



## 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.

### A rare 8410 shape

City and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 29<sup>th</sup> April 2024

<b>18</b>	♠ J86	Dir: E
	♥ J832	Vul: N-S
	♦ AQ85	
	♣ QJ	
♠ KQT32	♠ A754	11
♥ K7	♥ Q64	12 6
♦ KJT962	♦ 743	11
♣	♣ 832	
♠ 9		
♥ AT95		
♣ AKT97654		
	♠ ♣ ♥ ♦ NT	
	N 5 - 4 - 2	
	S 5 - 4 - 2	
	E - 3 - 4 -	
	W - 3 - 3 -	

Board 18 last week contained a fairly rare 8410 distribution. With such a freak hand you generally want your side to be declarer - and usually with your 8 card suit as trumps.

After a pass from East South can start with a simple 1♣. With this much shape in his hand it's highly unlikely that will get passed out! West now has a few options. Even though he has 5 spades and 6 diamonds it's quite appealing to overcall 1♠ to ensure he shows his major. If he overcalls 1♦ he needs to be prepared to bid spades next time at a pretty high level, otherwise he won't have shown his hand at all.

Another option for West might be 2NT. Some pairs play this as similar to Michaels - i.e. showing 55+ in diamonds and a major. However, a more popular treatment these days is specifically both red suits. See advanced section for more discussion.

If West does overcall 1♦ then North has a simple 1♥ bid. Likewise over 1♠ he can double to show hearts. East will raise either diamonds or spades and it's back to South.

Even after discovering a heart fit I would still be very tempted to just rebid 5♣. With these sorts of hands there's a big risk that a 44 trump fit won't be robust enough and the long 8 card suit might get cut off. Here that's especially true as South can expect to be forced to ruff a spade immediately. There's a bridge tip somewhere that you “never put an 8 card suit down in dummy”. The logic being that the suit should be trumps!

As it turns out both 4♥ and 5♣ can be made which we'll look at in a moment. So the “par” result is actually for East West to bid on in spades or diamonds as the penalty is less than the value of the vulnerable game. This of course may not be clear to them although West with his shape will surely be tempted - especially if East has been able to show some support for one of his suits. For example after 1♣ 1♦ 1♥ 2♦ 5♣ he might well try 5♦. After 1♣ 1♠ X 2♠ (or 3♠) 5♣ then bidding on is also appealing.

As so often though, bidding on to sacrifice, whilst right in theory, didn't work out so well in practice. That's because not all the North South pairs bid game and quite a few of those who did went off.

What about if West does bid 2NT over 1♣? This gives a further variation to the auction. North should double that showing some values and expressing interest in a penalty. East at this point can bid 3♥. This is what's known as a “correctable” bid. East doesn't know which major partner has but he has support for both so he is prepared to go to either 3♥ or 3♠. South with his huge shape will probably override his partner's desire to penalise and just jump to 5♣ (showing a very shapely hand that isn't interested in partner doubling at the 3 level). But, having done that, he's pretty much shown his hand so if North now doubles 5♦ or 5♠ then South should respect that.

What about the play? In 5♣ the most likely start is ♠K and another forcing South to ruff. To make 5♣ declarer needs to lose only one heart. In isolation the best way to do that is to lead hearts twice from dummy which

will work when the honours are split or East has both. Here it is possible to do that but there are some other constraints - entries! Declarer only has two entries to dummy - both in trumps - so he needs to use them carefully.

He should cross to ♣Q and lead a heart to his ♥10. This will lose to West who will no doubt play another spade. Now declarer crosses to ♣J and leads another heart finessing. Yes this delays drawing trumps both times but declarer needs to take that risk to make the best play in hearts. When the 2nd heart finesse works and they split 3-2 now declarer can draw the last trump and his hand is then high. Yes he'll go off on this line if hearts break badly and the defence can get a heart ruff. But it's still the best line. See advanced section for the other lines and why they aren't as good.

Some lucky declarers received a diamond lead. Now it's a lot easier! Declarer can take ♦A discarding his spade loser and immediately lead a heart. Now he can draw 2 rounds of trumps before leading the 2nd heart from dummy. This should lead to 12 tricks.

