



## Weekly Wisdom

### The Sydney Bridge Centre mini lesson

The Sydney Bridge Centre runs a morning session on Monday in both venues in City and Canada Bay. They play the same hands and we run inter-venue competitions from time to time. Julian Foster (many times NSW representative) will be analysing an interesting hand from each Monday morning session. His column is updated weekly and published on the Sydney Bridge Centre website, under “Learn Bridge”.

You are also welcome to [send questions](#) about hands that you have played.

### Michaels cue bids and thereafter

City and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2024

12	♠ Q8753	Dir: W																								
	♥ J6	Vul: N-S																								
	♣ AT9864																									
♠ 42	♠ AT9	7																								
♥ AKQ653	♥ 9872	11 10																								
♦ Q9	♦ K82	12																								
♣ 532	♣ QJ7																									
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Board 12 last week had the potential for quite a spirited auction. West starts with a normal 1♥ and then it's North's turn. With such a shapely hand, even vulnerable against not, it is well worth getting involved. Hands like that can be extremely powerful if partner does have a fit (conversely they can be very dangerous if not!). The best bid is 2♥, a Michaels cue bid. This shows at least 5 spades (the other major) and 5 of a minor. Some players make these sorts of bids on hands with only 54 shape. I would strongly advise you NOT do that – 54 hands have far less playing strength and risk a larger penalty when things sit badly. Nor do they give as much information to partner. I would keep

Michaels cue bids (and the 2NT unusual no-trump overcall) as strictly 55+.

Opinions vary on the type of strength Michaels should show (see advanced section for more). Here of course North is very minimum in terms of points and the quality of his suits, spades especially, isn't great. So he is definitely very minimum to make this bid. But it not only takes up a fair bit of space, it's also very descriptive to partner. Now it's East to bid and he obviously wants to raise hearts. Here, just like if North had overcalled 1♠, East can make a “Cue raise” to show a good heart raise. So he can bid 2♣, the opponents' known suit (North's minor is unknown so any bid of a minor by East at this stage should simply be natural). Had East been weaker he could have just bid 3♥ – which is usually played like a hand that would have normally raised to 2♥. Here there was just one known opponent's suit so the cue raise is easily identified. But suppose North had overcalled 2NT (unusual showing 55 in the minors) instead? Now both the opponents' suits are known so what should East's bids means here? See advanced section for some suggestions.

South can now come to life and he should bid 4♠. He knows partner has at least 5 spades. He strongly suspects that partner's minor will be clubs so his ♣K is useful as is his ♦A. West at this stage MIGHT choose to bid onto 5♥ but that's a bit unilateral as his partner could be sitting there with some defence to spades. West is also quite balanced. The vulnerability is, however, in his favour. On this hand it is technically the right bid because 4♠ can make and 5♥ is only 2 off for a score of -300. In practice, however, it's not as simple as this. For a start not everyone was bidding 4♠ and then quite a few pairs weren't making it either! So -300 would actually have scored pretty badly! If West passes then North certainly will and East will too as he is looking at quite a bit of defence (and his 4333 shape certainly doesn't suggest he wants to be playing at the 5 level!)

Note that East had the option of a cue raise in hearts. South might also want to show a good raise in spades just in case his partner has a better hand and slam is a possibility. That's not so easy here because partner's bid showed 2 suits. It might be that 4♥ shows a good spade raise but that would be worth agreeing with partner!

It looks from the travellers as if not that many pairs reached 4♠ – several North South pairs defended 4♥ and some even defended 3♥. 4♥ shouldn't make. There is a spade, a diamond and 2 clubs to lose. The only thing the defence have to be careful about is not playing the ♦A into thin air (if they do then declarer might be able to cash ♦Q and later discard his spade loser on ♦K) – they need to wait to use it to take one of the other top honours.

