

CAUTIOUS BIDDER [12]

The Lady Milne is the Ladies Home International Championship. Six teams compete: England; Scotland; Northern Ireland; the Republic of Ireland; Wales; and a second team representing whichever is the home nation for that year's renewal.

This year's Lady Milne was held last weekend, in Edinburgh. Accordingly it was the Scots who fielded a second team (dubbed the SBU). Wales was represented by one very experienced pair – Maggie Pierce of the Cardiff club and Ceri, Maggie's step-daughter. There was also a pair who were half experienced and half not: my partner, Sue, and her daughter, Charlotte; and finally a pair from the West, Jennifer Wardell and Eleanor Price, who along with Charlotte were making their debut in the event. I was the NPC (non-playing captain). I wasn't sure how it would go, but I have to say I found it a very enjoyable experience.

Given the Welsh team's relative inexperience it was likely that we would struggle against the strongest teams (England and Scotland, in particular) but we hoped to hold our own against the remainder. We began with a disappointing loss to Northern Ireland on Friday evening, but thereafter the whole team performed with credit, eventually finishing in 4th place. Scotland on home soil emerged triumphant, with England a close second.

One of the most pleasing Welsh performances was against England, to whom we lost narrowly. The following hand saw a valuable gain for Wales.

Dealer North; North/South vul

	♠A875	
	♥K987	
	♦4	
	♣AJ84	
♠Q2		♠10943
♥104		♥AQ62
♦Q8		♦K9652
♣Q1097653		♣void
	♠KJ6	
	♥J53	
	♦AJ1073	
	♣K2	

In the Open room Maggie Pierce declared Three No Trumps from the South hand. She received the 10 of clubs lead and played the hand skilfully to emerge with ten tricks. The key to the hand is not to be too 'active' in opening up suits, but – as far as possible – to get the opponents to do the work for you. This is vital on a hand where, with the exception of clubs, none of the suits lies well for declarer.

This was the bidding when Sue and Charlotte sat East/West.

W	N	E	S
	1C	1D	3NT
P	P	P	P

Sue's 1D overcall was somewhat questionable. I suppose she did not have the values to

double yet felt she had a hand with which to compete. I am hardly well placed to criticise.

Accordingly, Charlotte, on lead, began with the Queen of diamonds to declarer's Ace – a friendly start from declarer's point of view. The play then continued as follows:

at trick 2 declarer played the King of club, East showing out
a low club, Charlotte contributing the 9 and declarer winning with the Jack
a low spade from dummy to the Jack and Charlotte's Queen
8 of diamonds from Charlotte, ducked by Sue (the contract makes if she contributes the
King), won by declarer with the 10
King of spades
spade to the Ace, hoping for a 3/3 spade break, but Charlotte shows out
spade exit to Sue's 10
Sue was now end-played, but found the best exit of a low heart to declarer's Jack
declarer now played a heart towards dummy, but with Ace/Queen of hearts lying over
declarer's King, the defence had five tricks – two spades (the Queen and the 10); two
hearts (Ace and Queen); and one diamond (Sue's carefully preserved King).

Declarer was too active, but Sue had to defend sure-footedly not to gift declarer her ninth trick.

We lost that match to a strong England team by just ten IMPs. We also defeated the second Scotland team. All in all we could be proud of our 4th place finish, behind England, Scotland, and the Republic, but ahead of the SBU and Northern Ireland.

GD