What about the play in 4♥? After the expected forced ruff at trick 1 declarer's only real hope is to play trumps. ♥A and another works as West wins ♥K and they split 3-2 (the hand is likely to fall apart if hearts are 4-1!). West can't do better than another spade forcing South's last trump out. But declarer can cross to ♣Q and lead a trump to knock out ♥Q. He still has a vital trump in North to take care of a 4th spade and can then overtake ♣J for all of South's clubs. However, there is a slightly better line available - see advanced section.

So on this occasion 4♥ will make for +620 and that will outscore +600 for 5♣. In fact one pair made +680 in 4♥ after a diamond lead. But I'd still prefer to be in 5♣. If hearts don't behave at least 5♣ is probably only 1 off. 4♥ could go as many as 5 off if the club suit gets stranded!

If East West do end up playing in spades or diamonds how might the defence go? Spades will usually make 10 tricks losing 2 diamonds and ♥A. It's only a double dummy low diamond lead from North at trick 1 that holds West to 9 tricks by giving South a ruff while still allowing North to make ♦AQ later. Diamonds should make 9 tricks. 2 diamonds and ♥A are 3 obvious tricks for the defence but what's the 4th? It's another trump - see advanced section for how.

### **Key points to note**

- Hands with 8 card suits should generally try to be declarer and the long suit should be trumps (even with a 4-4 fit elsewhere).
- A 4-4 fit can be very delicate to play if you are forced to ruff early.
- It's worth discussing what 2NT over the opponents' 1♣ shows.
- When partner shows 2 suits but it's not known what they are, a bid of the lower of two possible suits in response is "correctable" - i.e. prepared to play in either.
- Use entries carefully. To make the best play in one suit may require leaving a trump out temporarily.

### **More advanced**

After 1♣ it's important to know what a 2NT overcall means. Playing it as two specific suits (usually red suits) is popular because both suits are known. Playing it as diamonds and a major makes it much harder for partner who may want to bid very high opposite one major but not opposite the other.

Traditionally (1♣) 2♣ was Michaels showing both majors. But it's becoming more common to play 2♣ as natural (because these days 1♣ can so often be a short suit) and to use 2♦ to show both majors. After all 2♦ isn't much use as a pre-empt as it doesn't take much space away.

I said the best way to play hearts in 5♣ is to lead them from dummy twice - even though that means leaving a trump out. But what other ways are there to play the heart suit for 1 loser?

Drawing trumps and playing ♥A and another will only work if one defender holds a singleton honour or exactly ♥KQ doubleton - very much against the odds. Another possibility is to draw two rounds of trumps ending in dummy and then lead hearts once from there. After ruffing the next spade and drawing the last trump declarer

tries ♥A. That line is better. It works if East has both ♥KQ or started with exactly ♥Kx or ♥Qx. But this is still not that likely as West overcalled so he is the defender more likely to be shorter in hearts. Hence the suggested line of leading hearts twice from dummy is better still as it also picks up ♥Kxx or ♥Qxx with East.

When in 4♥ after ruffing at trick 1, ♥A and another works on this hand. But the problem is a defender who started with ♥KQx could take ♥KQ (removing all South's trumps) and then cash a spade. So an improvement is for declarer to keep control of trumps by not releasing ♥A and instead lead ♥9 from hand (leaving himself with ♥A10). This stops 3 rounds of trumps being played.

Once forced to ruff again declarer is down to singleton ♥A which he cashes and that leaves 1 top trump out. Now he crosses to ♣Q and knocks that trump out as before. Note he must immediately get the ♥Q out while North still has a club. If he just starts playing clubs then as soon as East ruffs the South hand is dead!

Finally, when defending diamonds it may look like declarer's trumps (♦KJ109) are good enough to just lose ♦AQ to North. But that's not the case. North can start with a club, West ruffs, knocks out one top diamond, ruffs a 2nd club, knocks out the other diamond. But now North can cross to South's ♥A who plays a 3rd club. With North holding ♦8x over declarer's remaining ♦109 this causes the ♦8 to be promoted for the defence's 4th trick.

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)