



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.

The power of shape and double fits

City and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 20th May 2024

11	♠ A9	Dir: S
	♥ Q4	Vul: Nil
	♦ 952	
	♣ AQJT32	
	♠ T8632	♠ KQ54 13
	♥ A63	♥ JT5 5 11
	♦ J63	♦ KQT874 11
	♣ 97	
	♠ J7	
	♥ K9872	
♦ A		
♣ K8654		

Board 11 last week showed the power of shape and also of a double fit.

South has a normal 1♥ opening and West will usually pass (although today a 1♠ overall would work well!). Once his partner opens North has a game force and can start with 2♣. East at this point has a choice. He definitely wants to bid with a 6-4 shape - the two choices are a natural 2♦ (which risks losing the spade suit) or double (showing his spades but risking playing in spades and having his hand forced to ruff clubs early on). I think with 6-4 I'd bid 2♦ - with 54 shape I'd prefer to double.

South now will raise clubs in some fashion. Although he only has 11 points his hand is very powerful once a fit has been found. One possibility is 4♦, a splinter bid showing shortage in diamonds and strong support for clubs. Splinters are very useful bids in general although it's not ideal with a singleton Ace - see advanced section for why. It also goes past 3NT which, when playing pairs, isn't ideal. 5♣ as a contract should be a last resort because it scores so much less than no-trumps or majors. Another option for South over a 2♦ overcall is 3♦, a cue raise showing club support. That's less descriptive than a splinter but still gets the message across. It also leaves room to play in 3NT should North wish to.

One bid South should not make is 3♣. For two reasons:

1. He's too strong with such good shape now he knows his side has a fit.
2. It leaves space for West to raise to 3♦. Which will pave the way for East West to bid on over 5♣ later.

If East chose to double initially then West should be encouraged to bid spades - something that will in turn encourage East to keep bidding. Where East overcalls 2♦ it's much harder for their side to diagnose a spade fit - but bidding on to 5♦ is still quite appealing.

If South did bid 4♦ then North can make a 4♠ cue bid. South now knows the ♥A is missing (North didn't cue 4♥) so he can't really go beyond 5♣. Neither can North who will also be worried about hearts (as well as a possible diamond loser). However, 5♣ is the limit of what North South can make. The key to the hand will come as to whether East West bid on over it as a sacrifice. If West does manage to show some support then East, with his strong shape will almost certainly bid on. That's the right decision on this hand because both 5♦ and 5♣ play quite well and will usually, even if doubled, cost at most 300.

Bidding on would be easier still if East West can diagnose that they have a fit in both spades and diamonds. Hands with a double fit tend to play very well. The fact they have length in two suits also tends to mean they don't have much defence - which is another reason to prefer bidding on instead.

What about the play? Let's start with 5♣ which is where the majority played. East needs to lead a spade to hold it to 11 tricks. On a diamond lead declarer can draw trumps and set up a long heart in the South hand (by knocking out ♥A and then ruffing a heart to hand) to discard his losing spade and make 12 tricks. At matchpoints making that extra trick can be very important – so it's always worth seeing if you can set up long

cards in a side suit to provide discards for your losers. One pair even bid and made 6♣ after a diamond lead! A spade lead should be quite appealing to East if his side has only bid diamonds. Declarer will be expecting a diamond lead so may be prepared for it - but may not be prepared for a spade. That's even more true if South has splintered in the auction since the defenders now know they will have at most 1 trick in diamonds and quite possibly none.

If East West are playing in diamonds they can be held to 9 tricks but in practice will probably receive a club lead and should then make 10 (ruff the club, play a trump, ruff another club, draw trumps and knock out ♠A. West's 5th spade later provides a discard for one of East's hearts so declarer will end up losing 1 heart and 2 aces).

In spades the defence need to lead hearts early on. If they don't there's a chance that 5♠ will in fact make as East's long diamonds will eventually provide discards for both of West's hearts. This did happen at one table. Even at other tables where 5♠ was played it was usually undoubled and only 1 off for a score of EW - 50. Vastly better than -400 or -420 in 5♣.

Deep finesse can hold spades to 8 tricks and diamonds to 9 - see if you can work out how. See advanced section for the answer.

As long as East West hold their losses to 300 (i.e. 2 off doubled) they will score well as that beats -400 for 5♣. Note of course how significant the vulnerability is. Had East West been vulnerable they shouldn't dream of bidding on because now 2 off is 500 and more expensive than North South's 5♣ contract.

Key points to note

- Hands with shape and with a double fit tend to play well and you should try to declare with them not defend. The double fit usually also means they don't have many defensive tricks.
- Splinters are very useful bids but are not often a good choice with a singleton honour as it can cause partner to mis-evaluate how useful his honours in that suit may be.
- In defence it's often worth leading a decent holding in an unbid suit even if you have bid and supported your own suit (declarer is usually prepared for that to be led but may not be prepared for a different suit).
- When you have plenty of trumps look to see if you can set up winners in a long suit by ruffing in either your own hand or dummy. These can then provide discards for losers in other suits.

More advanced

Splinter bids showing support and a shortage are very descriptive and help partner judge how well the hands fit. But it's important not to over use them. They are best done with a void or small singleton. That way partner knows that the Ace of the suit is probably useful (singletons are much more common than voids) but other minor honours are probably useless.

That's why, on this hand, a 4♦ bid isn't so good. Imagine if partner holds ♦K. He will think it's useless opposite a small singleton but in fact on this hand it's incredibly valuable as it will provide a discard for one of South's spade losers. So the splinter bid doesn't help partner evaluate his hand. The same is true of singleton K or Q holdings - singleton Q opposite, say, KJxx can be very useful as you can quickly set up 2 winners to discard other losers on. But a splinter would cause partner to think his KJxx was useless.

What about the defence to diamonds or spades? In diamonds the defence need to start with a heart at trick 1. Now when South wins ♦A, he can give North a heart ruff and they will still score ♠A. It's too late after a club lead because declarer ruffs and leads a trump. A heart switch won't work now as declarer ducks one round. He can then either finesse South's ♥K or discard a heart on the 5th spade.

Spades can be held to 8 tricks but that also requires a heart lead. Assume declarer ducks and wins the next heart. He then knocks out ♠A. But North can cross to ♦A, receive a heart ruff and then give South a diamond ruff (South of course should return his highest heart when giving the ruff as a suit preference signal for his

partner to return a diamond not a club). Once again an opening club lead is too late. ♠A is knocked out and there's not time for the defence to set up their heart ruff before declarer can draw their remaining trumps. In fact the defence have to immediately switch to hearts after winning ♠A to score a heart trick at all. If they don't then declarer draws trumps, knocks out ♦A and now East's long diamonds provide discards for both West's heart losers!

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)