



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.

Handling long running suits

City & Canada Bay – Monday Morning 8th January 2024

19	♠ A7	Dir: S
	♥ KJ4	Vul: E-W
	♦ 7542	
	♣ 8632	
♠ 8	♠ KT654	8
♥ Q9	♥ AT852	20 7
♦ AKQJT63	♦ 8	5
♣ AKJ	♣ 54	
	♠ QJ932	
	♥ 763	
	♦ 9	
	♣ QT97	

Welcome back to bridge in 2024 - I hope everyone had a good break. Board 19 last week had a hand with a long running diamond suit. The majority of pairs played in 5♦ making 11 or 12 tricks but it was possible to score better than that.

South will usually pass (although these days some might start with a weak 2♠ given the favourable vulnerability - see advanced section for how East West might bid over that). Although West has at least 9 tricks in his own hand in diamonds I would still start with a gentle 1♦ rather than open a game force. If this goes all pass it's unlikely we have missed much (to make 3NT requires partner to have a stopper in spades and

perhaps hearts too - not likely if he can't even dredge up a response to 1♦). While you could open a game force you don't have 11 tricks in diamonds and the long suit means you may not have as much defence to a major as you expect.

After 1♦ the auction will continue P 1♠ P and it's up to West what to rebid. A good bid now is 3NT. Contrary to what many think, this is best played as a hand like this with a long running suit and NOT as a big balanced hand. It's not necessary to use 3NT to show a balanced hand after a 1 level response. Think about what all the balanced hand point ranges can do:

- 11-14 can rebid 1NT
- 15-17 will have already opened 1NT (swap these round if playing weak NT)
- 18-19 can rebid 2NT
- 20+ will have already opened 2NT or 2♣

So that means you can use 3NT for something else – and a long running suit like this is a very common usage.

Besides, what else could West rebid? He's way too good for 3♦ which is usually about 15-17 with 6 diamonds. Partner might well pass that when game is cold. West doesn't have a 2nd suit to bid and rebidding 4♦ or 5♦ goes past 3NT. The only other option is inventing a new suit which is fraught with danger and very misleading.

East should not be tempted to bid 4♥. Partner's rebid has shown his own long suit and that he's not interested in East's suits unless he has extreme shape or extra strength, neither of which is the case on this hand.

North doesn't have a pleasant lead against either 3NT or 5♦. It's probably between a club and a heart, both of which run round to declarer's hand and give a trick away.

Yes 3NT is a slight gamble without a heart stopper but it's a good shot (partner needs as little as Jxx to provide a stopper in hearts and the defence haven't bid the suit or led it yet anyway!). What's more 3NT scores more than diamonds. The pairs who played in 3NT usually scored 11 tricks for +660 whereas those in 5♦ scored either 11 tricks for +600 or 12 tricks for +620. See advanced section for how to make 12.

In general at matchpoint pairs 5 minor should usually be the last resort to play in. In fact if you have gone past a plausible 3NT it's often worth bidding 6 minor rather than staying in 5 minor. See advanced section for more on why this is the case.

Key points to note

- Big hands with long running suits may have lots of playing tricks but they often don't have much defence. Hence it is often better not to open them with a strong 2 bid as that may mislead partner. With such shape they are seldom passed out so opening them at the 1 level is often best.
- A jump rebid of 3NT after a 1 level response is best played as showing a long running suit – balanced hand of any range can be bid a different way.
- Playing matchpoint pairs, 5 minor should be the last resort for your contract. If 3NT is at all possible you should prefer it because it scores so much better. If you don't play 3NT it is often worth trying 6 minor.

More advanced

6♦ can be made on this hand although it's not a great spot. The best lead for the defence, unusually, is actually a trump (♠A sets up ♠K in dummy for a heart discard, a heart or club runs round to declarer's hand). Normally it's right to lead aggressively against 6 level suit contracts as you may need to set up your 2nd trick quickly before declarer can discard losers.

Here, however, even on a trump lead declarer can simply lead towards ♠K and set it up to discard his heart loser. Then he can either ruff his losing club (if no trumps have been played) or take the club finesse.

But put ♥K in the South hand and a heart lead will get the ♥A out of dummy before the ♠K is set up.

6NT can be played the same way but is even more hair raising since if the ♠K loses to the ♠A you will potentially now be going several off!

If South did start with 2♠, it should still lead to 3NT albeit this time played by East. With such a big hand West should start with a double. East probably bids 3♥ (his spades aren't quite good enough to leave the double in especially when, at the point partner makes a takeout double, he expects they have a big heart fit). If the pair is playing Lebensohl then 3♥ shows some values (weak hands go via 2NT first). Then West completes the description of his hand with 3♦ and East now bids 3NT. South might lead a heart against that which knocks the ♥A out but declarer still has 9 more top tricks in the minors and 10 if he's prepared to try the club finesse.

Note the heart lead is also why West can make 6♦ but East cannot. A heart lead through the ♥Q will get rid of the ♥A from the East hand early. Now, even if declarer leads up to ♠K, he can't later reach it for a discard and the defence will score ♠A and ♥J.

Returning to the bidding to finish – note I said 3NT is not needed to show a balanced range after a 1 level response. The same is not true after a 2 level response. For example something like 1♥ P 2♠. Now you have two balanced ranges to show (11-14 and 18-19) so you need 2NT for one of them and 3NT for the other. Note, however, this is where playing a weak NT system has an advantage. Now your NT rebids are strong so some pairs agree that 1X-2Y-2NT covers all the remaining balanced range (i.e. 15-19) and a jump to 3NT can then still be a running suit. That's possible because any strong NT rebid after a 2 level response is already game forcing (not the case when playing standard where your 2NT rebid might only be 11-12 opposite 10 for a 2 level response). 2NT also leaves more room open to explore other fits first.

I said 5 minor should be the last resort when playing pairs. In fact if 3NT was an option and you have missed it and are about to play 5 minor, it's often worth at least trying 6 minor. Yes if it goes off you will obviously score a near-bottom. But you might find you have lost very few matchpoints because 5 minor making when 3NT was making 10 or 11 tricks would have scored a near-bottom as well. Conversely 6 minor making will likely be a huge score. So bidding 6 minor at least gives you the chance of a top when it makes while not costing much when it doesn't. To retain the best of both worlds top pairs often try to have a way of inviting slam in a minor and but then being able to stop in 4NT when playing matchpoint pairs. This requires a fair bit of discussion though to be sure you are clear when 4NT is an attempt to play there and when it's blackwood!

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)