



## 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.

### Competing and accurate defence

City and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 8<sup>th</sup> April 2024

<b>10</b> ♠ T4 ♥ 932 ♦ AQ762 ♣ A85	♠ AKJ952 ♥ J64 ♦ T9 ♣ JT	<i>Dir: E</i> <i>Vul: All</i>																									
	♠ Q73 ♥ A87 ♦ K85 ♣ KQ42	♠ 86 ♥ KQT5 ♦ J43 ♣ 9763	<table border="1"> <tr> <td></td> <td>♠</td> <td>♥</td> <td>♦</td> <td>NT</td> </tr> <tr> <td>N</td> <td>1</td> <td>-</td> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>S</td> <td>1</td> <td>-</td> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>E</td> <td>-</td> <td>1</td> <td>-</td> <td>-</td> </tr> <tr> <td>W</td> <td>-</td> <td>1</td> <td>-</td> <td>-</td> </tr> </table>		♠	♥	♦	NT	N	1	-	1	2	S	1	-	1	2	E	-	1	-	-	W	-	1	-
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I hope everyone had a good Easter. I was actually intending to play at Canada Bay on Easter Monday until we discovered there was no session (and hence also no column!). So now resuming with the following Monday - Board 10 almost always ended up being played in spades by North (ranging between 2♠, 3♠ and 4♠). The key to the matchpoints scored was how many tricks declarer made. The defence can hold a spade contract to 8 tricks but very few pairs managed this.

First the auction. After a pass from East, South has a normal 1♣ opening. West should definitely overcall 1♦ (whilst it doesn't take up much bidding space it indicates a good lead for partner and it might lead to his side being able to compete). North bids 1♠ and it's back to East. He could now raise to 2♦ but I prefer double. This is a “competitive” double. It arises after 3 suits have been bid like here. It shows the 4<sup>th</sup> suit and normally also shows tolerance for partner (so usually a doubleton). It's really just saying to partner “I have a few values and the other suit so might be able to compete”. From East's point of view even with only 6 points he would want to bid 2♦, however if partner does happen to have hearts as well (still perfectly possible after a 1♦ overcall) then he would prefer his side to play there. He is unlikely to get into too much trouble because if West doesn't have hearts he will probably have to resort to rebidding 2♦ and East's hand will then be a pleasant surprise with 1 more diamond than he might expect!

On this hand, however, it doesn't much matter because East West will be comfortably outbid. Whatever East does, South will make a rebid. Without any opposition bidding he would naturally rebid 1NT (11-14). He might still do that if East doubles (unless playing support redoubles – see advanced section). If East bids 2♦ then 1NT is obviously no longer an option. This is where playing a support double is very useful. South could double to show 3 card support for spades and this immediately tells his partner what sort of fit they have. Without playing support doubles South either has to guess to bid 2♠ anyway (risking that his partner might only have 4) or pass. West has nothing more to say so it's back to North. Over 1NT he should probably just bid 2♠. He is certainly maximum for that but he is opposite 11-14 and his two low diamonds don't look great because any honours partner has will probably be sitting badly. Even if partner has a full 14 that's still a maximum of 24 points which isn't usually enough for game.

Nevertheless quite a few pairs seem to have got to 4♠. I guess North did invite and then South, holding a maximum, did accept (even though his ♦K won't look very good). Their optimism was rewarded more often than not though as quite a few pairs were allowed to make 4♠!

So what about the defence? Correct defence holds declarer to 8 tricks by scoring 2 hearts, 2 diamonds and ♣A. Many Easts led a diamond and this seems perfectly natural if partner overcalled the suit. Some led ♦J but the correct lead from this holding is the ♦3 (see advanced section for why). West will win ♦Q and the crunch point has been reached already! He needs to immediately switch to a heart to get 2 tricks set up there. If he fails to do so declarer will have time to draw trumps and knock out ♣A in order to set up the ♣KQ to discard his heart losers on. By the way if East does lead ♦J then declarer will cover and under West's ♦A he should play ♦9 from his hand at trick 1 not ♦10 – see advanced section for why.

Notice how much easier the heart switch is for West to find if East had made a competitive double during the auction showing hearts? But West should find it anyway – simply by asking himself the question of where else are the defence going to get tricks from?

Some Easts started with ♥K instead. This should lead to the same outcome but declarer can make it a bit harder. See advanced section for how.

