



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.

Misfits!

City and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 11th March 2024

12 ♠ 87542 ♥ 86 ♦ K7 ♣ AT72 ♠ QT63 ♥ 73 ♦ AQ654 ♣ J3 ♠ KJ9 ♥ AQJ2 ♦ JT83 ♣ 98	Dir: W Vul: N-S ♠ A 7 ♥ KT954 9 12 ♦ 92 12 ♣ KQ654																													
	<table border="1"> <tr> <td></td> <td>♠</td> <td>♥</td> <td>♦</td> <td>♣</td> <td>NT</td> </tr> <tr> <td>N</td> <td>-</td> <td>-</td> <td>-</td> <td>2</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>S</td> <td>-</td> <td>-</td> <td>-</td> <td>2</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>E</td> <td>1</td> <td>1</td> <td>1</td> <td>-</td> <td>-</td> </tr> <tr> <td>W</td> <td>1</td> <td>1</td> <td>1</td> <td>-</td> <td>-</td> </tr> </table>		♠	♥	♦	♣	NT	N	-	-	-	2	1	S	-	-	-	2	1	E	1	1	1	-	-	W	1	1	1	-
	♠	♥	♦	♣	NT																									
N	-	-	-	2	1																									
S	-	-	-	2	1																									
E	1	1	1	-	-																									
W	1	1	1	-	-																									

Board 12 last week was a hand where East West had to be careful. They don't have a fit in any suit and a lot of pairs ended up too high. Quite a few seem to have reached 3NT and went anything up to 4 off.

Hands like this are known as misfits. The art with a misfit is to identify it as soon as possible and stop bidding. Usually going further just makes things get worse!

The auction will normally start with two passes to East who has a normal 1♥ opening. South doesn't have a bid over that so it will usually then be uncontested for East

West. My recommended auction would be 1♥ – 1♠ – 2♣ – 2♥ - pass. Let's have a look at why.

West isn't strong enough to respond 2♦. That would normally show at least 10 points. So he should prioritise showing his major. If he were stronger then by all means respond in his longest suit because he is going to be able to bid again to show his spades. But with only 9 points he isn't strong enough to make a 2nd bid unless partner shows a better than minimum hand. Hence he wants to show his spades at what may be his only opportunity.

Over 1♠ East has a normal 2♣ rebid. After 1♥ – 1♠ – 2♣ West should just give a simple preference back to 2♥. He doesn't have anything extra. Partner's 2♣ rebid doesn't have to have anything extra either (yes it might – but in that case partner can show that next; if it doesn't then West doesn't want to be any higher than the 2 level).

I suspect some auctions went 1♥ – 2♦ – 3♣ – 3NT. And some others may have gone 1♥ – 1♠ – 2♣ – 2NT.

There are two problems with the first auction. We already said West wasn't strong enough to respond 2♦. But, equally, East with only 12 points is not strong enough to bid 3♣ over it (remember he could be opposite only 10). A new suit at the 3 level is game forcing so opposite 10, he would need at least a good 15 points to do that which he is well short of. 3♣ is basically a “reverse” – which is a rebid that forces your partner to go back to your first suit at the 3 level. To allow for that a hand making a reverse should be stronger.

So what should East do over 2♦? He must just rebid 2♥. Is that nice? No – it means he hasn't shown his 2nd suit. But at least he hasn't shown extra strength that he doesn't have. What should West then do after 1♥ - 2♦ - 2♥? Pass! But will he be happy doing that? No – because he will feel he hasn't shown his spades. Hence why he is better off responding 1♠ the first time.

Once East bids 3♣ over 2♦ it's too late to stop the bidding in time. West doesn't have anywhere else to go except 3NT (from his point of view 3♣ is a strong hand and game forcing so 3NT is the natural description of his hand at that point with a good stopper in spades, the 4th suit). But that lands the pair in 3NT with a combined total of only 21 points and no fit.

The second auction is OK as far as 1♥ - 1♠ - 2♣. But West isn't strong enough to bid 2NT at that point. 2NT doesn't just say there is no fit. It should be invitational with a stopper in the 4th suit – so typically about 11-12 points with a diamond stopper in this auction. Why? Because to make game without a fit (i.e. 3NT) your side is likely to need at

least 25 points. But when East rebids 2♣ as we saw above he doesn't have to have any extra values. So West needs to have some more values to invite game. Without them on this hand West should simply return to his partner's first suit.

It's all too common to see pairs bidding each other's suits on hands like these and eventually resorting to no-trumps but ending up much too high. There is an art to recognising a misfit and getting out in time. See advanced section for some more discussion on that.

