



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.

Two passed hands can make slam!

City and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 27th May 2024

22	♠ AKQ ♥ K9842 ♦ KQ5 ♣ 93	Dir: E Vul: E-W																									
♠ 9 ♥ A75 ♦ AT873 ♣ T642	♠ J8754 ♥ 64 ♦ AQJ875	17 8 8 7																									
♠ T632 ♥ QJT63 ♦ J92 ♣ K																											
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Last week I talked about the power of shape. Board 22 this week was another example where hands that both may well pass on the first round of bidding can in fact make 6♣! But in practice few got past the 4 level.

East deals and this sort of hand is often best started with a pass. When you come in later you can show a 2 suiter which you can't usually do as opener. South will probably also pass although if he is playing a method showing a weak hand with both majors he could start with that - see advanced section for more on that method.

West also passes and North might start with a strong 1NT. However, I'd be tempted to upgrade this hand and treat it as 18-19. It is a super maximum for a 15-17 NT and has a 5 card major. Also all its points are A, K and Q (Jacks tend to be overvalued at the 1 point usually given to them so a hand with no Jacks is usually worth a bit more). If you do upgrade you would open 1♥ and jump rebid in NT.

Over 1♥, East can now come to life with 2♥, a Michaels cue bid showing at least 55 in spades and a minor (although there are other methods to show specific suits - see advanced section). He doesn't have many points but his hand has great potential if there is a fit. So even vulnerable against not he should bid. South may now jump to 4♥ as he has 5 card support and a singleton. But now West should get involved too. His hand has become hugely powerful. He has good support for whichever minor partner has, shortage in spades (so partner's spades can be ruffed in his hand), and the two red aces. Think what that means. Partner has at most 3 cards in hearts and the other minor. If his minor is clubs then that guarantees at most 1 loser in the red suits. If his minor is diamonds then there is a 10 card fit and there will probably be at worst 2 club losers.

Despite being vulnerable West should bid 5♣. This is "pass or correct" - he is saying he is prepared to play in 5♣ or 5♦ whichever minor partner has. Sometimes players get confused about these sorts of bids but think about what West would have to want to play in 5♣ regardless. That would require about 8 clubs which he cannot possibly have - he would never have passed on the previous round with that!

North might make the mistake of doubling and if he does he will end up learning a hard lesson that we all usually experience at some stage in our bridge careers - which is that shape beats points every time! You need tricks to double not just points. Doubling 5♣ should lead to -750 (making 11 tricks) or -950 (making 12 tricks). In fact there was one very unusual score of -1110 - 4♣x making with 2 overtricks!

If North does open 1NT East should also now bid. It is useful to have a bid to show spades and another or spades and a minor. See advanced section for some suggestions. If he can, South may compete to 2♥ (no doubt to North's surprise!). Once again, however, once West learns partner has spades and a minor he should be bidding strongly (this auction may not guarantee 55 shape but even with 54 West knows his hand will still fit very well).

Even though they only have 8 points each, East West can in fact make 6♣! In practice that's unlikely though because they will surely take a club finesse through the strong North hand and lose to South's ♣K. But the

lucky spade position means North's ♠AKQ fall and declarer only needs to ruff 2 spades in West to set the whole suit up. As predicted the two red aces are huge as the diamond loser is discarded on ♥A. Surprisingly the majority of pairs playing in clubs seem to have only made 10 tricks. Maybe they didn't start playing on spades immediately?

Even though North South have the majority of the points it's actually they who need to bid on and sacrifice over East West's minor suit contract. But in practice that is hard to diagnose on this hand.

At many tables North South played 4♥ and quite a few made it. East West need to find their spade ruff to beat it. When West gets in with ♥A he can then cross to East's ♣A to receive a spade ruff. A club lead takes that entry away too soon and North South will then make 10 tricks just losing 3 aces. If South is declarer it's easy for West to lead his singleton - especially as he knows that even if partner doesn't have ♠A, he will have a 2nd chance as he will get in with ♥A and can hope to then reach partner's hand. If North is declarer it's not quite so easy for East but it's still likely to be the best shot. A diamond lead is OK too provided West wins ♦A and immediately switches to his spade.

