



## 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.

## A second go in the auction

City and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 5<sup>th</sup> February 2024

<b>9</b>		♠ T982	Dir: N
		♥ 3	Vul: E-W
		♦ QT93	
		♣ T932	
♠ 7	♠ J654	2	
♥ AJ642	♥ 9	13	7
♦ AJ765	♦ 84		18
♣ K8	♣ AQ7654		
	♠ AKQ3	♠ ♦ ♥ ♠ NT	
	♥ KQT875	N - - 2 2 1	
	♦ K2	S - - 2 2 1	
	♣ J	E 3 - - -	
		W 3 - - -	

Sometimes, even though partner passes your opening bid, you are strong enough to have a 2<sup>nd</sup> go. But it's not always clear what the best move is. Board 9 last week was like this.

The auction will most likely start P P to South. Just in case anyone considered it there are several reasons for East NOT to open 3♣:

- He only has 6 and they aren't that good
- He is vulnerable
- He has a side 4 card major

South has a simple 1♥ opening which will temporarily silence West (who may harbour hopes the opponents will be walking into trouble). North will pass that and it's back to East. This time he doesn't want to sell out to 1♥ so 2♣ is reasonable (double is too dangerous – it would work well if West had spades but he is far more likely to hear partner bid diamonds – and then what?)

So now it's South's turn again and even though partner passed he still has a strong hand with lots of playing strength so is worth a second go. The question is what? Some might bid 2♥ reasoning they have a nice 6 card suit. Some might bid 2♠ to show their 2<sup>nd</sup> suit. Both those of course have downsides. The former risks missing a spade fit, the latter risks getting too high if partner has to go back to 3♥. There is a better option – double (takeout). I know what you are thinking – but I said double with East was too risky with only 2 diamonds? True but the big difference here is you have a strong hand and your main suit is hearts which rank ABOVE diamonds. So this time partner responds to your double with 2♦ (quite likely) then you can NOW bid 2♥. That then implies you had hearts and spades (because with just hearts you wouldn't have bothered to double first, you'd just bid 2♥) and you are strong enough to handle that. On the East hand you weren't strong enough. If you doubled 1♥ then over partner's 2♦ bid you would be having to either bid 2♠ or 3♣ and that would push your side to the 3 level a lot of the time (in fact on this hand partner would probably jump to 3♦!). It's very important when contemplating making a takeout double to plan what you will do over all the plausible bids partner might make. If there are some you can't handle at all, then you probably shouldn't be doubling!

On this hand, double from South works very well because North will bid 2♠ and the pair have found their fit (note he should prefer 2♠ to 2♦ because partner is more likely to have 4 spades when he makes the effort to double). Before it gets to North though, West has a tricky decision. He has quite a good hand and would like to make a bid but his hearts are sitting over a known long heart suit in South. He also has a ruffing value in spades (which the defence are very likely to lead now they have found their fit there). So he may well be tempted to try 3♣. Even if he doesn't bid

initially, he may be tempted when 2♠ comes back to him. Another option for West over a double from South is redouble – see advanced section for more on that.

What about the play in 2♠? East doesn't have a good lead to that really. A trump from Jxxx is horrible and the singleton heart is not that attractive for two reasons:

- a) He has trump length himself so rather than playing for ruffs himself a better defence may be to try and force declarer to ruff.
- b) Hearts is declarer's main side suit. Even if the defence do manage to score a couple of ruffs they will almost certainly have set up declarer's side suit for him in the process on which losers might be discarded later.

I would rule out leading from the ♠AQ holding so I'd probably lead ♦8. That doesn't work very well either! Declarer will run that to his hand. West probably shouldn't play the ♦A immediately (he should wait to beat the ♦K with it on the 2<sup>nd</sup> round) so declarer will win in hand. At this point he might try another diamond just in case he can discard South's club on a diamond winner (highly unlikely against a remotely competent defence though). He also may innocently lead a heart trying to set up his side suit by ruffing some in dummy. When West gets in he can be almost certain partner has ♣A (why else wouldn't he lead his own suit?) so will most likely play ♣K and another. If at this point declarer ruffs a heart with ♠2 he will not be happy when East overruffs! Another club forces declarer to ruff with an honour in his hand and he is still not close to either setting up his hearts OR drawing trumps!

Some North South pairs played in hearts and this generally played OK despite the bad break. One reason for that is the singleton ♥9 with East. Once that appears declarer's ♥1087 become nice and solid. Even though West has 5 trumps he only has 2 natural winners (in practice he may also score a spade ruff of course). One West player unfortunately chose to double 3♥ and ended up conceding -530 when it made. That's a good lesson to learn. To defend a doubled part-score you need to have tricks in the trump suit – and that means having good intermediate cards not 642.

