



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.

#45775 BBO – Saturday ARVO session 21st August 2021

10	♠ 7653	Dir: E					
	♥ 987	Vul: Both					
	♦ JT6						
	♣ 532						
♠ AK	♠ T98						
♥ AT4	♥ QJ						
♦ KQ43	♦ 752						
♣ A976	♣ KQT84						
1	♠ QJ42	<table border="1"> <tr><td>♣♦♥♠NT</td></tr> <tr><td>N - - - - -</td></tr> <tr><td>S - - - - -</td></tr> <tr><td>E 6 5 2 3 6</td></tr> <tr><td>W 6 5 2 3 6</td></tr> </table>	♣♦♥♠NT	N - - - - -	S - - - - -	E 6 5 2 3 6	W 6 5 2 3 6
♣♦♥♠NT							
N - - - - -							
S - - - - -							
E 6 5 2 3 6							
W 6 5 2 3 6							
20 8	♥ K6532						
	♦ A98						
11	♣ J						

Board 10 last week should have been a fairly routine 3NT contract East West. But only 12 out of 21 tables reached it and some of those made 11 tricks instead of 12. Let's consider what happened.

After East's opening pass, South has to decide whether to open 1♥ or not. Most tables did and I would have done as well. It's marginal but getting into the auction first is usually an advantage and the 5431 shape is always nice (this is typically the best shape because it provides 3 possible suits that could be trumps or have a chance of being set up if they are not trumps, as well as a ruffing value). If South doesn't open then West has a pretty normal 2NT opening (usually showing 20-22) and East will raise to 3NT.

After 1♥ West should start with a double (a 2NT overcall is usually played as "Michaels" being 55 in the minors). In response to the double East should bid 2♣. As discussed last week, the response to a takeout double is not like responding to an opening bid as East will be forced to bid something even with zero points. (Remember that East assumes the double is takeout initially – here of course West is later going to reveal it's something else). East isn't strong enough to jump, however, as that normally shows a good 8-11 and this hand doesn't look to be worth that much with the ♥QJ potentially completely useless after the 1♥ opening on his left.

At several tables West now jumped to 3NT. Although it's the right spot today, this is a bit too much – remember partner might have had absolutely nothing when they bid 2♣. The correct bid is 2NT. This shows a hand that was too strong to overcall 1NT the first time. A 1NT overcall initially would have been 15-18 or thereabouts (some pairs play 15-17). So 2NT now shows a hand that is better than that - about 18-21. 3NT would be even stronger than this and prepared to try game opposite almost nothing. 2NT caters for the fact that East MIGHT have had to bid 2♣ on nothing. Over 2NT, East should now recognise that fact. In the context of what they could have had for their previous 2♣ bid they are now a super-maximum! Knowing partner is around 18-21, they have an easy 3NT bid. So my recommended bidding sequence is: P 1♥ X P, 2♣ P 2NT P, 3NT.

The play has some interest. At most tables a heart was led and trick one went something like 9 J K A. Better play by South is actually not to play the K (it makes no difference here but see advanced section for why). When South has opened the bidding this makes the hand pretty simple to play since the ♦A is marked in that hand. Therefore all declarer needs to do is lead up towards his ♦KQ to eventually score 2♠, 3♥, 2♦ and 5♣ for +690. They do have to be slightly careful with entries though (see advanced section). Even though slam makes today, it's not one you could really bid.

There is a right way and a wrong way to play the club suit as well (again it makes no difference here but see advanced section for details).

The correct sequence of plays after a heart lead is: ♥J scoring in dummy. ♣K (now confirming 5 club tricks are easy), diamond to the K, run the rest of the clubs, unblock the ♥Q and lead another diamond towards the Q (South will almost certainly take the ♦A this time). That secures declarer's 12 tricks.

Key points to note

- These days opening 11 counts is becoming quite normal.
- Mentally upgrade 5431 shapes – they tend to play well, especially in suit contracts.
- A minimum response to a takeout double shows about 0-7. Jumps are about 8-11.
- Doubling and then rebidding NT at the minimum level shows a hand that was too good to overcall 1NT to start with (about 19-21 typically).
- If you need to lead up to honours, think about entries to the other hand to do so.
- When a suit looks easy to play, identify what the worst distribution might be and then consider whether you can do anything about it (see advanced section).

More advanced

I suggested South should not cover the ♥J with the ♥K at trick one. Why not? It makes little difference on this hand but there are two reasons:

- a) Suppose partner had led the ♥9 from a doubleton and declarer had A108x (perfectly possible on the bidding). By covering, you give declarer 4 heart tricks. By not covering (either the Q or the J), he is limited to 3. Remember the ONLY reason for covering is to promote lower cards in either yours, or your partner's, hands. Your lowly 6 is hardly about to get promoted on this hand and partner isn't going to have enough hearts to promote any either.
- b) If you do cover, you leave declarer with a later heart entry to dummy whenever he wants it. If you don't cover, he has got that entry now – but he might not want it or know what he wants to do with it yet! You have forced him to take a position early on before he knows as much about the hand. That can sometimes be critical.

Yes it can sometimes be right to cover with these positions in order to deliberately block declarer's suit but that's not an issue here – declarer is clearly going to have loads of entries back to the West hand after unblocking the heart.

In the play declarer needs to lead up to the ♦KQ and, although they have enough entries to East to do that here you should mentally check and not just blindly cash all the clubs first. Note that South should not play the ♦A on the first round as a few tables did. By ducking it, they force declarer to use another entry to East to lead up a 2nd time. On some hands, that entry may be in short supply! Of course declarer's job is made easier with a heart lead taking that finesse for him. Imagine if a spade was lead. Now you need three entries to dummy, two to lead diamonds and one to take the heart finesse. If this did arise, you should take the heart finesse first. That's because if South doesn't cover you are left in dummy and can now repeat the finesse or lead a diamond up.

What about the club suit? It looks easy and indeed on this hand you have the 5 club tricks you expect. But the correct play on the 1st round is the K or the Q. Why? Imagine the clubs split 4-0 and one hand has Jxxx. If you play the A first and discover South had all 4 clubs, you have just created a loser. But if you play the K or Q first you can still pick up the suit if either opponent has all 4 clubs. (But note this is where South not playing the ♥K at trick 1 might be critical. Imagine the ♥J holding the trick, then declarer plays the ♣K and finds out South does have all 4 clubs. Now, provided South doesn't play the J until forced to, it's impossible for declarer to score 5 club tricks as they will end up in the West hand on the 4th round and can't now get back to dummy for the 5th club. Try it and see! But if South had covered at trick 1, this wouldn't matter as the ♥Q is now that later entry back there.)

These suit combinations are tricky though. Change the hand incredibly slightly and remove the ♣10. This time the correct play is the ♣A first! That's because now if one player has J10xx then it can only be picked up if it's with North so you need to leave the KQ over the J10 to be able to finesse them both.

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)

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