

CAUTIOUS BIDDER [22]

The Riviera Congress, held in the Riviera Centre, Torquay, is a well organised event that attracts a good field. Torquay on a beautiful summer's evening is a delightful place to be, and the organisers had sensibly adopted the now favoured early start and finish which enabled us to enjoy the evening sunshine. As is the way with many English tournaments these days, some of the best players were playing professionally, being paid for their bridge services by a munificent partner.

Sue and I had risen to a respectable 8th spot on the Sunday as we began our final match. All was set fair for a final summit push. Unfortunately, beneath the haze of a glassy summer's day, storm clouds were brewing.

Before describing the painful sequence of events, I will say something about match-pointed pairs events, such as this one. It should go without saying that in matchpoints every hand matters equally, and that your performance on each board is compared to that of every other pair in the room holding your cards. Your objective is to outbid them, or failing that to outplay them (whether as declarer or in defence). I have never subscribed to the notion that in pairs events one should endeavour to 'play with the room'. Indeed I regard it as one of the most fatuous, bone-headed pieces of advice ever coined by supposed experts for the misdirection of a credulous bridge public. Why should you not try to win the board in the auction, as well as in the play? The objective ought to be to outbid your opponents, as well as to outplay them. That may simply mean bidding to the optimum contract, but it may equally mean deflecting them from *their* optimum contract, or perhaps presenting opponents with a problem that they fail to solve. The auction, in other words, is your first chance to win the board.

That said, I despair of players who indulge themselves in any off-centre action that they can think of, basking in the occasional triumph (and the opportunity presented for self-glorifying anecdote) whilst conveniently forgetting the nine times out of ten that they end up with egg on their face. But don't always be content with the obvious. If an opportunity arises for you to improve what may otherwise be a mediocre contract, then at least consider it. Of course you won't always get it right.

Board 32, Dealer West; East/West vul

	♠107632	
	♥Q2	
	♦AQ7	
	♣J53	
♠AQJ		♠4
♥9543		♥AK8
♦KJ52		♦98643
♣Q9		♣8642
	♠K985	
	♥J1076	
	♦10	
	♣AK107	

Sue opened 1NT as West, North passed, and I considered my options. I could Pass, and I had little doubt that that would be the 'room' action. I could transfer to diamonds. That would involve my bidding 2NT as a transfer and then converting Sue's 3C to 3D - or

passing 3D if she bid that immediately (showing a liking for diamonds). I dismissed that option because I thought 3D would probably be too high – and of course there was no guarantee of a diamond fit. Anything else? Yes, I thought there was something else: I could bid 2C – Stayman. If Sue responded 2D, I would be content with that. If she bid 2H then I could pass and allow her to play in a Moysian fit (4/3), which might turn out well as she would be ruffing spades in the short trump hand. I could live with that. Or Sue might respond 2S, which I would have to convert to 3D, which for us is to play (a systemic agreement without which Stayman on this hand would not be a practical proposition). That wouldn't be my favoured outcome, but it wouldn't necessarily be disastrous.

All that having been said, Pass was clearly an option, and probably the call I should have made. But if I have a weakness at the bridge table (I need an Emoji symbol here) it is that I am inclined to be too 'active'. So I bid 2C. This was the full auction.

<u>W</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>S</u>
1N	P	2C	P
2H	P	P	P

Sue did her best in Two Hearts, but as you can see it was a terrible contract. The hearts don't break; the spade ruffs weren't needed; the diamonds lay badly; and she was immediately forced in clubs. Six tricks proved to be the limit, for an ugly minus 200. Two Diamonds would have made; Three Diamonds would have been one down. One No Trump would not have been pretty, but most Wests who played in that contract got out for one down. Minus 200 got us a measly 5% on the board.

I bid against the room. Did I bid against the odds? - because that is what matters. The result doesn't support me, so perhaps I was wrong. Perhaps I should file it under 'too much imagination'. We didn't recover, and the event petered out to a disappointing conclusion.

GD