



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.

#12424BBO – Saturday ARVO session 19th June 2021

13	♠ AKQJ2	<i>Dlr: N</i>
	♥ Q1092	<i>Vul: Both</i>
	♦ 5	
	♣ A63	
♠ 10873	♠ 4	
♥ K876	♥ J	
♦ Q9762	♦ AKJ108	
♣	♣ QJ10952	
16 ♠ 965	♣♦♥♠NT	
5 12 ♥ A543	N - - 3 3 2	
7 ♦ 43	S - - 4 4 2	
♣ K874	E 2 4 - - -	
	W 2 4 - - -	

Board 13 last week saw some potential high level bidding decisions.

North will start with 1♠ and East will obviously bid something, the question is what. 3 players chose 2♣, 2 chose 2NT and 2 chose 2♦.

- 2♣ is fine – it’s your longest suit and you may well be able to show diamonds as well later (see below).
- 2NT (unusual showing at least 5-5 in the minors) is also a good description.
- 2♦ I would not consider - it’s the shorter of my two suits and if partner has equal length in the minors I definitely don’t want him to put clubs back to diamonds; besides there’s a way to show diamonds later after overcalling clubs (see advanced section).

The choice between 2♣ and 2NT (minors) really depends on your style for 2NT. Some pairs like to bid it with any strength to just get the shape of the hand across quickly, others like to keep 2NT for either weak hands or strong hands but not intermediate hands. Both of course have their merits – see advanced section for more discussion on this.

Over 2♣ South has a normal 2♠ raise and over 2NT they should probably stretch to bid 3♠ to show their fit. West’s action will vary greatly at this point depending on what East did! After 1♠ 2♣ 2♠ West will pass and North will bid 4♠. Now East needs to bid again if their side is to get involved. After 1♠ 2NT 3♠ it’s very different – West now knows of 5 card diamond support. I would immediately bid 5♦ to put the maximum pressure on North. West knows partner will be very short in spades because the opponents have bid and raised them and he’s looking at 4 himself. So the very worst outcome is probably 4 losers (1♠, 2♥ and 1♦) which is only -500 against the opponent’s almost certain vulnerable game. And it could easily be better than that.

If North is faced with a 5♦ bid should they bid onto 5♠? 3 tables did and ended up 1 or 2 off. I don’t think I would. There are many “rules” in bridge but one of the best ones to follow is “do not bid 5 over 5”. Generally speaking with majors it is right an amazing proportion of the time to bid 4♠ over 4♥ but it is wrong an amazing proportion of the time to bid 5♠ over 5♥. Generally you should only be bidding on at the 5 level if you have exceptional shape, usually including a void. Here North doesn’t so I think a double of 5♦ is better. However as it turns out you have to defend well to beat it!

Before we talk about that let’s talk about the play in 4♠ by North as a couple of tables were allowed to play there. 4♠ can be beaten by a club lead ruffed, diamond return, and a 2nd club ruff. However East’s natural start is probably going to be two rounds of diamonds. North will probably ruff and try to draw trumps. The 4-1 trump break now makes things delicate. If they draw all the trumps they will have to lose the lead in hearts and the defence will have diamond winners. So that’s no good.

What can they do? If they draw only 2 rounds of trumps leaving one in dummy and now play on hearts then things are OK. After West wins ♥K they can’t do any damage because South still has the ♠9 to deal with another diamond. Declarer could then cross back to ♣A and finish drawing trumps. One table found this line of play – well done. There is another possible line of play too (see advanced section).

What about the play and defence to 5♦ by East then? This was played at one table and South led a spade. After two rounds of spades East led the ♥J and South took the A. They played a 3rd spade continuing to try and force declarer. However this didn't work because declarer could just cross ruff everything and cash the ♥K along the way. So they ended up scoring 10 trump trumps and the ♥K to make 5♦ and a top board. Trumps leads will beat 5♦ - see advanced section for why South probably should do that.