What about 4♠ played by South? West will clearly lead a top heart which will be ruffed in dummy. The play isn't that obvious now. Usually it is right to try and set up the side suit but the question here is which one! North's clubs or South's diamonds? On this hand South's diamonds are probably better to play on – because there are going to be later entries to them. Furthermore, the North hand will have its trumps shortened with hearts whenever the defence get in so it may be impossible for declarer to draw trumps, set clubs up, and get back to North to cash them. Therefore, a good move at trick 2 here would actually be to run the ♦J (losing to West's ♦Q). Assuming he plays another heart now declarer can try some trumps. Later he can get to ♣A (even overtaking his own ♣K if necessary) to lead another diamond and score the rest of the suit. It's actually an example of a "dummy reversal" where the short trump hand is used to draw trumps (see advanced section for more).

If declarer starts playing on clubs he may run into problems as he will run short of entries to the North hand.

### Key points to note

- Hands with at least 55 shape have a lot of playing strength and should get into the auction where possible (but recognising that they might run into trouble on a bad day where it doesn't fit with partner at all). The best bid is usually a Michaels cue bid or the unusual 2NT overcall – both of which are descriptive.
- Don't bid Michaels or the unusual 2NT on only 54 shape hands – keep them for 55+.
- Cue raises of partner's opened suit are still possible after Michaels and should be used where applicable to help partner judge better in the auction later.
- If you have a fit for one of the suits partner shows with a Michaels cue-bid it's frequently right to simply bid game – partner's hand has a lot of playing strength so the number of points is far less relevant.
- A "dummy reversal" is where declarer deliberately takes ruffs in the long trump hand and uses the short trump hand to draw trumps. This can lead to an extra trick – but is frequently hard for players to see at the table.

### More advanced

With Michaels cue bids (and unusual 2NT as well) there are typically two schools of thought:

- a) Bid to get the shape across almost regardless of strength
- b) Bid Michaels with weak hands (looking for sacrifices) or with strong hands (looking to make our own contract) but not with intermediate hands (those overcall one suit and try to later show the other).

The advantage of (b) is that it's much easier for partner to judge what to do. If partner might have anything between 5 and 20 points when he bids Michaels then it's impossible for partner to be able to bid accurately. On the other hand, the disadvantage of (b) is that you need to overcall one of the suits on an intermediate hand. Then, if the opponents are bidding, you might find the bidding too high when it comes back to you to safely show your 2<sup>nd</sup> suit at all. This can lead to your side missing a good save or a makeable contract.

Invariably each method will have wins and losses. For what it's worth I subscribe to option (b)!

What about raising after an unusual 2NT intervention? Here both clubs and diamonds are known suits for the opponents. Again there are different methods in use. One is to treat the higher cue as a raise of partner's suit and the lower cue as a good hand with the 4<sup>th</sup> suit (so spades after 1♥ 2NT). Actually bidding the 4<sup>th</sup> suit is then a weaker hand. Another method I quite like is to simply treat 3♦ as always showing spades and 3♣ as always showing hearts (either as a raise or as the 4<sup>th</sup> suit). So if partner has opened 1♠ then over 2NT 3♦ shows a good raise and 3♣ shows a good hand with hearts. But if he opened 1♥ then 3♣ is showing the good raise and 3♦ shows a good hand with spades.

A dummy reversal is a relatively rare type of play where declarer deliberately trumps in the long hand several times and uses the trumps in the short hand to draw trumps. A 5-3 fit is the most common time it occurs. This way he can make an extra trick (say he takes 3 small ruffs with the 5 card suit and then draws trumps with the 3 card holding – that's 6 trump tricks in total instead of 5. Many players have blind spots over dummy reversals because we are all instinctively trained to think about ruffing in the short hand to gain tricks! But

they can be quite satisfying to bring off at the table. There are two key things needed for a dummy reversal to work:

- The short trump hand to include quite strong trumps (as you need them to draw the opponents')
- Plenty of entries to the short trump hand (as you need to get there to lead the side suit cards to ruff with the long trumps, and then get back there later to draw trumps).

The South hand just about meets these criteria!

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)