



## 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.

### Don't panic in the defence!

City and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 24<sup>th</sup> June 2024

<b>21</b>	♠ A9	Dir: N	
	♥ AQ8	Vul: N-S	
	♦ QT632		
	♣ T53		
	♠ QT432	♠ K876	12
	♥ K7	♥ J962	14 6
	♦ 4	♦ J7	8
	♣ AKQ86	♣ J97	
	♠ J5		
	♥ T543		
♦ AK985			
♣ 42			

	♠	♥	♦	♣	NT
N	-	3	2	-	2
S	-	3	2	-	2
E	3	-	-	3	-
W	3	-	-	3	-

Last week board 21 was a competitive partscore hand but had a point in defence which I think isn't often appreciated.

The normal start to the auction is 1♦ P 1♥. Although South has 5 card diamond support he should still start by looking for a heart fit (there's no reason North can't have 4 hearts as well). West will now bid - either with a simple 1♠ overcall or perhaps by bidding 2♥. That is usually played as analogous to bidding it directly over a 1♥ opening - i.e. it's a Michaels cue bid showing 55 in spades and a minor (here that's obviously clubs). As when bidding it directly, the same questions arose about what point range it shows - see advanced section.

Let's assume a 1♠ overcall initially. North will now either pass or, if playing support doubles, double to show 3 card heart support. East will probably raise to 2♠ (even though he has 4 card support that might consider the 3 level his hand is balanced and pretty bad with 3 Jacks). South will now bid 3♦ to show the support he didn't show on the first round. With West's shape he will surely compete further to 3♠ - or possibly even 4♠. That's probably the end of the auction. North South should be wary of competing further to 4♦ when vulnerable. If they get doubled and go 1 off they score the dreaded -200 (which beats any normal partscore). Had they not been vulnerable then it's very different. -100 for 1 off doubled is still better than -140 for 3♠ making.

It's probably going to be similar if West bids 2♥ initially. North might double (although normally support doubles are not played above 2 of your own major). East this time knows West has 55 shape but he still has rubbish and will probably just bid 2♠ - after which the auction may well continue as before.

Some pairs were allowed to play in diamonds North South and there are 9 tricks pretty much whatever happens - 5 trumps, 2 hearts, ♠A and a club ruff in South. More interesting is defending spade contracts. That should also make 9 tricks. After a diamond to the ♦K, the defenders can trivially take 2 hearts if South switches at that point. But why should he? After North leads ♦3, from South's point of view his partner might only have 4 diamonds and then both ♦AK will score so he will surely try a 2<sup>nd</sup> round. When West ruffs and plays a trump, it's quite likely that North will duck and then a 2<sup>nd</sup> spade will put North in. At this point North needs to not panic and try to cash hearts - he needs to just exit a club and sit back to wait for ♥AQ. There are a few ways he can work this out – the key to which is giving thought to:

- A) What is declarer's shape?
- B) Can declarer do anything with his heart losers?

See advanced section for details.

It looks like some pairs were allowed to make 4♠ - presumably because North did cash ♥A and gave West's ♥K a trick.

## Key points to note

- Look for a major suit fit first - even with 5 card support for a minor.
- Be wary of competing too high when vulnerable - you may risk -200.
- Counting declarer's shape is essential to playing bridge well. Practice it whenever you can.
- When defending think about whether declarer can get rid of losers in a suit. If he can (e.g. by discarding them on winners in another suit) you must try to cash your tricks quickly. But if he can't you can sit back and wait.

## More advanced

If West bids 2♥ as a Michaels cue bid, it may not be clear to East how strong a hand he has. There are two schools of thought that I've discussed before. One bids to show the shape first regardless of strength. The other limits Michaels to weak or strong hands but not intermediate. This hand is intermediate and hence would overcall spades and hope to show clubs later. The 2nd approach makes it easier for partner to know what to do but risks missing out on showing the 2nd suit altogether. Classic swings and roundabouts!

So if he is defending spades how can North work out there's no rush to cash the ♥A? As so often in bridge it's by counting and you do that based on what's already happened in the play and from the auction. The first thing to count is West's shape. In fact whenever you are defending you should endeavour to count the shape of declarer's hand.

Of course if West has shown 55 in the auction then it's a lot simpler. But even if he only bid 1♠ then his shape can still be worked out. As soon as any hand (other than dummy) shows out in a suit, the distribution of that suit is known from simple arithmetic. The steps here would be:

- At trick 2 when West ruffs he is known to have started with 1 diamond. There were 2 in dummy and North is looking at 5 himself. That's 8 - so subtract that from 13 to work out South must have had 5 diamonds.
- West overcalled 1♠ so has at least 5 spades and this is known to be exactly 5 when South shows up with a 2nd trump (North can see 6 between his own hand and dummy which means West and South have 7 between them).
- Next South bid 1♥ in the auction so has at least 4 of those. That gives West 1 or 2 hearts (more likely 2 since South with 5 hearts may have tried to compete further there). So West is known to be most likely 521x. Since he has 13 cards he must have 5 clubs!

But how does all that help North? The key is working out whether declarer can get rid of his heart losers. The only way to get rid of losers is by ruffing them in dummy or discarding them on winners in another suit.

There's clearly nothing in the East hand that could be used to discard any of West's cards on. There are, however, 5 clubs in the West hand which could be used to discard some cards from the East hand. Those would be hearts. But - and this is the key - how many hearts? If West has 5 clubs that means only 2 hearts can be discarded. So declarer will still lose 2 hearts. In other words whatever heart losers West has in his own hand are not going anywhere!

Another way of thinking about this is that West is known to have 6 cards in diamonds/spades. Which leaves 7 for clubs/hearts. And that's the same number that are in dummy. Which means one of those suits can never be used to get rid of losers in the other. Imagine for example that West was instead a 5116 shape. Now 3 of East's hearts can be discarded on West's 6 clubs but that's still no help because West only started with 1 anyway!

A really important thing that I don't find is talked about very much in bridge books I've read is identifying whether a loser can "run away" or not (i.e. be discarded on something else). The way to do this is by counting declarer's shape. It can guide you whether to sit back and wait (as here) or just try and cash tricks in one suit quickly before they get discarded.

Finally I said there were a couple of ways North can work out he doesn't need to play hearts. We've discussed the main one (counting the shape) but really advanced defenders might be able to use the order that South played his cards in the other suits as a clue as well. Suppose South did have ♥K - how might he signal it? Two ways I can think of:

- a) play ♦A THEN ♦K at tricks 1 & 2. North will surely wonder why his partner played the other way round to usual (normally you'd win with the cheapest card available – i.e. ♦K). The answer can only be suit preference for hearts (higher of the other two side suits).
- b) play trumps ♠J then ♠5 (sometimes you won't be able to afford the J but here you can as you know partner only has at most 1 more). Again that's a suit preference signal for a heart.

So - if North trusts that his partner would have done that holding ♥K then the fact he has NOT done either of those things implies he doesn't hold ♥K. Hence it can't be right to cash ♥A. But that requires a lot of partnership trust and understanding! And it would require South to do some thinking before playing even to trick 1!

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)