



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.

#22833 BBO – Wednesday morning session 9th September 2020

15		♠ KT8653	Dir: S
		♥ QT62	Vul: N-S
		♦ T6	
		♣ 7	
♠ AQ94	♠	♥ AK954	
♥ 73	♥	♦ J72	
♦ AKQ84	♦	♣ AKT32	
♣ 86	♣		
5	♠ J72	♣♦♥♠NT	
15	♥ J8	N - - - -	
5	♦ 953	S - - - -	
	♣ QJ954	E 5 7 5 2 5	
		W 4 7 5 2 5	

Board 15 last week provided an opportunity for East West to bid slam. Only one pair reached 6♦. How should the hands be bid?

West will most likely open 1♦. 1NT is also a possibility – you have a semi-balanced hand and are in the 15-17 point range. Personally I wouldn't open 1NT for two reasons:

- I have all my points in two suits and am wide open in two suits.
- If I open 1♦ there isn't any response partner can make which will give me a rebid problem. Even if he bids 2♣ I am strong enough to reverse and bid 2♠ because I have a good 15 points and his 2 level response will show at least 10.

We'll suppose that North doesn't bid (had I been not vulnerable I might well have stuck in 1♠ or 2♠ but vulnerable it's arguably a bit too much and could certainly run into huge trouble here!) The auction then continues uncontested 1♥ - P - 1♠.

At a few tables East now closed proceedings with 3NT. This is premature. The East hand has great potential and is a good opportunity to use "Fourth Suit Forcing". After 3 suits have been bid naturally there is very little point in having the fourth suit as natural as well. Partner has already shown two suits – how likely is it they have a third? Only if they are 4441 or 5440 – rare.

Therefore most players use it as an artificial bid – basically seeking further information from partner. These days most players also agree to make it game forcing.

Why would East want to do this? Probably the most common use for fourth suit forcing is to ask if partner has a stopper in the 4th suit in order to play 3NT. That isn't necessary here of course as we have a club stopper ourselves. But there are other reasons:

- To find the best game – here we would like to know if partner has 3 hearts. Partner could be 4351 shape for example and hearts could still be our best trump suit.
- To find out more about partner's shape and/or strength to explore slam.
- To set a suit as trumps and show a strong hand in the process (again to explore slam).

Here the fourth suit is 2♣. It is nothing to do with clubs (even though we happen to have them here) – it's an artificial bid asking for more information. As such, it needs to be alerted (by partner in face to face bridge, by yourself on BBO).

West's response to that should just attempt to describe their hand a bit more. Usually the most useful things to tell partner are that you have some support for their first suit, or to bid no trumps if you have a stopper in the 4th suit. Here West has neither of those so they just resort to bidding 2♦.

So the auction so far has gone 1♦ - 1♥ - 1♠ - 2♣! - 2♦

After just these few bids East has a lot of information about West's hand:

1. West has at most 2 hearts (with 3 they would bid 2♥ over 2♣) - so although we now know there is no heart fit it also means there is no heart loser.
2. West has at least 5 diamonds.
3. West has exactly 4 spades (with 5 they would have bid 2♠ over 2♣).
4. West does not have a club stopper - so they won't be something like 4153 with ♣QJx).
5. Given West has at least 9 cards between spades and diamonds, that means there are no losers outside those suits (partner can have at most 4 cards in clubs and hearts and our two AK's will take care of all those).
6. West's most likely shapes are 4252, 4153, 4162 or 4261. Note they are unlikely to have 4 clubs because with that they could have raised 2♣ to 3♣ or bid 2NT.

East's next bid should be 3♦. That sets diamonds as trumps and is FORCING – because their previous 2♣ bid set up a game force. It shows a much stronger hand than one which would bid 3♦ directly over 1♠ (that would be invitational to game).

West should probably next bid 3♠ – this is a cue bid (see advanced section) showing a spade control and expressing willingness to co-operate with partner's diamond slam investigations. Why should West co-operate? Because they have a good opening bid, they have good trumps and several controls. Remember at this stage after just bidding 1♦ and 1♠ West could have had a minimum opening bid of only 11 or 12 points – in fact they have 15 and good controls.

At this point East can probably just bid blackwood. Note that normally blackwood isn't a good idea with a void – but once West has cue bid spades, we know that one of partner's key cards is the ♠A so we will not later be guessing which key card(s) West has.

West's response is whatever shows 0 or 3 key cards (usually 5♣). East should next ask for the queen of trumps and when West shows that card, East could consider actually bidding 7♦. In reality you probably would only bid 6♦ – you will score extremely well for bidding and making a slam anyway and it is silly to bid 7 unless you can almost count 13 tricks. Here you can count 5♦, ♠A, ♥AK, ♣AK and 2 spade ruffs in your hand but that's only 12. You MIGHT be able to ruff 3 spades in your hand (if the defence do not lead a trump) and you MIGHT be able to establish a long heart or club in your hand but neither of those things are certain. Hence 6♦ is enough.

Key points to note

- Fourth suit forcing is an essential convention on many hands to enable you to find the right game to play in, or to explore slam
- Bidding fourth suit forcing and then one of opener's suits sets that suit as trumps
- During the bidding always keep in mind what you MIGHT have had to bid the same way – that will allow you to recognise whether you should be exploring more or backtracking
- Slam bidding is about recognising the trick taking potential of hands and then trying to make sure you do not have 2 losers.

More advanced

If West did open 1NT how might the auction proceed? I liked the auction from the pair who did bid 6♦: 1NT-2♦!-2♥-3♣-3NT-4♦-6♦. 2♦ was a transfer to hearts, 3♣ was natural and game forcing. 3NT denied a fit for either ♥ or ♣. 4♦ was semi-natural still interested in slam (either 0535 as here or 0544). 6♦ was a good practical bid showing trust in partner – you have enormously good trumps when partner is showing slam interest! Well bid – a deserved top board.

By “blackwood” I mean Roman Key Card Blackwood (RKCB). That is a vastly superior convention to simple blackwood that just asks for aces. RKCB focuses on 5 “key cards” (4 aces plus the K of trumps) and also explores the Q of trumps too. Typical responses are:

- 5♣ = 0 or 3 key cards
- 5♦ = 1 or 4 key cards
- 5♥ = 2 key cards but not the Q of trumps
- 5♠ = 2 key cards and the Q of trumps

These days quite a few pairs swap over the 5♣ and 5♦ responses so that 5♣ shows 1 or 4 and 5♦ shows 0 or 3. That's mainly because a response of 1 tends to be the most common so this leaves more space to ask for other things.

What happens after RKCB? Bids of the trump suit are normally a sign-off. There are then all sorts of schemes for other bids. Importantly after the 5♣ and 5♦ responses you want a bid that asks whether partner has the Q of trumps (since those two responses don't say anything about it). Usually that bid is the next step that isn't the trump suit. Again responses vary. There are plenty of books on RKCB for those that would like to know more.

Cue bids are another essential tool for advanced bidding. They apply AFTER a suit has been definitely agreed and show controls (usually 1st round control) in that suit. They imply interest in co-operating with slam explorations so, while they don't necessarily show extra values, they typically show a hand that is not completely minimum for its bidding so far.

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)

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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](#).

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