



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.

#5613 BBO – Saturday ARVO session 14th August 2021

4	♠ JT86	<i>Dir: W</i>																													
	♥ Q7	<i>Vul: Both</i>																													
	♦ K873																														
	♣ Q43																														
♠ 753	♠ AK																														
♥ T86543	♥ K																														
♦ 6	♦ QJT5																														
♣ T62	♣ AKJ985																														
8	♠ Q942	<table border="1"> <tr><td>♣</td><td>♦</td><td>♥</td><td>♠</td><td>NT</td></tr> <tr><td>N</td><td>-</td><td>2</td><td>-</td><td>2</td><td>-</td></tr> <tr><td>S</td><td>-</td><td>2</td><td>-</td><td>2</td><td>-</td></tr> <tr><td>E</td><td>4</td><td>-</td><td>1</td><td>-</td><td>-</td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td>4</td><td>-</td><td>1</td><td>-</td><td>-</td></tr> </table>	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT	N	-	2	-	2	-	S	-	2	-	2	-	E	4	-	1	-	-	W	4	-	1	-	-
♣	♦		♥	♠	NT																										
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0	♥ AJ92																														
21	♦ A942																														
11	♣ 7																														

Board 4 last week saw another large hand opposite a very bad one. The most common auction was uncontested East West 2♣ - 2♦ - 3♣ - pass. Which usually scored 10 tricks for +130.

After two passes to East, the hand is obviously very large with only 4 losers. However I would personally have opened it 1♣. For a few reasons:

- Opening 2♣ is going to make it almost impossible to show both my suits (you can just see the auction going 2♣ - 2♦ - 3♣ and then whatever West does next, you are hardly going to want to bid 4♦ and bypass 3NT).
- We don't have majors so reaching 4 major isn't likely.
- These days opponents tend to bid far more so the chances of it going all pass are, in practice, incredibly low (especially as we don't have the majors).
- If the auction does go all pass, how likely is it that we have really missed a game?

I discussed in a recent column (31 July) whether a 2♣ opening is just a strong hand or whether it's an unconditional game force. If the latter then that's another reason to open 1♣ because we are nowhere close to 11 tricks in a minor in our hand (although we are pretty close to 3NT).

If East did open 1♣ then I would double as South. Even though I only have 11 points, I have the perfect shape and I have the shortage in clubs so I should be striving to act. West will pass (although see advanced section). Now North has to respond to the takeout double. I would have bid 2♠ which typically shows about 8-11 with at least 4 spades (see advanced section for more discussion on why).

What should East do now? I'd content myself with 3♣. If partner couldn't bid over the double it means he almost certainly has at most 5 points or he'd have dredged up something. Plus the opponents have both shown some values which leaves very little for partner! That is likely to end the auction.

What about the play and defence? On lead to 3♣ South should lead a spade. In fact they should do this regardless of whether partner has bid them or not mainly due to a process of elimination:

- Leading aces into thin air is generally a bad thing to do (you want to save them to beat Kings and Queens)
- Underleading aces against a suit contract is also very dangerous – it gives a trick away far more often than not
- Leading a singleton trump is usually also bad because it could well pick up an honour in partner's hand which declarer might not otherwise have managed if left to their own devices.

- Once you take all that into account you are only left with spades! But quite often that is the way you do decide what to lead – the least bad option. Opening leads are very difficult because you have the least information available to you. Following some sound general principles will help but, on the day, any particular lead could prove spectacularly successful or a dismal failure!

There isn't much to the play. Declarer will win the ♠A (not the K to try and conceal where that is) and should immediately lead the ♦10 to set up some diamond ruffs in dummy. South needs to win this (if they don't declarer's QJ will now be a ruffing finesse against their A). They should work out there is no future in spades (see advanced section for why not) so they may now switch to a trump hoping to cut ruffs. Although that gives declarer 6 club tricks, it does limit him to 2 diamond ruffs in dummy which, together with the ♠AK will be 10 tricks. One or two tables tried a low heart and declarer's singleton K scoring demonstrated perfectly why underleading aces is a bad idea!