What about the play in 3♣? Deep Finesse says it can always be made. But declarer only seems to have 5 club tricks, 1 spade ruff and 2 red aces which is only 8 tricks. So where does a 9<sup>th</sup> trick come from? See advanced section for the way the play develops.

### Key points to note

- Just because partner passes your opening doesn't mean your side can't still win the auction.
- Takeout doubles in the auction are often more flexible than just bidding a 2<sup>nd</sup> suit – they leave more options open for partner. BUT:
- When contemplating making a takeout double to plan what you will do over all the plausible bids partner might make. If there are some you can't handle at all, then you probably shouldn't be doubling!
- Be wary of trying to penalise partscores if you have poor quality trumps (even if you have length in the suit) – they may well not be worth as many tricks as you think!
- If as declarer you can stop the defenders being able to choose which of them wins a trick, sometimes that can gain for you.

### More advanced

If the auction did start P P 1♥ P, P 2♣ X what might West do now? A possible bid he might consider is redouble. That is worth discussing with partner – having accidents about the meaning of redouble can be very expensive! There are 3 possible meanings here:

- a) Penalty interest – he is sitting with a good hand and thinks North South are now in trouble.
- b) Competitive - a good hand but has no obvious bid – usually he would have tolerance for his partner's suit (i.e. doubleton) and length in an unbid suit (diamonds here).

- c) Another method I have seen people play is to have it show exactly Ax or Kx of partner's suit. That can prove quite useful both in helping partner judge whether to bid on but also in defence. Knowing partner has Kx now makes things like underleading your ace perfectly safe.

It's important for regular pairs to discuss this sort of sequence and agree what they both think redouble means. (One of my regular partners solves the problem a different way – she forbids me to redouble at all!)

Turning now to the play in 3♣ it looks like it should have 5 losers (3 spades, 1 diamond and 1 club). But in fact it gets made on what is sometimes called an “elopement.” In the real world South will surely always lead a top spade but suppose (double dummy) South did find the best lead of ♠J which is threatening to stop any spade ruffs in dummy. Declarer wins the ♣K in dummy (he needs to take a spade ruff with ♣8 to score an extra trick, the ♣K is needed to help draw trumps). He leads a spade which South will win and, to declarer's relief, has no more trumps. After, say, ♥K exit declarer now wins, ruffs a heart in hand and a spade in dummy. Then he leads another heart towards his hand. What can North do? Not much! If he ruffs low, declarer overruffs. If he ruffs in with ♠10 or ♠9, declarer simply discards his diamond loser. So North probably discards instead but that lets declarer score a 2<sup>nd</sup> small ruff in his hand. After a diamond to the ♦A and yet another heart, North has the same problem again! Effectively what is going to happen is that declarer will score the 2 red aces, ♠K in dummy, ♠8 in dummy via a spade ruff, and all 5 of his remaining trumps in hand (♣AQ as top winners, ♣765 as ruffs). By the time he has done all that he has 9 tricks. What effectively happens is that North's trump trick ends up ruffing one of South's spade winners. Declarer has “eloped” all his little trumps before the defence can get their tricks going.

Such a play can be quite satisfying as declarer and frustrating for the defence! Elopement plays like this are fairly unusual because, most of the time, ruffing in your own long trump hand doesn't get you any more tricks, it's only ruffing in the short trump hand that does. But sometimes it's just as good to scramble as many tricks as you can quickly and then sit back and watch the defenders crash each other's tricks at the end! This sort of hand lends itself to the play quite well because declarer's trumps aren't quite strong enough to draw trumps themselves, he has a few entries to dummy and he has a suit he can lead from dummy which he knows his left hand opponent has length in and will just have to follow suit.

It's also worth observing that declarer's ♠J is very important! Not to score a trick but to control which of the defenders wins the trick. Without it, North would have been able to gain the lead on the 1<sup>st</sup> round of spades and play a 2<sup>nd</sup> round of trumps. Here declarer was leading a spade from dummy but suppose he had been in hand. The right play would have been to lead the ♠J – this time that limits which of the two defenders can win the trick. Sometimes that can pay dividends as indeed it does here because only one defender can play a 2<sup>nd</sup> round of trumps. Carelessly leading a low spade would allow either defender to win the trick so they can arrange for that to be North so he can play the fatal 2<sup>nd</sup> round of trumps.

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)