



Wednesday Wisdom

The Sydney Bridge Centre mini lesson

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative) will be analysing an interesting hand from each Wednesday morning session. This hand commentary will be sent to participants before the next Wednesday session.

You are also welcome to [send questions](#) about hands that you have played. We will collate them and let our panellists (Julian Foster, Marcia Scudder and Paul Roach) answer them.

#76609 BBO – Wednesday morning session 16th September 2020

17	♦ AT97 ♦ K4 ♦ K874 ♣ 965	Dlr: N Vul: None
	♠ 32 ♥ JT653 ♦ 5 ♣ KQ842	
	♠ Q86 ♥ 8 ♦ A962 ♣ AJT73	NT N 2 2 - 1 2 S 2 2 - 2 2 E - 3 - - W - 4 - -
10		
13	6	
11		

This week we'll return to declarer play and defence. Board 17 last week had every table playing 4♥ by west (unusual to have such consistency!) – exactly half made it and half went off. Let's have a look at what might happen.

If West is playing it and North-South have not bid then North has a tricky lead. Leading or underleading an unsupported A is one of the worst things to do in suit contract (see advanced section for why) and Kx of trumps is even worse so the choice is an aggressive diamond or a passive club.

Personally I would have opened 1♣ with the South hand. West would probably overcall 1♥ and East West would reach 4♥. Now North will almost certainly lead a ♣ (which can beat 4♥ – see advanced section). But let's start

with assuming a diamond was led to South's A which is what happened at several tables. South is likely to switch to either a spade or a heart. A spade will force declarer to guess whether to play the K or the J – let's assume they get that right and play the J which forces the A. North probably now returns another spade to the Q and K. Declarer will probably ruff a spade in dummy and run the ♥J losing to the K. North now does best to exit their remaining trump.

Let's take stock now. Declarer's hand is down to ♠5 ♥AQ7 ♦QJ10 ♣– and dummy is ♠– ♥106 ♦– ♣KQ842

Both sides have 3 tricks (declarer has ♠K, spade ruff in dummy and the 2nd round of trumps, defence have ♦A, ♠A and ♥K). So declarer needs all the remaining 7. The key thing they need to do is count tricks and realise that if they just start ruffing things in both hands they are NOT going to get enough tricks. There are only 2 trumps left in dummy and 3 in hand which is 5 tricks. We need 2 more. Where can they come from?

The answer is a **ruffing finesse**. Look at the diamonds. If we run the ♦Q through North what can he do? If he covers the Q with the K we ruff in dummy and our ♦J10 are both now winners (i.e. the 2 extra tricks we need). If he doesn't cover we let the Q run (and the J if the same happens again). We are effectively hoping North has the ♦K and taking a finesse through him just like we would if we led up to an AQ holding. Here it is almost a guarantee to work because at trick 1 North led a low diamond (probably away from the K) and South won the A (holding AK they would normally win the K).

A ruffing finesse is often a very good play. Sometimes it can be a guarantee to make a contract even if it loses! Here we needed all the rest of the tricks but if we had not been in that position we could have run the ♦Q not really caring if it won or lost. If it lost, our ♦J and 10 are both now set up and they could perhaps be used to discard other losers.

Key points to note

- A “ruffing finesse” is a special sort of finesse that allows us to set up extra tricks in a suit by ruffing away the defence's big honour.
- Hands like this can be deceptive. There are only 3 losers due to the shortages in diamonds and clubs. But 3 losers doesn't automatically mean 10 winners! It is important to count both losers AND tricks! Counting the

ruffs in each hand is a good start – if that isn't enough tricks then we will also need to set up extra cards in a suit.

More advanced

Note I said that a spade switch from South will force declarer to guess whether to play the K or the J. Playing the K assumes South has underled the ♠A. But I also said that you should not underlead aces against suit contracts. Good players in situations like this will in fact frequently underlead the A. Why is it different? The rule about not underleading aces in suit contracts applies at **trick 1**. At that stage you haven't seen dummy – you might be about to let a singleton K score, or let declarer score a K and a Q in each hand separately. But now you have seen dummy none of those things apply. South can underlead the A knowing that it will not let an honour score in the East hand. Also even though they cannot see West's hand they "know" it cannot have a singleton ♠K. How? Because if West did have singleton K that would give North AJ109754 in spades. Surely we would have heard something in the bidding from them then?! Hence against good players it's a genuine guess. Weaker players are less likely to underlead the A so you should tend to presume they have the Q and not the A.

