



## 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.

## Minimising the damage!

City and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 15<sup>th</sup> January 2024

<b>5</b>	♠ Q653 ♥ K752 ♦ 876 ♣ 97	Dir: N Vul: N-S																									
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Board 5 last week was an ugly board for East West with many pairs going several off in 3NT or 4♠. This can happen and it's very easy as declarer to get depressed when suits break badly or cards lie badly. But you have to remember it's the same for everyone else playing with your cards – the players who score best on these hands are those who minimise the damage and just do less badly than everyone else!

After a pass from North, East has a normal strong 1NT opening. If South can bid diamonds naturally he may overcall 2♦. But for many players 2♦ will not be

natural and will have some artificial meaning. It's then a bit much to have to bid 3♦ when vulnerable. There are lots of methods played over 1NT (see advanced section for some more discussion).

If we assume South passes, then West will start with stayman and over 2♥, should now bid 3NT. Something many players don't appreciate is that this shows 4 spades! West doesn't have 4 hearts as he hasn't raised them so why else would he bother with stayman and then bid game? Without spades or hearts he would just immediately bid 3NT. Therefore East should now bid 4♠. It's important to appreciate this inference only applies when West jumps to game on the 2<sup>nd</sup> round. If he only had an invitational hand he might have to go via stayman even without a major at all (that will depend what methods the pair are playing over 1NT - see advanced section for more on this).

Against 4♠ South should lead a heart. This is just a process of elimination. Leading away from a suit headed with AQ or holding just the ace is fraught with danger of giving a trick away. Likewise, a singleton trump is usually a bad lead as it risks helping declarer find an honour in partner's hand. On this hand that just leaves hearts! That will work well. Declarer will most likely finesse at trick one losing to North's ♥K. Now a diamond through will allow South to cash two diamonds and exit a heart. In time the defence will come to ♣A and quite possibly a trump as well.

If South does overcall 2♦ this makes it a lot harder for East West. West can't really make a takeout double as he doesn't hold hearts. But with 10 points opposite 15-17, he has enough for game. So he could just start with 3♣ and the auction might continue 3♥-3♠-4♠.

However, a lot of pairs ended up in 3NT by East. This was usually a disaster because South leads a diamond. Whatever declarer does, the defence will now score 5 more diamonds and ♣A which is 2 off.

In practice quite a few pairs seem to have gone 3 or 4 off though – possibly some declarers immediately took the heart finesse and then had problems discarding on lots of diamonds? After a diamond lead in 3NT declarer should realise he has no chance of making the contract. Even if spades played for 4 tricks and the heart finesse worked that's still only 6 tricks plus ♦K. Therefore, he needs to simply try to minimise the damage. The way to do that is knock out the ♣A to at least set up certain tricks there (with the ♥A as an entry to them). Declarer will have to make 4 discards from each hand on the run of the diamonds but, with the club tricks in West all set up, those can be 3 spades and 1 heart from the West hand, and 4 major suit cards from East. Declarer will at least then make 4 clubs,

♥A and ♠AK. It might seem depressing to go 2 off but as it turns out -100 would have been a pretty good score because a lot of other declarers were scoring -150 or even -200! Of course if South does, miraculously, find a heart lead it could indeed go 4 off. If declarer finesses, that loses and a diamond through immediately gives 6 diamonds to go with ♥K and ♣A. Even if declarer wins ♥A immediately and knocks out ♣A, South can reach North with the ♥K for a diamond through. In the real world though South doesn't know any of that so he will simply want to set his long diamonds up while he still has ♣A as a certain entry to reach them.

Finally, against 3NT which diamond would you lead as South? Usually we lead 4<sup>th</sup> highest but the correct answer on this hand is actually ♦A! See advanced section for why.

### Key points to note

- Even if your contract looks hopeless, as long as you are in the same place as most other pairs remember it's the same for every other pair playing your cards. Keeping calm and minimising the damage can still score very well! The best way to minimise damage is usually to just set up your certain tricks – e.g. knock out an ace.
- The bidding sequence 1NT-2♣-2♥-3NT shows 4 spades (why else would you have used Stayman to start with?) so opener should convert to 4♠ when he has 4 spades as well as 4 hearts.
- But the bidding sequence 1NT-2♣-2♥-2NT may not show spades – it depends what methods you use to invite over 1NT.
- There are lots of bidding methods in use over the opponents' 1NT. Natural works fine but it can at least be useful to have a bid showing both majors.
- 4<sup>th</sup> highest from a long suit isn't always the best lead. It can sometimes be right to lead an Ace from a good long suit with a certain outside entry so you can see dummy and work out the best card to continue from that suit to set it up while you still have your outside entry.

### More advanced

There are many possible methods you can play over the opponents' 1NT. For many years I just played completely natural and it worked pretty well. But it is useful to be able to show hands with the majors (and possibly other suits) and this is what most artificial methods focus on. One simple one is to play 2♣ as showing both majors and everything else as natural. Some also do this but add 2♦ showing a single suited major and 2 major showing that major and a minor. Another group of methods that I quite like are where each minor shows a major and another suit (for example 2♣ shows hearts and another, 2♦ shows spades and another). As usual if you do play something like this it's important to work out what your responses are and to accept it means you won't be able to bid immediately over 1NT on some minor suit orientated hands unless you are prepared to bid 3 minor. Those interested can no doubt find lots of information on the internet.

I said above that the uncontested bidding sequence 1NT-2♣-2♥-3NT shows 4 spades. But the auction 1NT-2♣-2♥-2NT might not. Why is this? It depends what methods you play when responding to 1NT. If 1NT-2NT is an invite then without a major you'd simply do that to invite. Hence 1NT-2♣-2♥-2NT would imply 4 spades (same logic as before – why else would you bother to use stayman?) But these days many pairs play 1NT-2NT as something else (commonly a transfer to diamonds). If that's the case then the only way of inviting is to start with stayman even if you don't hold a major. Hence this time 1NT-2♣-2♥-2NT does not imply spades (and likewise 1NT-2♣-2♠-2NT does not imply hearts). It's purely the only way for responder to show an invite. A follow up to this is the sequence 1NT-2♣-2♥-2♠. A good method is to play here is for 2♠ to be invitational with 4 spades to preserve the chance of finding a fit there (remember opener can still have spades when he responds 2♥ to stayman, unlike 1NT-2♣-2♠ when he now definitely won't have hearts).

I said South's correct lead against 3NT was ♦A. Why? The reason is because you hold ♦AQ109 and a certain outside entry. The ace gives you the best chance of immediately setting up the rest of the suit. Imagine the hand was similar but with East having ♦Kxx rather than ♦Kx. If you led a "normal" low diamond, the ♦J would score in dummy at trick 1. Now when you are in with ♣A, you can't continue diamonds because declarer still has ♦Kx remaining. By

leading the ace, you see what's in dummy. If there is ♦Jx you can continue with the ♦Q and the ♦109 are now set up. Obviously if you didn't have a certain outside entry, you would not be able to afford to do this as you will need partner to get in and lead another diamond through for you.

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)