

## CAUTIOUS BIDDER [11]

With qualifying heats no longer required for the WBU Mixed Pairs Championship, the East Wales Committee – and in particular, our ATO, Helen Houston – took the enterprising decision to hold our own Mixed Pairs Championships, played last Sunday. The event was reasonably well publicised and the cost (£7.50 per person for a two session event, including a meal and free tea/coffee throughout) was more than reasonable. Helen secured the services of Gareth Evans as director and she herself provided a slap-up tea.

Sadly, Helen's efforts secured a very poor reward in terms of attendance, with only eleven pairs turning up. To say this was disappointing is an understatement. It seems that most bridge players in South Wales are content with their evening club games and are reluctant to venture forth to play at weekends against (possibly) more challenging opposition. If that is the response of 99% of bridge players locally then it is hard to see why even someone as public spirited as Helen should continue to make the effort. It's also hard to see the need for area and national bridge associations if the vast majority of players are content simply to play bridge in their local clubs. This is not a problem peculiar to Wales, but the failure to self-renew the game at tournament level is notably more acute here than it is in England, and we have fallen light years behind some of our European neighbours.

This did not prevent those who turned up from enjoying Sunday's event. Many congratulations to the worthy winners, Brian Harden and Marion Shewell.

Here is a hand that I thought was of interest.

**Dealer North; East/West vul**

	♠KQJ52	
	♥A2	
	♦A8	
	♣9742	
♠106		♠A4
♥J973		♥65
♦J753		♦Q9642
♣AK8		♣QJ53
	♠9873	
	♥KQ1084	
	♦K10	
	♣106	

This was the bidding at our table.

<u>W</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>S</u>
	1S	P	3C*
P	4S	P	P
P			

Sue and I now play 5 card major suit openings with 'Bergen' responses – so Sue's 3C call promised a moderate spade raise (roughly 7-9 hcp) with four card trump support. It can be useful to have a more finely graded series of responses to partner's major suit opening than is available if employing only standard methods. You do of course lose the change of suit game force so it's a question of which method you think has greater utility.

Perhaps surprisingly, for this was a 'mixed' event in more ways than one, every North/South pair bid to Four Spades. Only one pair (Liz Atkinson and Simon Gottschalk) defeated the game.

Can you see how the defence can prevail? If East begins with clubs, as seems normal, and his partner overtakes to continue the suit for three rounds, declarer ruffing the third round, East should be able to infer that his partner is now void. The best hope of defeating the contract is then to rise with the Ace when declarer tackles trumps – and to play a fourth club in the hope that partner can over-ruff dummy. It's possible that partner has no spade higher than the nine, but in that case it's hard to see what alternative defence could succeed. After all, the bidding surely indicates that declarer has both red suit Aces.

So I think the winning defence is fairly well marked, but of course everything is harder at the table.

GD