What about the play and defence? Unsurprisingly 2NT or 3NT contracts with only 21 points didn't usually fare well. There is no source of tricks to easily set up for East West – they have 7 card fits in 3 suits but none work that well. Hearts sit badly for them and neither clubs nor diamonds break 3-3. So the defence are likely to come to 2 clubs, at least 1 diamond, 3 hearts and ♠K. That's 7 tricks – so 3 off for East West in 3NT.

In fact even 2♥ is too high on this hand. If the defence are accurate it should lose 3 hearts, 1 diamond and 2 clubs. See advanced section for how that should happen. But even going 1 off in 2♥ here would still have been a very good score since so many pairs were much higher and going more off.

What should South lead against 2♥? ♦J is pretty clear to me. Not only is it the unbid suit in our recommended auction but it's also top of a sequence and none of the other suits appeal (we don't want to lead away from major suit honours, nor do we want to lead a club round into declarer's announced 2nd suit to help him set it up).

Key points to note

- When your side appears to have a misfit – get out of the bidding as soon as you can. Continuing to bid usually just makes things worse!
- Don't always respond in your longest suit. With a weak hand that may only be able to make one bid it's more important to show a major at the 1 level even if you only have 4 of them and a longer suit elsewhere.
- Don't always rebid your 2nd suit. If you have to do so at a level that forces partner to go back to your first suit at the 3 level then you need to be stronger (a good 15+). With less you may just have to rebid your 1st suit.
- If you have length in declarer's known 2nd suit, consider playing trumps to try and stop him ruffing his losers in that suit in dummy.
- Don't play aces into thin air – wait for them to take other honours.

More advanced

How can you recognise a misfit? In an uncontested auction the most obvious of course is when partner bids your shortages and doesn't raise your suit(s)! West should spot those warning signs on this hand as soon as East rebids 2♣, his other doubleton. Once East hears West go back to 2♥ he should also be wary. 2♥ doesn't guarantee a heart fit, it merely says West prefers hearts to clubs. But it also says West doesn't have a hand strong enough to make an invitational or forcing bid. Holding only 12 points himself, this should cause East to realise that his side only barely has the majority of the points and, with no fit, they are unlikely to be able to go any higher.

In a contested auction another misfit warning bell can be if the opponents start bidding one or more of your long suits. If they have length in one of your suits, then that almost certainly means your partner doesn't (and even if he did you now know the suit is going to break very badly!) Once East opens 1♥ South immediately knows hearts aren't sitting well but there could still be another good fit. North also gets a clue if his right hand opponent bids his 5 card spade suit and his misfit suspicions should be confirmed when he hears his left hand opponent rebid his 4 card club suit.

When defending no-trumps North South just have to go relatively passive. They already know from the auction that things aren't sitting well for declarer so they should just sit back and wait for declarer to play suits that set tricks up for them! After 1♥ - 2♦ - 3♣ - 3NT North has an easy spade lead (it's the 4th suit in that auction and won't give anything away). It's not so clear after 1♥ - 1♠ - 2♣ - 2NT but I would lead either a spade or a heart and both will work fine.

The key to defending 2♥ is for the defence to get 2 club tricks. They do that in two ways:

- a) by stopping declarer from being able to ruff a club in dummy.
- b) by making sure North doesn't play ♣A into thin air but waits to use it to beat the ♣J, ♣Q or ♣K.

After ♦J lead, declarer might finesse. When that loses, North knows declarer has clubs from the bidding so his ♣A10xx will be a nuisance provided he can get the trumps out of dummy. Hence he should switch to a trump. That will allow South to win ♥J. At that point he can afford to cash ♥A to remove the 2nd trump from dummy since he will still score ♥Q later. Then he just continues diamonds. Declarer has no real choice but to try clubs and hope they split 3-3 but, as long as North waits to win ♣A, there is no way for declarer to avoid 2 club losers.

Another variation might be for declarer to win ♦A at trick 1. He should start by trying to set up his clubs. If he leads low then North needs to withhold the ♣A at that point and beat the ♣J with it on the 2nd round (at which point he again switches to a trump).

If the defence fail to remove both of dummy's trumps in time then declarer can lead a low club himself on the 3rd round. Yes, South can ruff that with a trump higher than dummy – but that's with one of the 3 trump tricks he was going to win anyway. The difference is the rest of declarer's clubs are now all winners.

Finally, another variation might be if, after winning ♥J, South chose to continue a LOW heart! This preserves his remaining ♥AQ to be 2 more tricks but it still gets the 2nd trump out of dummy so partner can now score his club tricks. Such strange looking plays are possible in the trump suit – but of course might be suicidal in a side suit!

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)