



Weekly Wisdom

The Sydney Bridge Centre mini lesson

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative) will be analysing an interesting hand from each Saturday ARVO BBO session starting from April. To subscribe, please email your name and email address to office@sydneybridgecentre.com.

You are also welcome to [send questions](#) about hands that you have played. Please use “Weekly Wisdom” as email subject. We will collate them and let our panellists leading by Julian Foster to answer them.

#15851 BBO – Saturday ARVO session 24th April 2021

4	♠ Q875	<i>Dir: W</i>																									
	♥ J7	<i>Vul: Both</i>																									
	♦ KQ853																										
	♣ 84																										
♠ A3	♠ KT942																										
♥ AK854	♥ Q932																										
♦ JT	♦ 4																										
♣ QJ93	♣ AKT																										
8	♠ J6	<table border="1"> <tr><td>♣</td><td>♦</td><td>♥</td><td>♠</td><td>NT</td></tr> <tr><td>N</td><td>-</td><td>1</td><td>-</td><td>-</td></tr> <tr><td>S</td><td>-</td><td>1</td><td>-</td><td>-</td></tr> <tr><td>E</td><td>6</td><td>-</td><td>6</td><td>4</td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td>6</td><td>-</td><td>6</td><td>4</td></tr> </table>	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT	N	-	1	-	-	S	-	1	-	-	E	6	-	6	4	W	6	-	6	4
♣	♦		♥	♠	NT																						
N	-		1	-	-																						
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E	6	-	6	4																							
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15	♥ T6																										
12	♦ A9762																										
5	♣ 7652																										

Board 4 last week had a potential slam East-West which no pair bid. A way they might have managed to reach it despite only having 27 points between them is via a splinter. A splinter is an incredibly useful bid. It’s an unexpected jump into a new suit and it shows shortage there with support for partner. Let’s see how it would have helped.

West will almost certainly start with 1♥ and East has to decide their response. Even though there are only 12 high card points this is definitely a game force for several reasons:

- a known 9+ card heart fit
- 5431 shape
- a decent 5 card side suit we can set up
- good cards in our long suits (As and Ks tend to be worth a bit more than the 4 and 3 points we normally give them, while Qs and Js are worth a bit less than 2 and 1 points).

Many people play 2NT as a game forcing raise of a major. That’s all well and good but a better bid for East on this hand (subject to agreements about ranges - see advanced section) in my view is 4♦. This is a splinter which shows shortage in diamonds and a hand worth a raise to at least game in hearts. Note it should have 4 card support for the major - there is a huge difference in the power of a 9 card fit versus an 8 card fit.

If I have a choice of bids and a splinter is one option I nearly always choose it. That’s because it is a very descriptive bid and allows partner to evaluate whether their cards are working. Holdings like KJxx opposite a splinter are horrible because they may be worth nothing at all. The KJ are known as “wasted values”. Conversely holdings like xxxx are magical because it means there are no wasted values and every honour card partner has is in the other suits which will fit nicely with ours.

Here the splinter is music to West’s ears because the only wasted card is the ♦J. They now know their black suit honours are working well and, even though they only have 15 points, they should be happy to collaborate in a slam try. They could perhaps bid Roman Key Card Blackwood (“RKCB”) but a better bid is a 4♣ cue bid. RKCB isn’t usually suitable on hands with 2 losers in a side suit (see advanced section for why). Now East should take control with RKCB (they now know for sure their ♠K has partner’s Ace opposite). Hearing 3 key cards is enough to bid slam. Note that even though East only has one key card it is safe to bid RKCB here because they hold the ♥Q so they know that partner will not respond 5♠ (showing 2 key cards and the ♥Q). They can therefore pass a 5♥ response. If there was a risk of a 5♠ response then East could not afford to bid RKCB as 5♠ would propel them to slam missing 2 key cards!

The play is straightforward just requiring a diamond ruff in dummy to make 12 easy tricks despite only having 27 points between the two hands. The splinter allowed EW to identify that only 30 points are really relevant here (i.e. not the diamond suit) and they have 26 of those 30.

But, like last week, there is one point to the play - how would you play the trump suit?