Key points to note

- Don't be frightened to open strong hands with over 20 points at the 1 level if you think the auction will get too hard when you open 2♣ (e.g. where you have 2 or 3 suits to try and show). 1 level contracts are seldom passed out these days! Particularly when you don't have the majors.
- Responding to a takeout double is not the same as responding to an opening bid (see advanced section)
- If partner couldn't respond anything at the 1 level they have a very bad hand!
- Generally don't lead unsupported aces or underlead aces against suit contracts.
- When the cards of trick 1 are played, stop and try to work out the suit layout – remarkably often you will be able to do it almost completely (see advanced section).

More advanced

One or two tables started 1♣ Pass 2♥ or 1♣ X 2♥. The 2♥ jump response is played as very weak (0-6 points). Although that method can be useful, I would not have done it here with such bad hearts and vulnerable against not. Too much chance I am going to land up in a silly spot going at least -200. Vulnerable I would keep the range more like 2-6 and not do it on rubbish like this.

Playing these weak jump shifts can lead to an inference that can be very useful – if you respond at the 1 level and later repeat your suit at the 2 level it means you have a hand that was stronger than an initial jump would have been. Such a hand is sometimes called “semi-constructive” showing about 7-9 points and a 6 card suit. That knowledge can be useful to partner and allow them to bid game.

Why should North respond 2♠ to a takeout double? This is an area I see players get wrong all the time. They think it's like responding to an opening bid and bid 1♠. But it's not the same. You can pass an opening bid with less than 5 points. Passing a 1 level takeout double with that would be crazy! Therefore the key point to appreciate is that North is being FORCED to bid after the takeout double and they might have to bid 1♠ on a hand with no points at all. If they also bid the same way with the 8 points they have here, it's going to be impossible for partner to know what to do when they have 16 or so. Obviously on this hand, South is completely minimum for their takeout double and would pass 2♠ like lightning! But on other hands the jump from partner may be the only way to know they are in the game range. The extension to that is the takeout doubler shows around a minimum opening when they double so they should not be “raising” partner's forced response with that. Frequently you see auctions where someone makes a normal takeout double, their partner bids at the 1 level on a 10 count and the doubler raises on their 12 count. They land up in the right spot but the 1 level response risked missing game if doubler had 15, and raising on the 12 count risked getting too high when partner's 1 level response really was done on next to nothing!

Returning to the play now. When South wins the ♦A I said they should know the spade position. Why? By reading the cards played. Let's work it out. Trick 1 goes 2 3 10 A. South therefore knows East doesn't have the J or they would have won with that. But they can also be pretty sure East must have the K as well because partner would usually have played it at trick 1 if they'd held it (third hand plays high). This allows us to work out that spades are a safe continuation. If we had an auction where partner did respond in spades to our takeout double then we know he must have at least 4, hence declarer can only have ♠AK. If partner hasn't bid spades, it's still possible they are 3334 round the table and then it is worth playing another one to set up our spade trick. But should we consider something else? Yes – trying to reduce diamond ruffs in dummy! We know the long heart suit in dummy isn't setting up anytime soon so that's no threat but diamond ruffs definitely are.

Note North also knows a lot about the spade position after trick 1. If their partner's ♠2 lead guarantees an honour then that has to be the K or the Q (we assume partner will never underlead an Ace against a suit contract). After the 10 draws the A, declarer cannot have the Q or they would have won that. Partner also cannot have KQ because he would lead an honour with that rather than the 2. Hence the honours must be as per the hand (although, from North's perspective, it's still possible that partner has led from ♠Qxx and declarer has ♠AKx). It is always worth just working through the cards played to the early tricks – it is surprising how often you can piece together the entire layout of the suit just from one trick. Sometimes that knowledge is essential!

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)

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RED masterpoints at state level. BB\$15 per player. [Enter in advance](#) required on the NSWBA website.

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