



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.

#5087 BBO – Wednesday morning session 19th August 2020

13	♠ T543	Dir: N																									
	♥ AKT973	Vul: Both																									
	♦ KJ																										
	♣ 8																										
♠ AKQ2	♠ J8																										
♥ 62	♥ J5																										
♦ T9642	♦ A7																										
♣ 64	♣ AKQJ973																										
11	♠ 976	<table border="1"> <tr><td>♣</td><td>♦</td><td>♥</td><td>♠</td><td>NT</td></tr> <tr><td>N</td><td>-</td><td>-</td><td>1</td><td>-</td></tr> <tr><td>S</td><td>-</td><td>-</td><td>1</td><td>-</td></tr> <tr><td>E</td><td>5</td><td>3</td><td>-</td><td>4</td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td>5</td><td>3</td><td>-</td><td>4</td></tr> </table>	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT	N	-	-	1	-	S	-	-	1	-	E	5	3	-	4	W	5	3	-	4
♣	♦		♥	♠	NT																						
N	-		-	1	-																						
S	-		-	1	-																						
E	5	3	-	4																							
W	5	3	-	4																							
9 16	♥ Q84																										
	♦ Q853																										
4	♣ T52																										

Board 13 last Wednesday raises quite a few useful bidding points. Looking through the results I noticed that only one EW pair reached game despite holding a combined 25 points. Let's have a look at how the hand might be bid.

North has a fairly normal 1♥ opening bid. The first question is what should East do?

There are 3 possibilities you might consider 3♣, 2♣ or double. Let's look at them in turn:

3♣ would be a good description if we were playing "strong jump overcalls". But these days most pairs instead play "weak jump overcalls" trying to get in the way of their opponents. 3♣ is then a pre-empt and we are FAR too strong to do that.

2♣ is obviously possible as it's our longest suit and it's the bid most people chose last week. But the problem is are we too good? We have 16 points but, more importantly, we have 8 certain tricks in our own hand playing in Clubs. Will we be happy to hear the auction go all pass?

Double of an opening bid usually just shows takeout of that bid. The textbook shape would be 4144 with around the values for an opening bid. But there is another time when we also start with double – when we hold a really strong hand. Our plan is to double and THEN bid our suit next time. Are we good enough to do that here?

It looks like we should choose between 2♣ and double.

This is an area where opinions have changed a lot in recent years. Traditionally almost any hand with 16 points or more started with a double and overcalling your suit showed less than that. But the trend in recent years has been to increase that threshold and still make a simple overcall on stronger hands – perhaps even as many as 18 points. There are a couple of reasons for that:

- It tends to make life easier for partner if we just bid our suits – the quicker we can get information across, the better. Starting with a double runs the risk that the opponents will bounce the bidding high quickly and we will have to bid our suit at an uncomfortably high level next time round before partner knows what is going on.
- Auctions are tending to become more and more competitive. That means the chances of a simple overcall being passed out are low. So, even if partner does pass, opener frequently re-opens and we will have a chance to bid again.

So how should you decide whether to overcall or to double first?

One thing to do is think about some hands partner might hold. Suppose that West actually held this hand:

♠ Qxxx ♥ Ax ♦ xxxxx ♣ xx

Would you consider bidding anything on that if partner overcalled 2♣? No, neither would I. But your side is cold for 3NT if you play it! (you have a ♠ stopper plus 9 other tricks – ♥A, ♦A and 7 ♣tricks).

My own view is the East hand here is too strong for a simple 2♣ overcall because there is too great a chance partner will pass with a hand like the one above. We have 8 tricks in our own hand and need very little more to make a game. So I would start with a double intending to bid clubs next.

But others will feel differently. These days I expect if you asked a series of experts what they would do over 1♥ you would get a vote split between 2♣ and double. Remember I said a couple of weeks ago there frequently isn't a clear "right" bid on a hand? Experts disagree all the time!

Let's suppose East does double and South passes. What should West do?

This is an area where I frequently see players go wrong. Beginners are taught that you need at least 5 or 6 points to respond to an opening bid. So when they hold a hand like this (or even one slightly better) they think it's the same situation and bid at the lowest level. But when you are responding to a takeout double the situation is very different.

Suppose you held this hand:

♠xxxx ♥xx ♦xxxxx ♣xx

If the auction went 1♣ (X) P to you what would you do (apart from cursing the dealer!)?

Your partner is asking you to choose another suit. You certainly cannot pass and leave it in 1♣x because that's almost certain to make – quite probably with lots of overtricks! So you have to bid something. Most likely 1♠ since you still favour bidding majors. The point is you are being FORCED to bid something – even with no points at all. You are NOT voluntarily responding to an opening bid.

Here we don't hold that hand, we actually hold this one:

♠AKQx ♥xx ♦109xxx ♣xx

If we bid 1♠ on this as well, how on earth is partner supposed to know what to do?

