

Wednesday Wisdom

The Sydney Bridge Centre mini lesson

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative) will be analysing an interesting hand from each Wednesday morning session. This hand commentary will be sent to participants before the next Wednesday session.

You are also welcome to [send questions](#) about hands that you have played. We will collate them and let our panellists (Julian Foster, Marcia Scudder and Paul Roach) answer them.

#1330 BBO – Wednesday morning session 30th September 2020

2	♠ J75	Dir: E																														
	♥ 954	Vul: N-S																														
	♦ KQJ92																															
	♣ T7																															
♠ KQT62	♠ KT762																															
♥ 8	♥ A743																															
♦ T5	♦ AK92																															
♣ QJ864																																
7	♠ A9843																															
8 14	♥ AQJ3																															
11	♦ 86																															
	♣ 53																															
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Board 2 last week was a potentially ugly hand for NS. It also shows some useful bidding and defensive points for EW. Last week 3 NS pairs played 2♠ going 1 off, 2 off and 3 off. But none were doubled.

How might the auction go and how should EW double it? East will open 1♥ and South will overcall 1♠. West has the first decision. Do they want to try and penalise 1♠? If they do they need to PASS over 1♠ and hope partner re-opens with a double (an immediate double from West would be takeout showing the minors). If they don't wish to penalise they should bid something immediately – here 1NT is most likely as they are not strong enough to bid 2♣.

Would you try to penalise 1♠ as West? I would, for the following reasons:

- I am likely to have at least 3, possibly 4 trump tricks – and my spades probably won't take nearly as many tricks if we are playing the hand as they will not be trumps.
- I have a singleton in my partner's first suit.
- The opponents are vulnerable so I might get +200.

The last point there is very important – especially when playing matchpoint pairs. A score of -200 at matchpoints is often described as the “kiss of death”. That is because 200 exceeds the score for any normal partscore. So it is almost always a very good score. When the opponents are vulnerable we only need to take the contract 1 off doubled to achieve +200. Very tempting! Even if we fail and 1♠x makes we score -160 which isn't the end of the world.

So let's suppose West does pass. For the moment let's assume that North also passes (they won't on this hand but we'll come back to that). Should East re-open with a double? The rule of thumb I use here is to ask myself – if partner had been able to make a penalty double of 1♠ would I have been happy to pass that? Here the answer is surely yes. I am not ashamed of my opening bid and I have AAK in the side suits that are probably 3 tricks. If I had opened a distributional 10 point hand without many sure tricks in defence, that is one time I wouldn't want to defend 1♠x and that's when I should reopen with something other than double (another might be a really big hand where you think game or slam your way will score more than any penalty you might get). Once East does double West should go through with their earlier decision and pass it.

Now of course on this hand poor old North doesn't have 2nd sight and will raise to 2♠ probably thinking they have quite a good hand! East might themselves make a takeout double of 2♠ but let's suppose they pass. Now when 2♠ comes back to West this time they double. Now that double is **penalties**. Why? **Because they passed over 1♠ the previous round**. Had they wanted to make a takeout double they could already have done so.

NS now languish in 2♠x which is not going to be pleasant for them!

How should the defence go? West has two choices to start with – they could either lead their singleton heart aiming to take heart ruffs. Or they could lead clubs hoping to force declarer to trump and end up with fewer trumps than West. Either are reasonable. Let's assume they start with a heart (which works better here because the North hand can take care of club ruffs so South cannot in fact be forced). Trick 1 probably goes 8 9 10 Q of hearts. Note East should not play the ♥K – there is no point as they know South has the A because West would never underlead it.

Declarer might try a round of trumps and find out the bad news. Or they might try a diamond (see advanced section for defensive count signals here). Whatever declarer does, East will get in, give West a ♥ ruff, get in again and give West a 2nd ♥ ruff. So West will end up scoring ♠KQ, 2 ruffs and East the ♦A and the ♣AK. That's 7 tricks which means 2♠x is 2 off for -500. A massive score for EW who cannot even make game their way (and even if they could it would only score 400 to 490). A very unlucky hand for NS but EW still have to know what they are doing in the bidding and defence to take advantage of the horrible layout of the cards.

Here the defence is pretty obvious but it's still good practice for East West to signal accurately. When East is giving West a ruff they should return a LOW heart (a suit preference signal asking West to return the LOWER of the other two side suits – clubs here). Of course on this hand it's pretty obvious from dummy that a club is the only sensible return but that isn't the case on many other hands.

Key points to note

- When deciding if you want to penalise opponents you should consider your trump tricks, your length in partner's suit, and the vulnerability – as well as how many points you have. You may need to make this decision the round before and hope partner re-opens with a double.
- As opener, generally reopen with a double if you would have passed a penalty double had partner been able to make one.
- Vulnerability is critical. Taking vulnerable opponents just 1 off doubled scores +200 which can be a top at matchpoint pairs as it beats anything you can score in a normal partscore.
- Defenders should give suit preference signals when giving partner a ruff – suggesting the suit they want returned.

More advanced

When declarer plays on diamonds this is an occasion where East West should be playing count signals. Such a signal allows East to take their ♦A at a time when South has no more diamonds – which cuts off the rest of the winning diamonds in the North hand.

