

## CAUTIOUS BIDDER [21]

How good a bridge player are you? No need to answer that - your answer is unlikely to be reliable since you will err on the side of modesty, as usual. But I am sometimes amused when I hear others discuss the respective merits of different players, including - at least by implication - themselves. This is because they employ different yardsticks depending on who is being discussed. Players whom they are inclined to disparage are judged by reference to their worst atrocities (fondly remembered). Stars of the game are on the whole judged by reference to their brilliancies. And what of ourselves? Ah, that's a tricky one, but competitive bridge players (whom you may have noticed have egos) tend to judge themselves by reference to their best bridge. That is their 'true' level, the level by which they would like to be judged. The other times – the times when we do something horrendous – are not really 'us' at all; they are unfortunate departures from our real selves, perhaps reflecting a lapse of concentration, often brought about through some unfortunate combination of circumstances – illness, fatigue, an irritating partner, the state of the match, and so on.

We have to face the truth – most of us are not 'one' bridge player, operating to a uniform standard. Our best bridge may be reasonable enough, but that is not how we should judge ourselves as bridge players. Our true level encompasses everything we do at the bridge table, on good days and bad. It must take into account the lapses of concentration, the mood changes, the faulty reasoning, and so on – it's all part of us. The cheering aspect of this is that the surest route to improvement for most of us (novices aside) is to identify the factors which contribute to our playing bridge below the level of which we are capable, and to strive to address those damaging elements, whatever they may be.

This hand arose in the course of the Cardiff 'Pro/Am' Teams – the brainchild of Liz Atkinson which is proving to be very popular. It's not too serious – Liz attempts to match pairs so that teams are of roughly equal ability – but it's achieving its objective of introducing a wider tranche of club members to teams bridge.

### Board 1, Dealer North; both non-vul

	♠108	
	♥4	
	♦KQJ842	
	♣7543	
♠AKQJ5		♠432
♥A632		♥J10875
♦A5		♦1073
♣A9		♣102
	♠976	
	♥KQ9	
	♦96	
	♣KQJ86	

Sue and I sat East/West against Filip and Diane Kurbalija. The bidding was as follows.

W	N	E	S
	3D	P	P
X	P	3H	P
4H	P	P	P

Somewhat to my surprise I found myself declarer with my one point hand. Still, it was a reasonable contract. Filip led the King of clubs.

It's not a complicated hand. I could afford to lose a trick in each minor, and just one trump, or alternatively I could lose a trick in just one minor along with two trumps. I couldn't get to hand so even had I wanted to I was unable to take a heart finesse. Accordingly at trick two I banged down the Ace of hearts, both defenders following.

Playing my best bridge, I would consider the following two scenarios:

*Scenario 1* Trumps break 2/2.

In this case I can draw a second round of trumps, and then, whilst the defenders can cash a second club trick, they will not make a diamond as my spades will take care of my two losing diamonds in hand.

Alternatively, I might run my spades immediately, starting at trick 3. But in that case one defender – the one with the shorter spades – will ruff in and switch to diamonds. I still have a further trump to lose, and when that trump is taken both a diamond and a club can be cashed. So one down.

*Scenario 2* Trumps break 3/1, almost certainly with Filip, South, holding both the King and Queen.

In this case I need to run my spades immediately; Filip can ruff in when he's out of spades (on the fourth spade, as it happens), but I have discarded my losing club on that card; he can switch to a diamond, but I continue with my spades. Filip can ruff again, and cash a diamond, but that is the last trick for the defence.

Alternatively, I might play a second round of trumps at trick 3. In that case Filip will win, cash his club trick, and switch to a diamond. I can win and play on spades, but Filip will ruff in at some point and the defence will have a diamond to cash. One down.

So how do the hearts divide – 2/2 or 3/1? Which is more likely? *A priori*, having cashed the Ace and both defenders having followed with low cards, the odds very slightly favour the 2/2 break. But Diane had opened Three Diamonds. So she has at least six diamonds. That changes the odds. Given the bidding, the odds clearly favour playing Filip to hold both remaining heart honours. Accordingly, at trick 3 it must be right to crack on with spades rather than to play a second round of hearts.

And had I been playing my best bridge, that is precisely what I would have done.

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