It's not relevant on this hand but as a defence exercise suppose South was playing in 4♥ and West had led his singleton spade. If North South only had a 9 card heart fit when should West take his ♥A and why?

Key points to note

- With weak two suited hands it's often easier to pass and show them on the next round of bidding.
- Don't purely count points - some hands should be upgraded or downgraded depending on the honours and where they are.
- Shape beats points every time! When you know you have a big fit, don't be scared to bid high. Be wary of doubling based purely on points - you need tricks!
- There are lots of methods available to bid over 1NT – no one method is better than any other but it's important to agree what you do and what subsequent bids will mean.

More advanced

Some pairs play a method with an opening bid to show weak both majors. I've seen 2♣, 2♦ or 2♥ used for this. 2♣ has the advantage of letting partner bid 2♦ with equal length (enabling the pair to always find their better major) but also doesn't pre-empt as high. 2♥ has the advantage of forcing the opponents to commit earlier - there's a risk it might be passed whereas 2♣ and 2♦ openings very rarely will be so there's time to pass and bid on the next round depending on what happens. Committing to bid immediately over 2♥ could backfire if the next hand is strong!

Over the opponents' 1 major it's quite common to play 2NT as both minors and a cue of their major as 55 in the other major and one of the minors ("Michaels"). Sometimes, however, not knowing which minor partner has can be a downside. You might want to bid high if partner has one minor but not the other. If the opponents jump the bidding quickly it may then be too risky to wade in. For this reason some pairs play methods where these bids show 2 specific suits. There are 3 combinations of two suiters and only 2 obvious bids though! One approach accepts there is one combination you just can't show. Another approach (Ghestem) uses a jump overcall of 3♣ to show the other combination. However, this means you lose 3♣ as a weak jump overcall and I've also seen some spectacular accidents when one partner bids it and the other forgets what it is! So it's not as popular a method as it once was.

Many methods also exist over 1NT but my own favourite is "Asptro" where 2♣ shows hearts and another, 2♦ shows spades and another (with both majors you show the weaker or shorter one). These can be 54 in the two suits either way round. If partner makes the next bid up, that is passable if you have 5 of that suit, otherwise bid your 5 card suit. A 2 major overcall is then natural and tends to be single suited.

It's perfectly possible to just play natural overcalls as well - although it does tend to be useful to have a bid for both majors.

Another common method uses 2♣ as both majors and 2♦ as a single suiter in one major, with 2M being that major and a minor.

As usual there's no "best" method - it's down to your personal preferences. Any particular method will suit some hands better than others. Just make sure you and your partner both agree. It's also worth discussing continuations. What are jumps? Pre-emptive or invitational? What bid is a strong enquiry (you need one - commonly 2NT)? What bids can be passed? If the opponents intervene what do you do then?

Lastly let's consider the hypothetical defence question I posed. If North South are playing in 4♥ after West has led his singleton spade when should he win ♥A and why? The answer is frequently on the 2nd round not the 1st. The reason being his partner will usually be following suit on the 1st round (i.e. when North South have a 9 card fit). By waiting to the 2nd round West can receive a signal when his partner makes a discard. That may be necessary to help him find his partner's entry to get his spade ruff. Suppose for example North did not have K♦. Now West might need to know whether his partner has that card or the ♣A. If West tries to guess which and guesses wrong, the contract will probably now make. Yes if partner has two entries, West could win the ♥A immediately and cross to his partner twice to receive 2 spade ruffs. But in the far more likely scenario where East only has one entry and it's not obvious what it is, it's much better to sacrifice the chance of 2 off to increase the chances of 1 off by getting a signal. On this hand the only possible entry is in clubs and East will be discarding immediately so there is little need to hold up – but it's a good technique to remember. It's impossible to defend accurately without signals from partner.

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)