



## 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.

### Support doubles and subsequent card play

City and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 25<sup>th</sup> March 2024

<b>12</b>	♠ JT7	Dir: W	
	♥ Q84	Vul: N-S	
	♦ J8653		
	♣ 62		
	♠ KQ62	♠ 3	4
	♥ J93	♥ AK762	14 13
	♦ KT	♦ Q72	9
	♣ KQT4	♣ A983	
	♠ A9854	♠ ♦ ♥ ♠ NT	
	♥ T5	N - - - -	
♦ A94	S - - - -		
♣ J75	E 5 2 5 2 5		
	W 5 2 5 2 5		

Board 12 last week was a fairly normal game for East West. But the denomination and number of tricks still varied.

The normal start to the auction is 1♣ P 1♥. At this point South might overcall 1♠. I would - it gets our side a chance to compete and there isn't too much risk at the 1 level despite being vulnerable. We are also happy if partner leads a spade later on.

Where South does overcall West might choose to rebid 1NT but he might also be able to double to show 3 card heart support. That's known as a

"support double" - see advanced section for more.

A support double would make East's life quite easy now as he would know about the heart fit and probably just bid 4♥. After a 1NT rebid, East should make an enquiry by making a forcing bid. West should then show his 3 card heart support and East will again bid game.

Without any overcall West will rebid 1NT and this time East will probably use some form of checkback to again find out about the delayed heart support.

Note all these routes land up in 4♥. Most pairs seem to have played in 3NT though. Maybe they didn't have the bidding methods to find the 5-3 heart fit, or maybe after a spade overcall they consciously chose to play 3NT instead of 4♥. The player who might consider that is West. He knows he has ♠KQxx and he might be worried if South has overcalled 1♠ that partner also has some spades and the opponents might be able to play a spade to the ♠A and score spade ruffs. So he may think no-trumps are better to play. From East's point of view though, 4♥ is normal. Especially holding a singleton spade. After all partner's spade stop might be ♠Axx and get immediately knocked out in 3NT.

Today the field has done well because 3NT can score the same number of tricks and hence at matchpoints it scores that vital extra 10 points.

Against 4♥ by East South doesn't have a good lead. I'd eliminate either suit headed by just the Ace. Which only leaves clubs and hearts. Given clubs were opener's first suit I might be tempted to try a passive ♥10.

That lead is not at all successful though! Declarer can cover and will end up picking up ♥Q so the ♥9 in dummy means trumps can now be drawn for no loser.

As declarer I would lead my singleton spade towards dummy early on in case I catch South napping and ducking! If he does duck I now have no spade loser and can now play on diamonds to take a diamond ruff in dummy. If South does take ♠A, that sets up ♠KQ in dummy to discard diamonds (although the ♦A is still a loser).

This sort of position is hard for South because, even though it may seem strange, there are some hands where it may be right to duck ♠A even when declarer does have a singleton! See advanced section for more.

Declarer still loses  $\spadesuit A$  whatever happens in spades so the hand should end up with 10 or 11 tricks depending on whether he loses a heart or not. We saw above that the defence might helpfully lead a heart for him. If they don't then declarer has to decide how to play hearts himself. It's quite plausible to draw 2 rounds of trumps with  $\heartsuit AK$  (hoping for  $\heartsuit Qx$  with either defender) but today that will give North's  $\heartsuit Q$  a trick. However, there is a way for declarer to play the suit for no loser - see advanced section for how.

Note there is no need to try and trump a diamond in dummy on this hand because East's diamond loser can more easily be discarded on a spade from dummy.

What about the play in 3NT? Most of the time this was played by West on a spade lead (some seem to have led  $\spadesuit 7$  but  $\spadesuit J$  is normal from this holding - not only will  $\spadesuit 7$  be very hard for partner to understand, it also risks blocking the suit). Declarer can make 11 tricks no matter what the defence does - he just loses  $\spadesuit A$  and  $\diamond A$ . But again that depends on him being able to play hearts for 5 tricks.

If South plays  $\spadesuit A$  and another then declarer will score 2 spades, 4 clubs, and 4 or 5 hearts. Alternatively South might decide to duck a trick 1 so declarer immediately wins  $\spadesuit Q$ . This time he only has one spade trick. But now if gets hearts right he has time to play on diamonds to score 1 spade, 4 clubs, 1 diamond and 5 hearts.

3NT making 11 for +460 was the top score with quite a few +430's and some +400's.  $4\heartsuit$  wasn't played that often but +450 still scored well, however +420 was well below average.

### Key points to note

- 1 level overcalls don't show much these days and can often help you side compete.
- Support doubles can be useful to show 3 card support for partner's 1 major response.
- As declarer leading a singleton from your hand early on towards honours in dummy is often a good idea - it's often not easy for the defence to know whether to duck or win.
- Sometimes suits can be played for no loser even if it doesn't immediately look like it

### 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.

Note when playing support doubles there is often a useful negative inference as well. When opener does NOT double then it means he has at most 2 of responder's suit (and you should alert what he does bid because it conveys that information which your opponents are entitled to know).

Of course as with any convention there can be downsides. Imagine you hold a 3433 5 point hand. Partner opens  $1\clubsuit$ , you dredge up  $1\heartsuit$  and it goes  $2\diamond X$  (support) back to you. You have no good bid now - you can't leave  $2\diamond x$  in so  $2\heartsuit$  on the 4-3 fit is probably the least bad option. But you would far rather partner had shut up!

So how can the heart suit be played for no loser? The answer is for declarer to run the  $\heartsuit J$  on the 1st round! Try it. There's nothing the defence can do. If North doesn't cover declarer runs it and then draws trumps easily after it wins. If North does cover it means South's  $\heartsuit 10$  will fall on the 2nd round and then West's  $\heartsuit 9$  can draw North's  $\heartsuit 8$ ! Effectively South's  $\heartsuit 10$  is smothered by declarer playing  $\heartsuit J$ . But it's the presence of the  $\heartsuit 9$  that makes this a viable chance for declarer. Of course doing that is a bit double dummy. Why shouldn't South have started with  $\heartsuit Qx$  initially? Now you want to cash  $\heartsuit AK$  and running  $\heartsuit J$  looks very silly! So this sort of play is something to consider if you perhaps can work out that one hand can't have the relevant honour.

A variation of this line which is perhaps better is to cash one top heart first (in case there is a singleton ♥Q). Then on the 2<sup>nd</sup> round you decide whether to cash the other top heart hoping the ♥Q will drop; or to run ♥J which pins South's now singleton ♥10.

I said there might be times when it's right for South to duck ♠A even if declarer has a singleton so that loses his side's spade trick. It doesn't apply on this hand but suppose declarer had ♦Axx in dummy and ♦xxx in hand at the point he led a spade up. If South takes ♠A, declarer can later discard both his diamond losers on ♠KQ so he only loses one trick across spades & diamonds. But if South ducks ♠A declarer will win ♠Q. Yes this means declarer won't now lose any spade tricks but he will instead lose TWO diamonds as he has no way of setting up the ♠K. Hence on that layout the defence are actually better off ducking. It can often be hard for the defence to tell what to do in these sorts of situations, especially early in a hand when they don't know as much about what declarer might have in his hand.

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)