

CAUTIOUS BIDDER [9]

The English Bridge Union's Mixed Pairs Championships, otherwise known as the Portland Pairs, used to be an enjoyable and fairly prestigious event. It involved regional qualifying heats, followed by a two day, all-play-all final. I played in the qualifier several times, without ever making the final. Then, as we all know, Pairs events began to diminish in popularity. The entries have dropped much more sharply than for Teams events, which by and large remain well supported. The response of the bridge authorities, in England as in Wales, has been to downgrade these Pairs competitions. The Portland Pairs is now a one day event (no qualifying heats), played at as many venues as can attract entries, and scored as yet another Simultaneous Pairs. Simultaneous events provide a bit of fun, but they are non-serious. Accordingly, the Portland Pairs is now non-serious. It's a shame.

That didn't stop Sue and I playing in this year's incarnation, and for once we did quite well. We even had hopes of winning the thing, until a disastrous final round. Those final two boards were played against Harry and Sally Anoyrkatis, former British internationals now resident in Devon. On the first hand against them I held ♠AQ1062 / ♥A9654 in the major suits and bid 2C over Harry's 1NT opening to show that hand type. My partner declined to contribute to the subsequent auction (implying equal length in the majors) and the Anoyrkatis pairing bid confidently to 3NT. Which major suit do you lead? Foolishly reasoning that I needed less help from my partner in spades than in hearts, I led a spade. Completely wrong. On that auction I should have focussed on the question of which of my two suits *would give nothing away*. On reflection I should certainly have led a heart. The spade lead gave declarer an additional trick, and since he played the hand efficiently from that point on, amassing eleven tricks in total, we scored just 2% on the board.

Then came this, the final board of the event.

Dealer East; E/W vul

	♠1097 ♥QJ52 ♦AKQ987 ♣ -	
♠43 ♥A ♦J10632 ♣K10543	♠KQJ865 ♥K9864 ♦5 ♣7	♠A2 ♥1073 ♦4 ♣AQJ9862

At our table the bidding was as follows, Sue and I in the East/West seats.

W	N	E	S
		1C	2C*
2S*	4H	5C	5H
P	P	P	

Sue's bid of 2S (the higher of the opponents' two suits) promised a constructive raise in clubs. This enabled me to bid Five Clubs when the bidding came back round to me, and

our opponents did well to bid on to Five Hearts. Five Hearts cannot be defeated, and as you can see, Five Clubs is likewise 'cold' for East/West.

Generally speaking the five level in competitive auctions is best left to the opponents, but in this case it would have paid us to bid on. Six Clubs would of course have been doubled, but even vulnerable that is just 200 away, as compared with minus 450 when Five Hearts rolled home.

Should either of us have bid it? Very difficult. If anyone was going to do so it had to be me, in the East seat. They say that high level bidding judgement is one of the marks of the top player, and I suppose I fell short here. In order for a bid of Six Clubs to be correct, each pair would have to be able to make precisely eleven tricks in their respective suits, as indeed was the case. Not so easy to judge – at least, I didn't find it easy. When we allowed our opponents to play in Five Hearts we were booked for another very poor board, and could wave goodbye to the Portland Pairs for another year.

GD

I have been asked to insert the following message from the Cardiff bridge club committee.

Calling all Cardiff members

As most of you will have noticed, the club has installed four screens in the playing room, each of which displays the time still available on any given round. In addition, a disembodied voice, currently that of our Chairman, Brian Quinlan, issues from the machines with instructions to the players - "No new boards to be started", and so on. The club committee has decided that Brian's voice, whilst unquestionably a very fine voice in its own way, is not suited to this particular task. His announcements are not being listened to with the degree of attention they deserve. Also, some people appear to find them amusing, which is not the intention.

Accordingly the committee is seeking volunteers who might be willing to have their own voice issuing from the machines. We have many distinctive voices in the club, and the committee would like to try using some of them. We have available to us French accents, Danish accents, Indian accents, Chinese accents, and so on. Even a Scottish accent would be acceptable, provided it were not at the rougher end of the spectrum.

This coming Sunday, 1st April, starting at 11 am, the committee will hold an audition. Please let Brian know if you are interested. He will give you a time slot when you should attend the club. It is proposed to give each trialist a ten minute window in which to demonstrate that their voice is suited to the task.

For the most part you will be asked to read set messages, but some variation is permissible. For example, rather than "Please do not start any new boards", you might try substituting: "If you haven't started your last board, DON'T!" The committee thinks that this might enliven the evening and add a human touch.

Contact Brian if you would like to know more. Don't be shy – this is your chance to become the voice of Cardiff bridge.