



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.

Still cold for game even when they open 1NT!

City and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 13th May 2024

On board 8 last week North South could make game easily in spades but not that many pairs reached it after a strong NT opening from the opponents. However, this shouldn't put you off – after all distribution will beat points any day! It is important, however, to know what your bids mean over 1NT and how to continue the auction later.

8	♠ T82	Dir: W
	♥ T653	Vul: Nil
	♦ T	
	♣ K9732	
♠ K	♠ A76	3
♥ 9842	♥ KQJ7	4 15
♦ 987653	♦ QJ	18
♣ J8	♣ QT65	
	♠ QJ9543	♠ ♦ ♥ ♠ NT
	♥ A	N 1 - - 5 2
	♦ AK42	S 1 - - 5 2
	♣ A4	E - 1 2 - -
		W - 1 2 - -

Let's consider the auction.

West has first go and is most likely to pass. Even if a weak 2♦ is available I wouldn't do it for several reasons:

- I have a 4 card major on the side
- why would I want to encourage partner to lead a diamond?!
- it doesn't take up that much bidding space

North also passes and East has a normal strong 1NT opening. South clearly wants to do something with his really powerful hand - but what? I would start with a penalty double! After all I have an easy spade lead and am going to get in in the other suits to set my spades up. But it's not as simple as this of course - many pairs don't play double of a strong 1NT as penalty (I think this hand is a good example of why you should!). They take the view that it isn't worth trying to penalise a strong NT so double is best used to help their side compete in the auction. For example maybe double shows a single suit. It's certainly true that it's less frequent to have a hand good enough to double a strong NT (it happens more with a weak NT). But it's also important to be able to show you do have a good hand. If he can't double for penalties South will have to do something else like jump to 3♠ - he's too strong to just overcall 2♠. But 3♠ might be better played as pre-emptive!

Of course even if South can start with a penalty double there is no way West will leave it in. He will run - most likely to 2♦ although there are plenty of different methods played when running from 1NT doubled that can show combinations of 1 or 2 suited hands - see advanced section. The whole point is West's hand might be completely useless to his partner in no-trumps but will be worth something if diamonds are trumps. If there is a heart fit that would also be fine. So he definitely should run.

When 2♦ comes back to South he might consider doubling it for penalties but it's not very appealing. He only really has 4 tricks. A much better description of his hand is to show his spades. What's more, after the opponents run from 1NTx many people play the next double as takeout. It's well worth discussing with your partner what double means after you double their 1NT and they run. It's playable as either takeout or penalty but, as usual, it's far more important to make sure you are both on the same wavelength than what that wavelength actually is! A popular general method to handle doubles is “123 doubles” (sometimes referred to by other things). The 1st double by the partnership is values (the penalty of 1NT here), the 2nd double is takeout and a 3rd (or subsequent) one is penalty. This covers a lot of general situations and should avoid most of the painful accidents pairs have with doubles where one means it as takeout and the other thinks it's penalty!

South should probably bid 2♠ - he's already shown a big hand by doubling 1NT to start with. But he might stretch to 3♠ – he only has 4 losers so, if he finds a fit, he only needs partner to cover 1 of those losers to make game.

Now what about North? While many pairs seem to have played in 2♠ I think there's a good case for North to raise. Yes even with only 3 points! It's a case of thinking about what he has got relative to what he might have had:

- a) he has 3 spades (he might have had none)
- b) he has a shortage in diamonds (he might have been 4333)
- c) he has 3 points which are a King (he might have had 3 points as 3 Jacks or he might have had 0).

Once North does admit to some spade support South has an easy 4♠ bid. Equally, if South stretches to 3♠ initially then North has an easy raise to 4♠ for all the reasons above.

