



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.

#9967 BBO – Wednesday morning session 2nd September 2020

19		♠ T9852	Dir: S
		♠ K	Vul: E-W
		♣ KT87654	
♠	♠ AKJ		
♥	♥ AQT8762	♥ KJ953	
♦	♦ J752	♦ 94	
♣	♣ A9	♣ J32	
6	♠ Q7643		
11	♥ 4		
13	♦ AQT863		
10	♣ Q		
		♣	♥
		S	3
		E	- 5 - 5
		W	- 5 - 4

A couple of weeks ago I mentioned that shape beats points any day. Board 19 last week was another example of this. I was surprised to see that only one North-South pair bid 4♠ – most tables allowed East-West to play in 4♥. Although North-South only have a combined 16 points they can make 4♠. At the same time East-West can make 5♥ with their combined 24 points. When there are wild distributions around and large fits it is quite common for both sides to be able to make high level contracts. The key is for each side to identify that they have such a fit.

How might the auction go? South has the first decision. Personally I would open this hand 1♦. Yes I only have 10 points and 2 of those are a singleton Q that might be worthless but there are other good reasons for opening:

- I have a lot of shape – a 65 shape is very powerful if we find a fit.
- By opening 1♦ I indicate a good lead for partner if we do end up defending
- The side that opens the bidding has an advantage – it tends to be harder to evaluate your hands when you are overcalling

If you are playing 2♠ as a weak hand with 5♠ and a minor that is also a reasonable action. Once North hears that, with their enormous shape they should immediately bid to at least 4♠.

Let's suppose South does open 1♦, West will overcall 1♥ and North will bid 1♠. At this point both East and South know they have large fits with their partners. East will force the bidding to 4♥ (either directly or using a "cue raise" – a bid of the opponent's suit to show a good hand with a ♥ raise as opposed to a pre-emptive raise). Whatever East does, despite South's 10 points they should bid 4♠ next. They have found a fit and they have a lot of shape. Furthermore, how much defence do you have to a ♥ contract? Not much!

Give West also has a lot of shape, they might well push onto 5♥. Now it's hard for North-South. In general you want to leave the 5 level to the opponents. Bidding 5 over 5 is usually a bad thing to do (so often both 5 level contracts go off and you just convert a plus score to a minus score). But when there is extreme shape around it is more likely to be right. Here 5♥ makes so bidding 5♠ is right as it scores -100 (assuming doubled) instead of -650. With their 75 shape, North is probably the one more likely to bid 5♠ (and possibly even 6♠ over 6♥ - see advanced section).

Let's finish with a different auction. Suppose South did pass initially. West would open 1♥ and now North should enter the auction using a common convention called the "Michaels cue bid". This is a bid where you overcall the suit your right hand opponent has opened to show at least 55 in two suits (1m-2m shows both majors, 1M-2M shows the other major and a minor). Here North would bid 2♥. That gives South a huge amount of information – they now know they have at least a 10 card spade fit and partner's other suit is almost certainly clubs. They will bid at least 4♠ for sure. With such powerful shape and being not vulnerable it is absolutely critical for North to bid something over 1♥. What's more they hold spades. The spade suit is often called the "boss" suit because you can outbid the opponents at the same level. Doing so creates problems too – imagine you are about to end up in a nice comfortable

4♥ contract. The very last thing you want to hear from the opponents is 4♠! You now have to decide whether to risk 5♥ or double 4♠ or give up. No matter how expert you are, you will get that decision wrong sometimes.

Key points to note

- Wildly distributional hands have enormous power once a fit is found. High card points are almost irrelevant. Do not be afraid to bid with them!
- The spade suit is hugely valuable as you can outbid the opponents at the same level. Be more inclined to get into the bidding when you hold it. Bidding 4♠ over 4♥ is right an amazing proportion of the time!
- If your hand is marginal tend towards opening the bidding rather than passing. It tends to be easier to bid well having opened than when you overcall.
- The Michaels cue bid is a very useful convention to be able to get into the bidding with shapely hands.

More advanced

When you bid the Michaels cue bid what strength should you have? Expert opinion varies here. Some play “any strength” believing it is more important to get the shape in first. But that can make it hard for partner to know which side has the strength. Others (including me) prefer “Either weak or strong”. You bid Michaels with weak hands or strong hands but with intermediate hands (about 10-16) you overcall one of your suits and hope to be able to bid the other one later. Using this method if you bid a 2nd time after using Michaels you are showing the strong option, otherwise you have the weak option and leave it to partner. The rationale is the weak option may lead to a cheap sacrifice, the strong option to making game, but intermediate hands frequently have enough defence to stop the opponents making their contract. Knowing the strength allows partner to judge the hand better. But the downside is you may never be able to safely bid your 2nd suit if the opponents bounce the bidding high quickly so you could miss finding a fit there. As with all these things, each approach will work on some hands and fail on others. There is no magic answer!

High level decisions are tough. A good mantra is “the 5 level belongs to the opponents”. Although it is right on this hand to bid 5♠ over 5♥, I would have sympathy with North-South pairs who chose to defend 5♥. Both have cards that could take tricks in defence.

With extreme shape, it is generally far safer to play the hand. You simply don't want to take the risk of making an unlucky lead and letting a high level contract make, possibly even a slam, possibly even doubled! Note that on this hand even 6♠x only costs 300 – far less than the value of East-West's 4♥ vulnerable game. In an expert game I would not be at all surprised to see some 6♠x contracts on this hand. It is relatively cheap “insurance” against the risk of conceding -1430 in 6♥!

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)

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](#).

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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](#).