



## 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.

## 4<sup>th</sup> seat bidding and forcing an entry

City – Monday Morning 10<sup>th</sup> June 2024

<b>19</b> ♠ 82 ♥ AK986 ♦ 742 ♣ T84  ♠ AKJ94 ♥ T42 ♦ T5 ♣ K73	♠ 53 ♥ J753 ♦ J986 ♣ 965	<i>Dir: S</i> <i>Vul: E-W</i>	♠ QT76     2 ♥ Q         7    20 ♦ AKQ3     11 ♣ AQJ2																													
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	♠	♥	♦	♣	NT																											
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Board 19 last week may well have seen East, holding 20 points, hear the bidding go 3 passes to him.

These days, however, many Souths will have opened 1♠. I certainly would – it has several advantages:

- It gets our side into the auction first (always good)
- It indicates a good lead for partner if we end up defending
- It forces the opponents to start their auction at the 2 level

Neither West nor North have a bid so 1♠ will run to East. What should he do? I would bid 2NT showing about 19-21 balanced. Note that’s completely different to an immediate 2NT overcall over 1♠ which is most frequently played as showing at least 55 in the minors – the “unusual no-trump”.

It’s important to appreciate that it’s not the same after two passes. 2NT here is far better played as natural – basically the same as an opening 2NT would be. Otherwise hands like this become very hard to bid (see advanced section for more details on how to bid various balanced ranges in the 4<sup>th</sup> seat after two passes).

Another difference is the 2NT overcall in 2<sup>nd</sup> seat is often done on a weak hand as a pre-empt to make things hard for the 3<sup>rd</sup> player if they have a strong hand. But here we already know that isn’t the case – 3<sup>rd</sup> player hasn’t even got enough to respond. Hence there’s a very good chance that it’s our side’s hand so there is no point pre-empting.

No 2NT is not perfect here because of the singleton heart but it’s the least bad option. With such a strong hand you might think about starting with a double – but what will you then do when partner inevitably bids hearts? What’s more you surely want to be declarer with all the holdings you want South to have to lead up to!

Another advantage of playing 2NT as natural here is that you can use exactly the same responses as over an opening bid. Here South won’t bid again so West will most likely transfer to hearts and then bid 3NT – exactly what he would do over an opening 20-22 2NT. East will inwardly curse when partner starts a transfer to his singleton(!) but will happily pass 3NT on the next round and the best contract has been reached.

If South did pass initially then the end contract will probably be the same – this time it will go 3 passes to East who might choose to open 2NT or might 1♣ and rebid spades over 1♥. When West gives preference back to clubs, East probably just jumps to 3NT.

What about the play and defence to 3NT? South will surely start with a spade of some variety – but which one? He has a dilemma – leading a low spade is perhaps the best chance of beating the contract (partner might have 10x, or xx like he has but with an entry to be able to return the suit and give South 3 more spades). But it also gives declarer a cheap early spade trick which could easily be his 9<sup>th</sup>. One influencing factor for South here is he has an almost certain entry with ♣K and he knows partner has very little. So he might start

with ♠A and hope to be able to set the suit up and get in with ♣K to cash the rest. A low spade is more likely to be needed when South doesn't have another entry. See advanced section for some further thoughts.

What about from declarer's perspective?

If South starts with a low spade then declarer has scored a cheap spade trick already so he only needs 2 hearts, 3 diamonds and 3 clubs which he can easily attain after knocking out ♣K. If North were to get in with ♣K then a spade through declarer would result in the defeat of the contract. But if South had opened the bidding then declarer can be very confident that isn't the position. South must surely hold ♣K to make up an opening bid – after all there are only 13 points missing.

If South starts with ♠A he will be disappointed when partner discourages and will now need to switch to avoid giving declarer 2 tricks in spades. A diamond looks the most likely switch which gives nothing away. Now it's harder for declarer. How many tricks does he have? 3 in hearts (but only if he can reach them – the suit is blocked), 3 in diamonds (4 if they break 3-3) and potentially 3 in clubs after losing a trick to the CK. So the key to the hand is getting to his heart tricks. For that he needs an entry to the West hand. The only hope is the ♠10. If he can force the ♣K out then he can reach dummy with that card to cash the ♥AK.

