



## 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.

### Inferences from the lead

City and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 19<sup>th</sup> February 2024

<b>16</b>		♠ 954	Dlr: W
		♥ A9765	Vul: E-W
		♦ AKJ5	
		♣ 2	
♠ KT862	♠ AQ7	12	
♥ 3	♥ KJ8	7	14
♦ T62	♦ 974	7	
♣ KJ97	♣ A864		
	♠ J3	♠ ♥ ♦ ♣ NT	
	♥ QT42	N - - 3 - -	
	♦ Q83	S - 1 3 - -	
	♣ QT53	E 3 - - 3 2	
		W 3 - - 3 2	

Board 16 last week was a partscore hand where both sides could make a 3 level contract. There were also several things that could be learned from the lead and play.

Some Wests could have started with 2♠ if they were playing this as showing spades and a minor. That is likely to lead to his side winning the auction (most likely in 3♠). Failing that, North has a normal 1♥ opening bid. East has a balanced 14 count so will normally pass as he is not quite strong enough to overcall 1NT (which usually shows 15-18). Overcalling light here after partner has passed is very risky (especially when vulnerable) as South could be sitting with a big hand and able to take a large penalty! Today, however,

if he did decide to stretch to overcall it would work well as his partner would now compete in spades and the pair can in fact make 9 tricks in spades.

After a pass from East it is likely to be hard for their side to get into the auction at all. South will raise hearts in some manner – a popular method these days is a Bergen raise where a 3♣ bid shows 4 card heart support and about 6-9 (3♦ shows 4 card heart support and 10-12). At the 3 level it is now too risky for West to venture in and it's back to North. Although he has a nice hand, there is no particular reason to bid game just because he knows of a 9 card heart fit. Especially not at pairs where the bonus for bidding game is not worth much. He still only has a minimum 12 point hand.

3♥ by North was therefore quite a common contract. What surprised me, however, was how many tables appear to have led the ♠7. That's a lead I would never even consider! Even if partner has bid spades there is no guarantee that he holds ♠K and, even if he does, it is likely to better for my hand to lead the ♠A to avoid blocking the suit. I would lead a diamond from the East hand – simply through a process of elimination. I'd never consider a lead away from ♠AQ, a lead of a trump looks equally bad as it will just give declarer a cheap trick. Leading ♣A or away from ♣A is also likely to cost a trick more often than not. So that only leaves diamonds!

On a diamond lead declarer will win. He has 2 spade losers and 1 club loser so the hand purely depends on how he plays the trump suit. He needs to avoid losing two trump tricks. It won't matter when trumps break 2-2 so the only things to consider are 3-1 or 4-0 breaks. In the absence of any other factors there are two possibilities – ♥A and another, or run the ♥Q from dummy with the intention of later running ♥10 (this is effectively playing West for either of the heart honours). Ace and another will fail when West holds ♥KJx, running the ♥Q will fail when East holds ♥KJx. So, on the face of it, it might seem to be a guess. There are, however, several reasons on this hand why playing ♥A and another is better. See advanced section for the reasoning. Of course if East had overcalled 1NT it would then be very clear that he must surely hold the HK for his stopper.

If declarer does play ♥A and another, East will win ♥K and West should discard an encouraging spade on this trick. That tells East that now it is safe to lead spades and they will probably cash two rounds. But that's all they get – declarer can ruff his 3<sup>rd</sup> spade in dummy and only loses 4 tricks.

If East does lead a diamond a good exercise (which you should always try to do as declarer) is to work out what you can tell from that lead. See advanced section for more discussion (hint – think about what holdings East probably will NOT have).

Some tables did play in spades by West. Where North leads diamonds, the defence quickly cash 3 of those and their best defence next is to just exit a trump. Declarer can draw trumps and try leading a heart up but North should win ♥A and can now safely exit with his 4<sup>th</sup> diamond. Declarer ruffs and needs to then play the club suit correctly (he can discard one on ♥K and then needs to finesse against South's ♣Q). But after this defence declarer can actually work out the club finesse is a certainty to win! See advanced section for how.

Where North chose to lead his singleton club that solved declarer's problem there – trick one is likely to go ♣24QK. After drawing trumps he might then try and sneak a heart through to the ♥K or at least set ♥K up as a winner with the hope of being able to later discard a diamond if the defence fail to cash their tricks there. That shouldn't work of course because, having seen the play in clubs at trick 1, North knows declarer has ♣J (South would have played the ♣ at trick 1 from a holding of ♣QJx). So there is no future in clubs and the only thing to try is diamonds.

East West scoring +140 in spades was a great score. Some got all the way to 4♠ though which did seem a bit much!

### Key points to note

- Opening leads are hard – often it's just a process of elimination when there are suits you definitely don't want to lead.
- As declarer always look at the lead you have received and see what you can work out about the defenders' hands. This can often be a negative inference (e.g. if they had had an honour sequence in a suit they would surely have led that).
- A common situation is having to play a suit for 1 loser and choosing from alternative ways to play. It's not often a complete guess. Try to think about which distributions make a difference and which might be more likely based on the bidding and play so far.

### More advanced

On this hand there are two reasons to play ♥A and another.

- a) The main one is simply that declarer doesn't have enough entries to South to lead hearts twice from there. He can reach South once with ♦Q but not a 2<sup>nd</sup> time.
- b) There is a small risk that the defence, having led a diamond, are in a position to take a diamond ruff. Hence it is better to get two rounds of trumps played as quickly as possible.

Incidentally there are two ways to play the heart suit for no loser. One is to run the ♥Q from dummy hoping East has singleton ♥J; the other is ♥A from hand hoping West has singleton ♥K. Neither is very likely of course but it costs nothing to try.

So what can declarer in 3♥ tell from a diamond lead? The first thing he should note is that East has led passively. That usually indicates he has holdings in other suits that he doesn't want to lead away from. It also usually means he doesn't have an easy lead in those suits. So on this hand he almost certainly will not have ♠AK or ♠KQ, or ♣AK since all those would have been an easy and natural lead. Although that knowledge isn't particularly useful on this hand it can often be critical. Something you should always do as declarer is look at the opening lead and consider firstly why the defender might have chosen that suit and secondly what that can mean for other suits. Frequently what a player doesn't do (either in the auction or the play) is just as important as what they did do!

Lastly I said that when West was playing in spades, he can work out the club finesse is a certainty. Why? By counting the distribution. Assuming North has bid hearts, he has at least 5 of those. Then if the defence have cashed their diamonds and North has exited the 4<sup>th</sup> diamond he is known to hold 4 diamonds. He also followed to 3 rounds of trumps. So at least 12 of North's cards are known – which only leaves room for at most 1 club. Hence when declarer cashes ♣A in dummy it is now a certainty that the finesse will work. It can be quite satisfying as declarer to work this sort of thing out. Counting is critical to getting better at bridge – sometimes it's counting the distribution, sometimes

it's counting the points and sometimes it's counting tricks that is the critical clue to getting a hand right. It's definitely not easy to do all these things at the table (or work out which is the important one on any particular hand). But you cannot play bridge at a high level without counting these things!

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)