

CAUTIOUS BIDDER [10]

The Cardiff Winter League finished last week. It was won by the Kurbalija team, but rather less comfortably than might have been expected. Five teams finished within ten Victory Points of the winners, and the rankings fluctuated throughout the season, making for an exciting competition. Thanks go to the organiser, Liz Atkinson, who managed to ensure that all nine teams had a full complement of players each month (no easy task, as it turned out), and to the director, Chris Rochelle.

This was a hand from the final evening. I expect every East/West pair played in Three No Trumps. Deep Finesse tells us that Three No Trumps can be made if played from the East seat, but should in theory go down if played by West. In fact Three No Trumps went down at both tables in our match, even though – at least at our table – it was played by East.

Dealer South; both non-vul

	♠AK32	
	♥KJ10	
	♦109732	
	♣4	
♠QJ84		♠1065
♥A94		♥Q53
♦J8		♦AQ6
♣KQ92		♣AJ105
	♠97	
	♥8762	
	♦K54	
	♣8763	

This was the bidding at our table.

W	N	E	S
			P
1C*	X*	3N	P
P	P		

East/West were playing a Strong No Trump and Five Card Majors – hence the One Club opening. I have a theory about the short club as played by non-expert pairs. That theory is that they would be better off with a simpler method as they haven't worked out all the continuations, especially when employing transfers. However, that was not an issue on this hand – on the contrary, the system worked to the benefit of East/West since Three No Trumps was declared from the East seat. This mattered because it protected against the diamond lead which would have scuppered the contract had the lead come from North.

My partner led a diamond anyway because we play transfers over a short club, and my Double in second seat laid claim to a diamond suit (yes, there was an element of poetic licence). Anyway, following orders as it were, Sue led the 4 of diamonds from South.

As is often the case, the key play came at trick one. Perhaps hoping that I would contribute the King (assuming I had it) on thin air, declarer called for a low diamond from dummy – and the contract could no longer be made.

I contributed the nine and declarer won the first trick with the Queen of diamonds. Now the defenders were able to play on diamonds whenever they had the lead. Eventually North's three length winners in diamonds were established, along with two top spades. One down.

If declarer had opted to play the Jack of diamonds at trick one he would have been ahead of the game. No doubt he was expecting the Jack to be overtaken by the King, but there was no cost in trying it. Once the Jack held the trick, declarer could establish two spade winners (or, in due course, a second heart trick) whilst the diamond suit could be blocked provided declarer rose with the Ace on the second round. Alternatively, even if declarer attempted a (losing) finesse when North next pushed a diamond through, North would find himself squeezed on the run of the club suit and could in due course be end-played and have to lead away from the King of hearts.

It's a deceptive hand. Superficially it looks as if declarer has two diamond tricks whatever he does, but his play in the suit is still critical. That Jack of diamonds was a key card; it was important not to waste it.

GD