It is often interesting to look at the Deep Finesse double dummy analysis shown on the hand records. Here it says that West can always make 4♥ but East can only make 3. Why the difference? It's because South can lead a trump safely but North cannot. On a trump lead, suppose declarer wins the A, North can then get in with the ♠A or the ♦K and play the ♥K. That means 2 rounds of trumps have been drawn. Declarer's tricks are therefore limited to 4 hearts in one hand, 3 ruffs in the other, ♠K (assuming they guessed right), ♣Q (after the K loses to the A) but that's only 9.

Can the defence avoid the diamond ruffing finesse? Yes but only if NORTH wins the first diamond. Now North is not later exposed to the ruffing finesse and either South will score the ♦A or declarer will have to keep ruffing in dummy and run out of tricks. If declarer leads the ♦5 from dummy a strong player sitting south will often play low even though they can see the singleton in dummy. Yes they do risk losing their ♦A trick that way but often, as here, they still score it later or it stops a ruffing finesse from working. On this hand that situation won't occur because declarer hasn't got a quick entry to dummy to lead the diamond – but the point is still valid.

So in fact a diamond lead to the A at trick 1 is fatal for the defence! But a club lead is OK. Even though that also takes a ruffing finesse (trick 1 will go ♣KA ruff) that only sets up ONE extra trick for declarer (♣Q). Declarer will probably now lead a ♦ themselves from hand aiming to get to dummy with a diamond ruff to take the heart finesse. Now it is easy for North to win the 1st diamond. If they play a 2nd club declarer will probably now fail because they'll win ♣Q, take the losing heart finesse and just make the 9 tricks we identified above.

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)

A chat with Julian Foster



Julian and Jenna. Jenna is also a very good bridge player.

Why do you like bridge?

The challenge. It's a game you never master and, because it involves 4 players, there's a lot more social interaction than there is at something like chess.

But also because it's a shared interest that gives you ready access to new people all over the world. When I moved from England to Sydney in 1998 for work I knew one person here. But once I got involved in bridge I had a natural introduction to lots of new people, many of whom are my best friends today.

What is the best thing happened to you at bridge?

At the table it would have to be helping the NSW Open team win the 2018 Australian National Championships in Hobart. The final was 60 boards and we were behind after 58 of them. On the 59th board ([board 29 here](#)) I made a slam on an endplay which went off at the other table. That put us in the lead and thankfully the last board was flat. The beers tasted pretty good that evening! Away from the table I have had two girlfriends in the last 10 years (no, not at the same time!) and met both of them through bridge.

The winners of the SBC Labour Day Online Congress are going to win an Over the Shoulder Mentoring from you. What one lesson you would like them to take away?

Above all - don't be intimidated and remember it's only a game! More seriously try to have a reason behind everything you do. For example if you switch to a spade during the defence - think why are you doing so and what card(s) are you hoping partner holds? Sure the play might not work but at least you were trying for something and not just playing a card at random! It's incredibly satisfying when you do think through what you need to make or defeat a contract, play for that, and it works!

We will next interview Marcia Scudder, so don't miss out the Wednesday Wisdom!

Win an Over the Shoulder Mentoring opportunity by Julian Foster!



The Sydney Bridge Centre is running an **Online Swiss Pairs congress** on the Labour Day 5th October. It is a one-day congress with 24 boards in the morning, lunch break, then another 24 boards in the afternoon. There will be separate field for Novice, Restricted and Open players. An invaluable and meaningful prize for the winners in each category – **Over the Shoulder Mentoring** by Warren Lazer, Julian Foster or Marcia Scudder (all are many times NSW representatives).

RED masterpoints awarded. Please refer to [programme brochure](#) for details and [enter online](#).

To join the SBC online sessions on BBO

Please follow this [Step by Step Guideline](#) to join the Sydney Bridge Centre duplicate session on BBO.

The SBC online session timetable

We have daily session from Monday to Saturday. Please find our [session timetable](#) on our website.

To book an Introduction to BBO session

Join our [BBO Training session on Zoom](#), we will be able to show you how a tournament table looks like on BBO, how to make alerts, how to find out the meaning of opponent's bids, etc. It's a live session running on Zoom teleconference application, completely free of charge. You can book a session with us by picking a time suitable for you via this [booking form](#).