Key points to note

- Hands with 5431 shape are usually worth upgrading, especially when there is a known 9 card fit.
- Splinters are one of the most descriptive bids available.
- Blackwood is not usually a good bid with 2 losers in a side suit - prefer a cue bid if you want to explore slam.
- Before using Blackwood make sure you can handle every response partner can make.
- Don't be afraid to look for slam if you identify you have no wastage in a suit - effectively there are then only 30 points in the pack.
- If a suit looks trivial to play, stop and think whether you can do anything if it breaks badly.

More advanced

Some pairs play splinters as any point range (which works well here). Others prefer to say a splinter is either around 8-11 or 16+, hands in the 12-15 range still start with 2NT.

The idea is 8-11 may help you evaluate whether to bid a game on hands that fit well but don't have the normal point range for game; and 16+ may help you do the same for a slam. That has its merits but doesn't work so well on this hand.

There are many schemes for opener's continuations after 2NT. A common one is to bid shortage at the 3 level. West doesn't have any shortage here but does have slightly better than minimum so they might bid 3♥ (this is stronger than 4♥ because we are already in a game force so the "principle of fast arrival" means that 4♥ is the weakest action we can take). But neither hand now knows about the lack of wastage in diamonds and it is unlikely that either will move further towards slam.

Note I said splinters allow you to evaluate wasted values. The presumption is partner doesn't have anything in the splinter suit. For that reason it's generally not a good idea to splinter with holdings like singleton Q or K. They will cause partner to miscalculate. Those hands are better off going via 2NT or cue bidding.

Why isn't the West hand suitable for Blackwood? Well, suppose you did use it and partner showed 1 key card. Is it the ♦A or the ♣A? We don't know. Partner could hold lots of values in spades and hearts and the ♦A but we are still losing the AK of clubs! That's less likely here of course once partner splinters but it's the reason in general why Blackwood doesn't help when you have 2 losers in a side suit. It's the same reason Blackwood doesn't help on hands with a void. Partner having the ace in our void could be completely useless, but the ace in one of our other suits could be critical. In both cases we need to know WHERE partner's key cards are; Blackwood only tells us HOW MANY key cards partner has.

Conversely the East hand is perfect for Blackwood. It really just wants to know about the controls partner has as they will fill in the gaps in our hand. We would like to know about the black queens and we might be unlucky and find partner with something like Axx AKxxx J10 Qxx but that's the worst that can happen and, with that more balanced hand partner might not move over 4♦. Remember bidding is a constructive

dialogue between partners. West's 4♠ cue was a voluntary action so they will have a better than minimum hand as they have gone beyond 4♥. The 2524 shape they have is a more powerful hand than the 3523 shape above as it has fewer losers. East clearly doesn't have enough to Blackwood immediately as partner could have a minimum opening with diamond wastage. But once partner expresses interest with 4♠ now they can come to life!

Finally what about the play? Déjà vu! Trumps here are effectively the same suit as clubs in the hand from last week's column. Again irrelevant on this hand but we should play the ♥Q first because it will allow us to pick up J10xx with South. If North has J10xx there isn't anything we can do except curse the bridge Gods. Note we can only pick up J10xx with South because we also hold the 9.

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)

Play in the Same League – A special event for Novice players ONLY



The Sydney Bridge Centre is running a **F2F Australia Wide Novice Pairs Event** on Wednesday 26th May at Level 1, 162 Goulburn Street, Sydney. A no-fear morning session from 10am – about 1.15pm. **ONLY players with less than 100 masterpoints** will be accepted in this competition. Refreshment included.

Your results will be compared to other participating players who are of similar level in the whole country – a much better indicator to see where you are in the bridge journey! ALL participants will be given a booklet of hand analysis after the session. An invaluable and meaningful prize for the winners – a **Complimentary SBC Workshop by Will Jenner-O'Shea** of your choice.

Please refer to our website for details and [enter online](#).

Players with more than 100 masterpoints are welcome to join our normal Open duplicate on the side.

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 Face-to-Face sessions:

All are welcome, you don't need to be a member to join us for a game in SBC. We have sessions for different level of players. If you need a partner, please come in 15-20 minutes before the game start, our directors will try to find you a partner.

Normal table money fee.

For BBO sessions:

All are welcome. No need to book. Please find us on BBO / Featured Areas / Virtual Clubs / ABF-Australia. Tournament title "Sydney Bridge Centre & Friends". Tournament will open only 2 hours before the game starts.

BB\$3 per person per game.