It won't be any good to cash ♠A and then lead ♠Q though – a wise South will simply duck and wait to win on the 3<sup>rd</sup> round. So that's a clue to what declarer should do. Keep the ♠A and lead the ♠Q from hand. If South takes his ♣K that solves the problem – now declarer can cash ♥Q and later cross to the ♠10 to score all his tricks. But South should also be wise to that and counter declarer's plan by ducking. However, declarer can try the same thing again and continue with ♣J. Now South has a problem. If he ducks this time he gives up his club trick completely – that gives declarer 4 clubs and 3 diamonds so he only needs 2 hearts (so he can now afford to overtake ♥Q). If he wins ♣K then declarer once more has his entry to dummy. There isn't actually any way to beat 3NT played by East but there are other combinations of plays that can still make declarer's life harder – see advanced section.

This sort of play can be quite common – if you can force the defence to take their trick early you can perhaps build a critical entry to dummy.

Another thing declarer might try is cash ♥Q and lead a low club towards ♠10. Now South needs to win his ♣K immediately to leave declarer stuck in his own hand – which may be hard for him to know.

### **Key points to note**

- After 1X P P 2NT is best played as strong and natural (about 19-21 balanced) and NOT 5-5 in the minors (as it would be if bid directly over 1X).
- Bidding in 4<sup>th</sup> (“protective”) seat is different to 2<sup>nd</sup> seat because partner may have had to pass over an opening bid with quite a decent hand – so you need to come back in with weaker hands to keep the auction alive.
- Against no-trumps when leading round to a strong hand – consider whether you think it's worth giving up a cheap trick early on to increase your chances of beating the contract. At pairs it may well not be.
- When playing in no-trumps, entries can be critical to reach stranded winners. Sometimes you can force an entry to dummy by making the defence take a high card early (or give them the choice of giving up their trick in the suit).

### **More advanced**

There are lots of principles about bidding in 4<sup>th</sup> seat after 1X P P to you – also known as “protecting” the auction. That's a reference to re-opening quite light to “protect” your side's contract because your partner may have had to pass over the opening bid with quite a reasonable hand. Normally you mentally add about 3 points to your hand (similarly partner should deduct 3 from his!)

Bidding balanced hands is also different. An immediate 1NT overcall is usually 15-18 or similar. With a stronger balanced hand you start with a double and then rebid no-trumps. In protective seat, however, there are weaker hands that you need to be able to bid on to protect partner. So it's quite common here to use

1NT as 11-14. (If you don't bid with a 14 count here you run the risk partner might have 14 as well and had to pass over the opening bid – with a combined 28 points and almost all the opposing points known to be in one hand, you are almost sure to be making game. So it would be pretty embarrassing to pass out the hand at the 1 level!)

So if 1NT is 11-14 that means double followed by no-trumps is used to show 15-18. With 19-21 it's unwieldy to double and jump rebid in no-trumps – so it's much better to use an immediate jump to 2NT to show that instead.

What's another factor for which spade South might lead? The form of scoring. If you are playing imps then the key aim is to beat the contract – overtricks don't really matter. A low spade is definitely the best chance of doing that (you know partner has very little so there is no point in trying to set up his suit). But if you are playing matchpoint pairs then the aim is very different – now overtricks could be critical so you tend to want to avoid giving cheap tricks away. That makes starting with ♠A much more appealing.

What combinations of plays in 3NT have we not considered? Assuming South has led a top spade (so declarer hasn't scored a cheap spade trick) then there are two more variations:

- a) Suppose declarer has not cashed ♥Q. Now what if South ducks ♣Q, but then wins ♣J and immediately returns a club to dummy's ♣10? That removes the critical ♣10 entry while the hearts remain blocked and declarer still only has 8 tricks.
- b) Alternatively, if declarer has cashed ♥Q earlier then now South ducks both the ♣Q and ♣J and gives up his club trick. But declarer is cut off from ♥AK so just has 1 heart, 3 diamonds and 4 clubs – also only 8.

If either of these plays do occur then declarer will have to look elsewhere for his 9<sup>th</sup> trick. On the hand he's OK because he cashes his diamonds. They aren't 3-3 but when South is short, he can afford to give a spade trick to South – who will either have to give declarer access to dummy's hearts or lead back into the spades.

This is why Deep Finesse can always make 3NT played by East. Played the other way up North can of course lead a spade enabling South to set up his spades straight away while he still has ♣K.

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)