

CAUTIOUS BIDDER [7]

The Cardiff Winter League has been a closely contested affair this season, and there are now just two matches to go. In the penultimate pair of fixtures my team came up against the favourites, the team captained by Filip Kurbalija. We lost both segments of the match, one of which was close. The following hand made a big difference. It might have been a gain, but as things turned out it saw a significant swing to our opponents.

Dealer South; E/W vul

	♠42	
	♥A42	
	♦Q83	
	♣K10964	
♠Q873		♠J95
♥QJ		♥K9765
♦J10972		♦65
♣73		♣AQ2
	♠AK106	
	♥1083	
	♦AK4	
	♣J85	

Sue and I sat North/South against Julian Pottage and Tony Ratcliff. This was the bidding at our table.

<u>W</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>S</u>
			1C
P	2C	2H	P
P	3C	P	P
P			

We now play 5 card majors – hence the One Club opening. Two Clubs was 'inverted' – ostensibly showing club length and at least a ten count. Well, I had the club length. I thought the North hand was marginal and so, as ever, I opted for the more aggressive course. Tony Ratcliff now entered the auction with a hand on which many players would be content to pass. You won't be surprised to hear that I'm with Tony. Of course there are risks attached to entering the auction at the two level, vulnerable, with such a poor suit, but the potential benefits of doing so are underestimated by most players.

Without the intervention Sue would have rebid Two No Trumps, but Tony's heart call deflected her from that course. She might have doubled to show a good hand (my choice), but opted to pass for now. I had an obvious raise to Three Clubs and Sue - who never needs much excuse to bid conservatively - elected to pass. She knew that we held at least borderline game values, but could see no obvious game.

Quite right as it happens. The marked heart lead would have scuppered Three No Trumps, so Three Clubs - which she made - was the limit of the hand.

Our team-mates, Chris Rochelle and Simon Gottschalk, sat East/West against Filip and Diane Kurbalija. This was the auction at their table.

<u>W</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>S</u>
			1N
P	3N	P	P
P			

Filip and Diane play a Strong No Trump. As you can see, there was no opportunity for Chris in the East seat to introduce his heart suit.

Simon's leads are legendary. There are probably peasants in the Hindu Kush who even now are chuckling to themselves at tales of Simon's opening leads, wondering whether he's smoking the same stuff they're smoking. In this instance however Simon's choice of the diamond Jack strayed dangerously close to orthodoxy. There is a good case for a major suit lead following a 1NT – 3NT auction, but I have to concede that Simon's actual choice is hardly to be criticised. On this occasion.

Declarer won and played a club to the 10, Chris winning with the Queen. He returned a low heart, which declarer ducked. A second heart from Simon followed, Chris following low and declarer ducking again. That was the end of the defence. Chris had a further club entry, but no chance of setting up his hearts. In order to prevail he needed to overtake the heart return from Simon (not too difficult, with Ace to three visible in the dummy) and then his hearts could be established, with a certain club entry to follow. It was an opportunity missed.

Having escaped an initial heart lead declarer could still have made Three No Trumps by rising immediately with the Ace of hearts when Chris led the suit. That would have created an insurmountable blockage, but it's a most unlikely play in practice without sight of all four hands.

3NT making was a 7 IMP loss on the board, which meant we lost the 2 VPs for that stanza, thereby smoothing the path of the Kurbalija team.

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