



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. 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.

#26596 BBO – Saturday ARVO session 4th September 2021

11		♠ T87	<i>Dir: S</i>																															
		♥ K	<i>Vul: None</i>																															
		♦ KJ8652																																
		♣ J98																																
♠ AQ63		♠ KJ5																																
♥ 985		♥ T632																																
♦ T93		♦ A74																																
♣ K53		♣ AT6																																
8	♠ 942	<table border="1" style="font-size: 0.8em;"> <tr> <td></td> <td>♣</td> <td>♦</td> <td>♥</td> <td>♠</td> <td>NT</td> </tr> <tr> <td>N</td> <td>1</td> <td>1</td> <td>1</td> <td>-</td> <td>-</td> </tr> <tr> <td>S</td> <td>1</td> <td>1</td> <td>1</td> <td>-</td> <td>-</td> </tr> <tr> <td>E</td> <td>-</td> <td>-</td> <td>-</td> <td>1</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>W</td> <td>-</td> <td>-</td> <td>-</td> <td>1</td> <td>1</td> </tr> </table>				♣	♦	♥	♠	NT	N	1	1	1	-	-	S	1	1	1	-	-	E	-	-	-	1	1	W	-	-	-	1	1
	♣				♦	♥	♠	NT																										
N	1				1	1	-	-																										
S	1				1	1	-	-																										
E	-	-	-	1	1																													
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9	♥ AQJ74																																	
12	♦ Q																																	
11	♣ Q742																																	

Last week board 11 saw 11 different contracts played across 22 tables which included every contract between 1♠ and 3♥ plus one table in 3NT!

With such variety, as you can imagine there are a lot of possible choices in the auction. South gets first shot. 12 chose 1♥, 9 chose pass and 1 chose 2♥. I'm with the 1♥ bidders. Yes it's only 11 points but we have a nice suit and a 5431 shape plus it's nil vulnerability which is by far the best vulnerability to be bidding on at matchpoints (see advanced section).

Most tables then continued Pass 1NT although some Norths bid 2♦. The hand isn't strong enough for a 2 level response which usually shows at least 10 points. Therefore you should bid 1NT. Yes even with this shape. That's often a misconception from inexperienced players. A 1NT response to a 1 level opening bid does NOT promise a balanced hand. It simply shows a hand that can't raise, can't bid a suit at the 1 level, isn't strong enough to bid at the 2 level but does have enough to respond. Yes most of the time bidding no-trumps you do have a balanced hand but this particular sequence is an exception to that.

East cannot really bid over 1NT so South now has another decision. A few tables passed but I would have bid 2♣. I find it's usually better to bid a 2nd suit here – especially as partner might not have a balanced hand. For example suppose here they had something like ♠10 ♥Kx ♦xxxx ♣AJxxxx. Now we have a big club fit and we might even make game in 4♥ or 5♣! That's not very likely but it is definitely possible that 1NT will be a silly contract (we are wide open in spades and diamonds) and we can make a club, diamond or heart partscore.

If South does bid 2♣ then North also has to decide whether to leave that in or bid 2♦. I wouldn't crime passing 2♣ but I prefer 2♦ because our hand may well be worth more played in diamonds. See the column on 25 November 2020 where this was discussed a bit more. Played in something else, there won't be any later entries to my diamond suit. Bidding a new suit like this having responded 1NT to start with now shows it was a long suit (at least 6) but a weak hand (if we had had at least 10 points we would have responded 2♦ to start with). Accordingly South should give up before things get worse!

Where South chose to pass initially the auction usually began with 3 passes, East opening 1♣ and south overcalling 1♥. West doubled or bid 1♠ and East rebid 1NT, usually playing there making at least 8 tricks for a good score. Surprisingly very few Norths opened the bidding in 3rd seat – I would definitely have opened a weak 2♦ if I was playing it. One table opened 3♦ which I actually have quite a lot of sympathy for. Today it gets them too high but on another day they could easily catch East with a big hand and give them a very nasty problem (here East West should just quietly pass 3♦ out as neither have a bid over it).

Playing in 2♦ North should go 1 off. Assuming East finds the spade lead (see advanced section for why you should) the defence can cash 3 spades and 2 clubs and will make the ♦A too. In fact they can give declarer a nasty decision to avoid going 2 off – see advanced section.

Of course if the defence don't cash their spades, declarer can quickly play 3 rounds of hearts (playing the K under the A) to discard two spade losers. Now they should make at least 8 tricks and 9 if they later avoid 3 club losers.