The answer is we need to JUMP when we actually do have something. Again opinions vary but in general we should divide our hand into 3 ranges and bid differently for each. This is typical:

- 0-9 bid your suit at a minimum level
- 9-11/12 jump in your suit
- 13+ bid game directly or (if not sure what to play in) bid the opponent's suit to show a good hand that is worth game if partner has anything remotely reasonable for their double.

Note 9 appears in both ranges because it's around the margin. Here we have 9 points but, following on from last week, this is a "good" 9 count – we have 3 certain tricks and our honours are together. So I would upgrade it to the middle of these 3 ranges and bid 2♠ not 1♠ (note again I bid the major in preference to the minor to give us a chance to reach 4♠ – bear in mind at this stage we still think partner has just made a regular takeout double of 1♣).

Returning to East again if partner jumps to 2♠ what would we do?

On this particular hand East simply continues with their original plan – they bid 3♣ over 2♠. Doubling and bidding a new suit here does not agree partner's spades or anything like that, it is simply saying that they had clubs to start with but a hand too good to overcall just 2♣. East cannot have a regular hand with clubs, they would have already overcalled 2♣ with that. Note also that when East starts with a double they should be prepared to bid their own suit at higher levels as well. Even if West had jumped all the way to 4♠ over the double, East should STILL bid 5♣. Partner's 4♠ is not based on a long spade suit of his own, he is assuming you had a takeout double of 1♣ – and hence some support for spades. But you don't!

After the 3♣ bid West has to completely re-evaluate what is going on! He has now discovered his partner didn't have a takeout double at all, instead he has a strong hand with clubs. Holding a good 9 points himself West knows the partnership wants to reach game but the question is which one. His first move should be to bid 3♥ (the opponent's suit) to ask if partner can stop Hs in order to play 3NT. East will bid 4♣ to say no he can't. West therefore resorts to 5♣.

My overall auction for this hand would therefore be:

(1♥) X (P) 2♠

(P) 3♣ (P) 3♥

(P) 4♣ (P) 5♣

Key points to note

- Doubling an opening bid and then bidding a new suit on the next round shows a hand that was TOO GOOD to overcall that suit the first time. These days that shows an extremely good hand – typically 18+ points or a hand like this example with slightly fewer points but a lot of certain tricks that needs very little from partner to make game.
- When responding to a takeout double from partner you might well be forced to respond on 0 points. That means when you hold at least 9 points you need to JUMP in the bidding. Otherwise partner cannot judge whether to bid game when they hold an above average hand of around 15/16 points.

More advanced

In the recommended auction East's 4♣ bid says they cannot stop ♥s. But it actually should say more than that – it should deny 3♠ as well. Why? Because East cannot have 4♠ (they would have raised partner's 2♠ with that). But if they have 3♠ then bidding 3♠ is more helpful than 4♣. Partner already knows you have clubs, but West might have had 4 or 5 spades initially. If it is 5♠ then knowing East has 3 allows you to find the 5-3 spade fit.

If East decided to only bid 2♣ it will probably go pass pass back to North. Should they bid again?

Yes but not 2♥ which is what several tables did. They should re-open with a double.

That double is basically takeout and it is allowing for the possibility that South had a penalty double of 2♣ the first time (remember they cannot double 2♣ for penalties themselves, that would have been takeout). Here South had a genuine pass and would have to dredge up 2♥. Except that East would almost certainly have another go first and bid 3♣ over the double.

Finally, let's return to the question of jumping in response to takeout doubles with 9-11/12 points. Why does it help? Let's consider three different point ranges we might have for our initial takeout double when partner jumps to 2♠:

- 10-14 (min) Here we'd just pass 2♠ and be fairly happy we would make.
- 15-17 (med) This is the important case. If partner bids 1♠ on hands with both 0 points and 9 points then it's just a guess whether we should pass or bid on. Sods law says if we bid further partner will have 0 points, and if we pass partner will have 9 points! But partner has helped us by jumping. Now we KNOW they have 9-11/12 points and we can bid onto game. Had they bid 1♠ showing 0-9 we might invite but we wouldn't do any more than that.
- 18-19 (strong). Here we'd make a move regardless since we only want to stay out of game if partner is really weak.

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)

To join the SBC online sessions on BBO

Please follow this [Step by Step Guideline](#) to join the Sydney Bridge Centre duplicate session on BBO.

The SBC online session timetable

We have daily session from Monday to Friday. Please find our [session timetable](#) on our website.

To book an Introduction to BBO session

Join our [BBO Training session on Zoom](#), we will be able to show you how a tournament table looks like on BBO, how to make alerts, how to find out the meaning of opponent's bids, etc. It's a live session running on Zoom teleconference application, completely free of charge. You can book a session with us by picking a time suitable for you via this [booking form](#).