
- The vulnerability is also a big factor in deciding how far to compete for a partscore. Mathematically no-one vulnerable is the best time to compete, everyone vulnerable is the worst. But whenever vulnerable you should be wary because going 2 off or 1 off doubled leads to -200 which is worse than any partscore the opponents could make.

### More advanced

After 1♠ P 1NT 2♣, 2♥ P West is most likely to give preference to 2♠ although he could consider 3♦ on the grounds that his hand is worth so much more in diamonds than anything else. On this hand it can in theory make but in the real world will almost certainly struggle since there is little indication of the unpleasant 5-0 break! Here, I'd definitely bid 2♠ because I have a doubleton and I have top diamonds which will usually be tricks anyway. With a weaker diamond suit there is more case to try and make that suit trumps because otherwise it risks getting cut off.

Why should East lead ♠K against a club contract? Because he knows his side doesn't have a spade fit (partner has at most 2 when he doesn't raise initially) so there's a good chance of giving partner a ruff. Furthermore, he knows he is going to get in in clubs fairly early on to be able to do so.

Suppose instead East did lead ♦9 against a club contract. North ruffs and plays ♣A and another. It's now too late to get a spade ruff so East no doubt continues his other diamond which declarer can ruff again and draw the last trump. Now he might consider playing a low spade towards dummy. East will have to win but is now endplayed with only major suits left. Another spade will give declarer an entry to dummy to lead a heart to the ♥10. Opening up the heart suit will give up tricks there as well. That in fact might be another reason for East to lead the ♠K initially – he can perhaps predict what is likely to happen if he leads diamonds!

Against a spade contract when North wins ♥K if he switches to a low spade (keeping trump control) it is interesting to see how much more of a problem it causes declarer. He will win in hand. But if he now takes a heart ruff that means he can no longer pick up the trumps as there are none left in dummy to lead through North. He will probably try to cash ♦A but again things now turn ugly. North ruffs and can cash the ♥10 before playing another club. The best declarer can do is ruff high and play a trump himself. At that point North has singleton ♠A and South has ♠Jx. So the ♠A and ♠J are both tricks. Overall the defence score ♣A, ♥K, ♠10, ♥10, ♠A and ♠J for 1 off. If declarer goes wrong and doesn't ruff high it gets worse! South overruffs (now leaving himself with singleton ♠J), can give North a ruff with his singleton ♠A and another club promotes the ♠J as well.

Some tables appear to have bid onto 3♠ East West. Again very dangerous without a fit and especially so when vulnerable. Both times it went 2 off for the dreaded -200 matchpoint score and a bottom. The vulnerability is another big factor to consider when deciding whether to compete. Many people think the worst time to compete is when vulnerable and the opponents are not. In fact that's not actually true. The worst time is when both sides are vulnerable. The reason being

that had you defended you would be taking the opponents off in 100's which might lead to a better score than you playing the hand making a partscore your way. When they are not vulnerable you would only be getting 50's so you are potentially better off bidding and trying to make your own partscore. It's effectively the reverse logic as to why no-one vulnerable is the best time to be competing at pairs, something I have discussed in this column on a few previous occasions.

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)