Key points to note

- Generally overcall your longest suit.
- An unusual 2NT overall shows at least 55 in the minors over a major. Pairs should agree whether to play this as any strength or whether to limit it to weak or strong hands but not intermediate ones (see advanced section).
- If the opponents are at the 5 level, bidding on at the 5 level yourself is wrong a large proportion of the time. It should generally only be done if you have extreme distribution.
- You sometimes cannot afford to draw all the trumps if it will leave you exposed to being forced.
- When you have the majority of the strength and the opponents are sacrificing they are usually expecting to score most of their tricks from ruffing. Trump leads reduce this as far as possible (see advanced section).

More advanced

If West does overcall 2♣ and finds the auction comes back to them at the 4♠ level, how can they also show diamonds? Bidding 5♦ is obviously fraught with danger as partner might have to retreat to 6♣! The answer is a bid of 4NT. This typically shows both minors but with longer clubs (obviously with longer diamonds you would have started with a 2♦ overcall). 4NT allows both suits to be shown but still to play in both at the 5 level. It cannot be blackwood in this context – what suit have we agreed? The same treatment can be applied by opener as well. Suppose you had this hand as dealer and opened 1♣. If the auction went 1♠ P 4♠ back to you, you might now also consider 4NT.

Where you have opened or overcalled the higher suit you can also use 4NT to distinguish between a hand with 4 or 5 in your 2nd suit. For example a 1174 shape might bid 1♦ and then bid 4NT over 4♠ (showing 4 clubs only), whereas a 1165 shape would bid 1♦ and then bid 5♣ over 4♠ (which, because 4NT shows 4, would guarantee at least 5 clubs). That knowledge can be critical to partner.

With regard to shape showing bids like the unusual 2NT and Michaels I mentioned earlier that there are two schools of thought around strength. The “show the shape first” camp and the “Weak or strong but not intermediate” camp.

There are obvious advantages of showing both suits immediately so that partner knows if there is a fit or not. That works well on this particular hand. But the downside is it's very hard for partner to judge whose hand it is if you might be doing this on a distribution 8 point hand and a distributional 20 point hand!

The rationale for the other view is that it's useful to make these bids on weak hands (with a view to finding a good sacrifice) and on strong hands (with a view to finding a game or even a slam our way) but it's not so useful on intermediate hands where the hand could belong to either side and we'll just give away too much information about our shape when we might end up defending. The downside of this approach is there will be some occasions where you don't ever get to show your 2nd suit on an intermediate hand as the bidding may come back too high to be able to do it safely. That's not so much the case on this hand which has enough playing strength to venture another action at the 4NT level but a less appealing 2155 shape or something would not.

Turning to the play now, I said there was another line of play in 4♠. Something North might consider to keep trump control is not to ruff the 2nd diamond at trick 2 at all but to discard his club loser. Now he can ruff a further diamond in the south hand. That sort of play can be effective on many hands to keep trump control but it would backfire here pretty badly though – because East could give West the club ruff that the defence have, so far, failed to find! Holding 7 clubs between North & South and hearing West's quick jump to 5♦, declarer should probably be wary of

this and not risk it. Besides, they don't need to as the line described earlier (draw just 2 rounds of trumps) is fine too.

So how do the defence beat 5♦? By getting some rounds of trumps played. Every round plays reduces the number of trump tricks EW can score. Just one round will reduce East to scoring 5 trumps in one hand, 4 ruffs in the other and the ♥K (for 10 tricks). Two rounds would reduce the number of trump tricks still further but now East can set their clubs up instead so they would still make 10 tricks but not 11. Assuming North has doubled 5♦ there is actually a good case for South to lead a trump. The double should tell him that North believes it's their hand so EW are sacrificing with more shape than high card points. The shape means they are hoping to score most of their tricks by ruffing. So the defence should aim to neutralise that as far as possible – which they can do by playing trumps whenever they can.

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)

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