### Key points to note

- Don't be afraid to compete in the auction even with few points – especially with support for partner.
- Support doubles are useful. Support redoubles also can be – but require a bit more discussion.
- Lead low from Hxx or longer in partner's suit. Only lead the honour from Hx (but that's generally a bad lead anyway).
- Accurate defence is worth a fortune when playing pairs. It's much easier if your side has bid in the auction (hence compete aggressively!) But also think about what suit your side can get tricks in – you may need to switch quickly there before declarer can set up discards for his losers by knocking out one of your other top cards.
- Hands with a maximum of 24 points and two balanced hands are generally not enough for game.

### More advanced

Support doubles are a useful and increasingly popular method played by opener after partner has responded 1 major and RHO has overcalled something. They normally apply up to 2 of your major and simply show 3 card support for partner (if you don't play support doubles then double here is best played as takeout). They are particularly useful when responder has a 5 card suit as they enable him to know about support straight away.

It's also possible to play that if the opponents intervene with a double then redouble shows the same thing. This isn't played quite as much though because there is a downside. Redouble can also be useful for opener to use to show a big hand and a desire to penalise the opponents! For example, suppose South had 18-19 balanced and had opened 1♣ with the intention of jump rebidding 2NT. When East West waded in vulnerable it might be quite attractive to try to take a penalty. However, if his redouble shows support then that option is no longer available. If you do play support doubles it's worth discussing whether your partner thinks that automatically implies support redoubles as well or not!

Why is the ♦3 the right lead from East's holding? Generally you should always lead low from an honour where you hold 3 or more cards. It doesn't make much difference on this particular hand but suppose one diamond was switched from South to North so North held ♦109x and South held ♦Kx. Now a low diamond lead enables the defence to play ♦Q, ♦A (dropping the ♦K) and East still remains with ♦J beating declarer's ♦10. Had he led ♦J originally declarer could cover and now his ♦109 will become a trick after West's ♦Q is knocked out. You would only lead the honour from an original doubleton holding (but generally honour doubleton tends to be a pretty bad lead).

After a low diamond to the ♦Q West should observe declarer playing either the ♦9 or ♦10. If that's a true card then either declarer has no more diamonds or his other one is also a high one. Which means that ♦8 in dummy is going to be a threat! West should also see that his ♣A is going to get knocked out and that could lead to more club tricks for declarer. Either way it looks like hearts is his only hope for tricks. East of course is happy to then keep playing the suit and the defence will then take all their tricks.

There is another reason why East should not lead ♦J and that's the problem it might give his partner on the next round. Suppose trick 1 goes ♦J K A 9. Declarer draws trumps ending in dummy and leads a low diamond towards his now singleton ♦10! If East did raise diamonds during the auction it will look for all the world to West as if partner has led from ♦J10x(x) and he doesn't need to put his ♦A up. But that will let declarer sneak a trick through! Observe that declarer playing ♦10 at trick 1 will not have the same deceptive effect. If that were a singleton it would place East with ♦J943 and from that holding he won't have led ♦J.

Finally I mentioned that if East chose to lead a top heart then declarer could also create a problem. How? By smoothly ducking the ♥K. This is threatening the “Bath Coup” where, if East continues the suit (thinking his partner has either the ♥J or ♥A), it will give declarer a trick with ♥J that he is not entitled to. For this reason a method some pairs play is “King for count, Ace Queen for attitude”. Which basically describes the signal they want from partner when leading. That enables them to lead ♥Q instead of ♥K from this sort of holding specifically asking partner for an attitude signal (if he holds either the ♥J or ♥A). When West discourages then East knows it’s unsafe to continue and will switch.

Playing this leading method the King then tends to be led from holdings more like AKQxx(x) or KQJx(x) where you want to know the count to find out how many rounds you can cash. There can of course be downsides to this method though. Imagine East leads ♥Q and West holds the ♥A and can’t see any other honours. He might think East is leading from ♥QJ (so declarer has the ♥K), and therefore crash his ♥A against your ♥Q!

But on this hand East should lead his partner’s suit anyway (a heart lead is much riskier – suppose declarer held ♥Axx and dummy held ♥Jxx – now the lead gives a trick away as declarer can win and later lead towards dummy’s ♥J). Even if East does lead ♥K and it’s ducked then, after seeing dummy, it will look attractive to switch to a diamond through the ♦K to partner’s suit anyway.

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)