Another contract played a few times was 3♣ by South. Assuming North hadn't bid diamonds I would have lead the ♦10 which, on seeing dummy, doesn't look a great start for the defence on this occasion! However, after winning ♦A East should see the threat of the spade discards and switch sharply to spades so the defence should then come to the same 6 tricks to beat this by 2.

Key points to note

- A 5431 shape with a nice suit is usually worth an extra point or two and therefore is worth opening with an 11 count.
- A 1NT response to a 1 level opening bid does NOT promise a balanced hand – merely a hand that isn't strong enough to bid at the 2 level and can't raise or bid a new suit at the 1 level either.
- Bidding a new suit after having responded 1NT to start with shows at least 6 of that suit (and less than 10 points).
- Where discards are threatened in a suit contract you may need to attack your suit to take your tricks quickly.
- At pairs be more inclined to bid when it's nil vulnerability and less inclined when both sides are vul (see advanced section).

More advanced

Why is nil vulnerability the best time to be bidding at matchpoints? I went into this in some depth in a column on 11 November 2020 but, in a nutshell, it's the mathematics of the scoring. If you are playing a contract which fails you only go off in 50's. But if you beat a contract they are playing you only get 50's. In the first case even if you go 2 off (-100) you are usually scoring better than conceding their contract so you have done better to bid on. Likewise in the second case if you take their contract 2 off you score +100 which is less than something you might be able to make yourself – so they have done better to bid on.

The situation changes if either side is vulnerable. Bidding on now by either side runs the risk of going off in 100's and going 2 off (or 1 off doubled) for -200 is almost always a very bad pairs score. You might instinctively therefore think the most dangerous time to be bidding is when you are vulnerable and they are not. However that isn't actually true! The most dangerous is when both sides are vulnerable. The reason is that if you let them play the hand going off in 50's you may not score enough anyway – hence it's worth bidding on to try and make your contract. Conversely when they are also vulnerable you may be able to collect 200 from their contract so it is less appealing to risk bidding on. Therefore at pairs you should tend to compete the most when no-one is vulnerable and compete the least when both sides are vulnerable.

So after the auction 1♥ – 1NT – 2♣ – 2♦ why should East lead ♠5? Partly again just process of elimination – hearts and clubs have been bid on your left, and you know declarer has a weak hand with plenty of diamonds and no fit for hearts or clubs. Neither hand has shown spades. But there is another reason too. You know South has at least 5 hearts and North is short (they bid 2♦ on the 2nd round, they didn't give preference back to 2♥). With your own lack of heart honours there is definitely a danger that some losers from North could get discarded on South's heart suit. You may therefore need to cash some spades (as here) or you may need to set some spade tricks up quickly before declarer sets up hearts in dummy to discard them on (suppose for example the spade and heart aces were switched between the West and South hands).

Although 2♦ should only be one down, the defence can give declarer a nasty moment. If they cash 3 rounds of spades, the ♦A, the ♣A, then the ♣K and now West plays the last spade declarer has to trump with exactly the ♦8 to avoid either being over-ruffed or promoting West's remaining 109 for 2 down. Not easy!

Lastly I mentioned that North may need to avoid 3 club losers if the defence don't attack the suit. To do this they effectively have to guess where the ♣10 is. If they can force out the A or K on the first round, the Q and J are then good enough to force out the other top honour. Here that works by running the 9. In practice, however, when playing in 2♦ the risk of North being able to pitch club losers is the same as pitching spade losers so the defence will just seek to cash their club tricks. If clubs were trumps, however, the defence should steer clear and just hope declarer guesses wrong!

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)

Repeat on Demand - The SBC Encore! Mid-Week Swiss Pairs



A lot of players really like the idea of a weekday congress and asked us to run it again. If you didn't manage to join our last time, here comes the opportunity!

The [SBC Encore! Mid-Week Swiss Pairs](#) is a one-day congress to be held on Wednesday 29th September, 10am start. We will play six 8 boards round with a lunch break in the middle.

RED masterpoints awarded. BB\$12 per player. Winners (of 3 categories) will receive FREE entry to the NSWBA Online Teams of Three, details will be announced very soon!

[Enter in advance](#) required on the NSWBA website. We intend to run separate fields for Open and Restricted & Novice players, if number allows. Please nominate the field you would like to compete in.

The Sydney Bridge Centre online sessions on BBO

Our clubroom on Goulburn Street is temporary closed under the current restriction. We are running regular club session online on BBO for the moment and will resume our F2F sessions once we can. Please keep an eye on our [website](#) for the latest announcement.

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.

24 boards, BB\$4 per person per game.