



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.

Takeout doubles and free bids

City and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 18th March 2024

22 ♠ AKJ7 ♥ AKQ6 ♦ 9654 ♣ 2 ♠ Q954 ♥ J52 ♦ 82 ♣ K654 ♠ T83 ♥ 9743 ♦ KQT3 ♣ 83	Dir: E Vul: E-W
	♠ 62 ♥ T8 ♦ AJ7 ♣ AQJT97 ♠ 5 ♥ 5 ♦ 5 ♣ NT

On board 22 last week North South could make 4♥. But they needed to compete in the auction to have a chance of reaching it.

The normal auction will start 1♣ P 1♠. At this point North should double. Yes even though he has length in spades - the double is basically takeout showing both red suits. With 17 points and both red suits North should be happy to compete – his hand has the potential to be very powerful if he finds a fit.

East has an easy 2♣ rebid and it's now up to South. Even though he only has 5 points it's appealing to bid. He has length in both red suits so the hands may be a double fit. I would bid 2♥. Showing that his side has a heart fit may

help his partner judge later on in the auction too. Note that he is making what is known as a “free bid” here. That means he has actively chosen to bid 2♥ when he didn't have to. Had East passed South might have had to bid 2♥ on nothing at all (not being able to risk leaving the contract in 1♠ doubled). Once East has bid 2♣ then it's very different because South is no longer forced to bid - he has the option of passing which he would naturally do holding almost nothing. Hence when he does choose to bid something he is usually showing at least a few values. This hand would be minimum to do that of course. But the concept of a free bid is important and it's well worth recognising when partner has made one.

West will surely raise to 3♣ and it's back to North. He will certainly want to bid on, the only question is whether he just competes with 3♥ or bids 4♥. 4♥ is quite tempting for a few reasons:

- his spades sit over the spade bid
- his hearts are very strong
- he only has 1 club.

The only bad sign is his diamonds - but, as discussed above, partner has to have some values somewhere for a free bid. They aren't in the majors and the opponents clearly have a lot of clubs. So the odds are they are in diamonds.

So all that points to trying 4♥. See advanced section for another possible way to judge when faced with these sorts of decisions.

You might think that North could try 3♦ as some sort of game try for hearts? That wouldn't be a good idea on this hand - see advanced section for why.

Even bidding 3♥ scored ok on this hand because very few North South pairs reached 4♥ and quite a few sold out to 3♣. That goes 1 off (declarer has 6 trumps, ♦A and a diamond ruff in dummy) but +100 isn't a good score when +450 is available.

What about the play in hearts by South? The defence will surely start with a low club to the Ace (Quiz - what does that tell declarer about the where the club honours are? See advanced section for the answer). It's not so nice for

East to continue now. He definitely won't want to lead a spade round to dummy. A diamond doesn't look great either as any diamonds declarer does have sit over him. He might just try a 2nd club forcing dummy to trump hoping to perhaps later weaken declarer's trumps further. Declarer can try a couple of rounds of trumps but will need to lead a diamond towards his hand at some point to start setting that suit up. East ducks and the ♦Q wins. Now declarer should cross back to dummy with a trump to lead a 2nd diamond (if he doesn't draw the last trump, East can take ♦A on the 2nd round and give West a diamond ruff). East might as well win ♦A and now dummy has no trumps left, he can play another club which forces declarer's last trump. Declarer has winning diamonds in his hand and can also take the spade finesse to end up scoring 3 spades, 4 trumps, 3 diamonds and 1 club ruff. But if you finesse at that point in spades and it loses then, without any more trumps, East will have lots of winning clubs! So you might choose to just cash ♠AK. However, declarer should be fairly confident by now that West holds ♠Q - see advanced section for why.

Key points to note

- If you have values and length in unbid suits it's fine to make a takeout double even if you also happen to have length in an opponent's suit.
- Think about whether you or your partner were forced to bid in an auction or not. Where you were (e.g. in responding to a takeout double), you might have had to bid on nothing. Where you weren't, you can pass with nothing. In that case actually choosing to bid is a "free bid" and shows some values.
- As declarer always try to place the honours in the suit led based on the cards played. It's often amazing how much you can work out - which can then lead to further deductions about where other key cards might be.
- If trying to judge what level to bid, imagine your partner holding a "perfect minimum" (i.e. a hand that is consistent in shape but minimum in values for what he has bid so far but which fits perfectly with yours). If the higher level contract is almost cold opposite that then you should generally be trying it.

More advanced

If playing in hearts a low club to the Ace by the defence at trick 1 is quite revealing. The following deductions can be made by declarer:

- East doesn't have ♠K (with ♠AK he would win ♠K at trick 1).
- West doesn't have ♣Q (with ♣KQ he would have led ♣K not a low one).

So declarer knows West has ♠K and East has ♣AQ - just from 1 trick! Bear in mind that these observations tend to be quite reliable. Early in a hand it's very dangerous for the defenders to play false cards because they have the disadvantage of not being able to see each other's hands. Hence at that stage it tends to be more important for them to help each other than mislead declarer. That in turn means declarer can perhaps place more reliance on what the defenders do early in a hand than he can later on after they know more.

Here the knowledge that West has ♠K then makes it almost certain that East must have ♦A for his opening bid. When he proves to have both ♦A and ♦J, that in turn means West almost has to have ♠Q. Otherwise he would not have had a response to 1♣ originally. Hence it's pretty safe to finesse in spades although declarer should of course cash ♠A at some point when he's in dummy just in case East happened to start with a singleton ♠Q.

I said after the auction 1♣ P 1♠ X, 2♣ 2♥ 3♣ that 3♦ by North as a game try for hearts wouldn't be a good idea. Why not? If we were bidding uncontested, had agreed hearts, and I wanted to make a "trial bid" to look for game then 3♦ is the obvious bid I would make. The problem here is we aren't bidding uncontested! You have doubled on the first round. Just like had you been in the immediate overcalling position if you double first and then bid a suit you are showing a hand that was too good to overcall the first time. So bidding 3♦ now wouldn't be a game try for hearts - it would be showing a large hand with diamonds and not necessarily any hearts at all. So South might then raise diamonds on this hand. You always need to think back to what you have already done in the auction and what it may look like from partner's perspective.

In terms of North trying to judge whether to bid 3♥ or 4♥, there are some competing factors on this hand. Because it's matchpoint pairs you should tend to bid more cautiously as you don't gain as much for bidding a light game. That points to 3♥. On the other hand, a method I was once told about when trying to judge this sort of thing was to imagine partner with a "perfect minimum." If the higher contract you are contemplating bidding is very good opposite that

hand then you should probably be bidding it because, even though partner almost certainly won't hold that exact hand, he doesn't have to hold a minimum at all – he could easily hold something better which would make the contact good as well. On this hand, for example, imagine partner with something like 10x xxxxx KQx xxx. That's perfectly plausible based on the auction so far and 4♥ is enormously good opposite that (remember a "minimum" here won't be complete rubbish because partner has already shown something by making the free bid of 2♥).

If North South competed in the auction, reached 4♥ and played it correctly they can make 11 tricks and score +450. In reality either reaching 4♥ or reaching 3♥ and making 11 tricks instead of 10 (i.e. scoring 200 v 170) scored very well.

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)