You can play "natural" or "reverse" count. It doesn't matter as long as you agree which! Let's assume EW are playing reverse count – that means high-low shows an odd number in a suit and low-high shows an even number. When declarer leads a diamond from hand, West must play the ♦5 to show an even number. Can East work out the distribution now? Not completely but what they can work out is that declarer CANNOT have a singleton. How? Suppose declarer did have a singleton ♦6. West would then have 1085. Playing reverse count they would play the 10 or the 8 not the 5. Likewise if declarer had a singleton 8, West would have 1065. This time West would play the 10 or the 6 not the 5. The 5 is the lowest missing card from East's point of view – that means the only holdings West can have are singleton 5 or doubleton 5. Therefore as long as they trust their partner it is QUITE SAFE for East to hold up the ♦A on the first round. When they take it on the 2nd round they now find out diamonds are 5422 round the table and declarer cannot reach the winning diamonds in dummy (if they did discover partner's ♦5 was singleton they can now give them a ruff which uses declarer's 3rd diamond and also cuts the suit off).

This shows how important the little spot cards are and how top-level defenders are always watching them! On this hand holding up the ♦A isn't so critical but there are many hands where it might be. If East panics and takes the ♦A immediately, declarer might be able to get in, and then play ♦K and now discard a loser on ♦Q. Even if West can trump that, it is going to be from a long trump that would otherwise have made a trick anyway. So it is good defensive technique for East to hold up the ♦A and take it on the 2nd round.

Note that sometimes declarer can scramble these defensive signals though. Suppose West actually had 106 and declarer had 85. If declarer leads the 5, when West plays the 6, East can work out in the same way as above that it

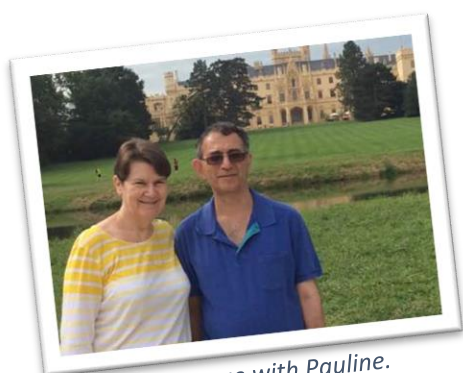
cannot be from a 3 card holding (West would hold 1086 and would play the 10 or 8). But suppose declarer in fact doesn't lead the 5, and instead deviously leads the 8! Now look from East's point of view. If that 8 was a singleton West would hold 1065 and they might play the 6. East cannot now be sure that it's safe to duck the ♦A.

So the moral of the story is – declarer should lead the higher of 2 small spot cards from hand and conceal the lower one – sometimes that means the defence cannot work out their signals. Equally the defence should always signal as clearly as they can afford. Here if West did hold 1065 they should actually play the 10 not the 6 (sometimes the 10 is too high to afford but here they know it is dead looking at the KQJ9 in dummy). After seeing the 10 East knows for sure West can only have 1 or 3 diamonds and they can take the ♦A regardless of any deceptive card declarer might be trying!

Note also when East gives West a heart ruff, the suit preference signal doesn't automatically mean their lowest heart, it means their lowest heart **in context**. Here East should not return the ♥2 because South (who knows hearts are 1-5 because of East's opening 1♥ bid) will just play the 3. So West should return the ♥6 which forces South to cover (once the ♥9 has gone from dummy at trick 1 the 6 would hold the trick if not covered). But it still asks for a club as it's the lowest heart from several that East has available – they could have led the K or the 7 as well.

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)

A chat with Warren Lazer



Warren in Prague with Pauline.

The **SBC Labour Day Online Pairs Congress** was successfully held on **Monday 5th October**. Congratulations to the winners who will win an Over the Shoulder Mentoring with Warren Lazer, Julian Foster or Marcia Scudder:

Open	Hugh GROSVENOR - Tania LLOYD
Restricted	Kit MEYERS - Kerry RYMER
Novice	Ray SPURR - Paul MOLLOY

Why do you like bridge?

Is there a more egalitarian game? Club players are able to compete against the top players in truly open state and national championships. The same opportunities also exist at world championship events. And although the top player will usually win such encounters, luck or monumental misunderstandings by experts means that the underdog has a chance on every board. I can think of no other sport where the players of all abilities can and do play against one another. If you ever want to meet Bill Gates, your best chance of doing so is probably at the bridge table.

What is the best thing happened to you at bridge?

Bridge partner becoming life partner. Pauline and I have been together for 25 years now, 28 if you count our first session together. We've travelled and seen the world together and played on every continent except Antarctica. Proudest bridge moment? Probably when we made the quarter finals of the Bermuda Bowl in Shanghai in 2007, especially as we won the playoff for the Australian Team that year by a mere 1 IMP.

The winners of the SBC Labour Day Online Congress are going to win an Over the Shoulder Mentoring from you. What one lesson you would like them to take away?

What I would like them to take away is how important counting is on every hand – including what to count and how to count. What I actually expect them to take away is that there's usually no 100% right answer to the problems you will be set and that the so-called-experts make huge numbers of errors.

The Sydney Bridge Centre is now running F2F club sessions AND online sessions on BBO

Yes, we have reopened on Goulburn Street only. Rozelle and Henley remain closed for the time being. We are now running F2F sessions in the City AND also online sessions on BBO. Please find our full session timetable on our website:

<https://www.sydneybridgecentre.com/sbc-sessions/>

For F2F sessions: All are welcome but due to Covid restrictions the numbers are limited. It is essential that you pre-book for these sessions via this [F2F Session Booking Form](#). Normal table money fee.

For BBO sessions: All are welcome. No need to book. BB\$3 per person per game.