So what about the play in spades? West will probably lead a red suit. The key to the hand is to trump the 2 diamond losers in North. Hence declarer doesn't want to start drawing trumps until he has dealt with his two small diamonds. It looks easy doesn't it? Declarer has all the intermediate trumps so might expect to just lose the two top trumps at some point. However, while it's easy enough to make 10 tricks, making 11 actually needs a bit of care. Suppose North immediately ruffs one of his diamond losers. That's fine and he crosses back to hand to ruff the other. This time East can overruff. That's OK because it's with the ♠A which is a trick he was going to make anyway. But can you see what could now go wrong and hold declarer to 10 tricks? See advanced section.

Key points to note

- Just because the opponents have opened a strong NT doesn't mean your side can't win the auction. You can still have strong shapely hands and easily make game!
- It is still perfectly feasible to play double of a strong NT as penalties – even when the opponents don't stay there it is still useful as it means you have shown a strong hand.
- It's important to have a means of running from 1NT doubled – there are many schemes available. It doesn't really matter what you do – it's much more important that you and your partner both know what it is!
- A general approach to doubles is "123 doubles". The 1st double by the partnership shows values, the 2nd is takeout and the 3rd onwards are penalties.
- When bidding always try and keep in mind what you have (or haven't) shown already. Consider your hand relative to what you might have had for your bidding so far.
- When a hand looks easy, stop and try to consider what might go wrong. It's sometimes important to cash winners early on to prevent the defence being able to ruff them later.

More advanced

It's important to have a way of running from 1NT doubled. This is especially important if you play a weak NT but even if you play a strong NT it can still happen and it's often right to try and find somewhere better to play if you are outgunned. The other common scenario it can happen is if your side overcalls 1NT and the next hand doubles that.

Note that if you play against a weak NT it is vastly better to play double as penalties. The weak NT is really a mini pre-empt and can be very effective as it cuts out the entire 1 level. What's more, hands in that point range are more frequent than the strong NT point range. But its one disadvantage is it can occasionally get doubled and go for a large penalty. If you don't play double of it as penalties you are removing that disadvantage as well. In practice I have played a weak NT for years and can hardly ever remember actually getting penalised for a large number!

Returning to running from 1NTx. There are lots of possible methods. What I play is redouble shows a single suited hand (it asks partner to bid 2♣ and you then pass or bid your suit); suit bids show that suit and a higher

one (partner passes or bids the next suit up that he's prepared to play in and you hope to scramble to somewhere better than 1NT!)

Some methods still retain major suit transfer and use redouble to show a minor. Others play pass as forcing partner to redouble whereupon you either pass if you were confident it was making or make bids which now show two non-touching suits (whereas bids made immediately show two touching suits).

As usual there's no one method that is automatically better than others. Personally I don't like the ones where pass forces redouble because it means you can't ever play in 1NT doubled when you think it might be making. Yes you can force redouble and then pass that but in practice the opponents will seldom risk leaving 1NTxx in and after they run somewhere you then have to decide between penalising them or bidding on. Whereas they may well leave 1NTx in and don't think I have ever got a bad score playing in 1NTx making or with overtricks! Plus of course making a doubled contract can also have a psychological effect on your opponents!

What about the play in 4♠? The problem with immediately ruffing the low diamonds is that South still has the ♦K. Project what will happen on this layout. East can overruff the 2nd ruff with the ♠A and play a trump to West's ♠K. Because dummy has already ruffed twice this removes the last trump from dummy but East still has one. Which means West can now play a 4th diamond which allows East to ruff declarer's ♦K away before declarer can get in to draw trumps.

What declarer needs to do is cash the ♦K first before starting to ruff - and then ruff in dummy with the ♠8 not the ♠2 (which East could overruff with the ♠6). Now if East overruffs with ♠A and returns one to West's ♠K, West doesn't have another trump to remove the ♠10 from dummy. So declarer wins the next trick in hand and can now safely ruff his last diamond with that ♠10. It's similar to the technique needed on a hand you are about to play on a cross-ruff. You want to cash your side suit winners first so that the opponents can't discard from that suit while you are using up all your trumps cross-ruffing; and later ruff them.

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)