

CAUTIOUS BIDDER [1]

Some of you may be familiar with my 'Cautious Bidder' persona. For those who haven't previously encountered my efforts under this guise, I have written bridge articles under this nom de plume for the past fifteen (maybe twenty?) years, first on the Wiltshire county website and more recently on the East Wales and Gwent Bridge Academy websites, but not previously for the Cardiff club. After a while I tend to get bored and pack it in for a bit, but then something tempts me back and I embark on a further series. So here we go again.

Last weekend saw the trial to aid selection for the Welsh Ladies team to compete in the Ladies Home International, otherwise known as the Lady Milne. Eight pairs competed and they faced a gruelling schedule of 98 boards over two days. Scoring was by IMPs (ie Teams scoring), with each pair's results 'X-imped' against the results at the other three tables in play. It sounds complicated, but computers are wonderful things and they take care of everything.

I thought this hand was of interest.

Dealer South; N/S vul

	♠1084	
	♥J9863	
	♦J1032	
	♣J	
♠7		♠AK53
♥104		♥AK72
♦Q96		♦AK87
♣AK87432		♣Q
	♠QJ962	
	♥Q5	
	♦54	
	♣10965	

After South passes, what do you do as West? You are at the very top of the range for a non-vulnerable pre-empt, but most would nonetheless open the hand 3C. Pass is possible, but it's always dangerous to pass on hands where you intend to catch up later. Partner isn't a mind-reader and may never place you with such a powerful suit if you haven't bid first time around.

As it happens Pass should not be disastrous since partner has a huge hand and will probably open with whatever is the partnership's strongest bid – say, 2C. That is what happened at the table where I was kibitzing. West did indeed Pass at her first go, but East opened 2C and West raised to 3C – a positive response. But now when East rebid the inevitable 3NT, which describes her hand to a 'T', West meekly passed. In my view she should have bid a forcing 4C at this point, following which the club slam would surely have been reached. In fact slam (Six Clubs in both cases) was bid at two of the four tables, with the other two East/West pairs languishing in 3NT.

This was the bidding when Sue and Charlotte held the East/West hands (Charlotte sitting West).

<u>W</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>S</u>
			P
3C	P	4N	P
5H	P	6C	P
P	P	P	

Had she been playing with me Sue might not have been quite so confident of her partner's club holding (my pre-empt's can be on the emaciated side), but with Charlotte she had no such problem. Charlotte does not do emaciated, and Sue could be confident that her partner held a decent club suit. The leap to 4N (Roman Key Card Blackwood) was a little agricultural perhaps, but it's difficult to see how going more slowly would have helped. It was a practical shot, and when Charlotte confessed to the possession of two of the five 'Aces' (the trump King also counting as an Ace under this method), the club slam could be bid with confidence.

As you can see, it is only the 4/1 club break that prevents declarer emerging with all thirteen tricks. As it is she has an inescapable club loser, but no worries aside from that. Had any pair bid the Grand Slam they would have been entitled to consider themselves a trifle unlucky. Not so had any greedy East/West pair attempted 6NT (completely unnecessary at Teams scoring, of course), since if you study the hand carefully you will see that the 4/1 club break would have scuppered that contract also – and deservedly so, since the club slam is by far the safer option.

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