

CAUTIOUS BIDDER [23]

If you watch top players in action, for example on BBO, you will observe that their bidding decisions are considerably more aggressive than one finds at club level – so much so as almost to invite the conclusion that they are playing a different game. This is an approach that I also favour, to the best of my ability, partly by reason of temperament (I like to be aggressive), but also because I believe it has practical utility. In other words, it accords with my understanding of the bridge scoring system, along with my estimation of my opponents' frailties.

The following hand is a case in point. It arose last weekend, in the North Wales Swiss Pairs, held in the well-appointed Venue Cymru, Llandudno. It was a long way to travel, but the drive through mid Wales was enjoyable, as was the bridge.

Board 43, Dealer South; both non-vul

	♠732	
	♥5	
	♦A74	
	♣QJ8652	
♠KQ5		♠86
♥J8642		♥KQ103
♦K3		♦J10952
♣A94		♣103
	♠AJ1094	
	♥A97	
	♦Q86	
	♣K7	

Sue and I sat North/South against the North Wales pair of Liz Commins and David Stevenson. Sue opened One Spade (playing 5 card majors) and I considered my options. I could raise to Two Spades, which many would consider the standard action on the hand. I couldn't bid Three Spades as that would promise four trumps. The only other option, and the one I adopted, was to bid Two Clubs. This notionally promises at least a 9 count on our methods, but I thought my playing strength was up to it. I had three card trump support (we would eventually be playing in spades), along with a ruffing value, an Ace, and a long side suit. I thought it was powerful.

Sue rebid Two Spades and I had another little cogitate. I might have passed, but I still had the hand I'd started with, and I still liked it. So I bid an invitational Three Spades, and Sue accepted – as she should. She was certainly non-minimum. This was the full auction:

<u>W</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>S</u>
			1S
P	2C	P	2S
P	3S	P	4S
P	P	P	

It was a thin contract, but a reasonable one. My finessing friend tells me that Four Spades can be made if played by South, but should go down if declared by North. It's not difficult to see why: a diamond lead through the Queen scuppers the contract, whereas diamonds cannot be attacked with advantage when West is on lead.

Still, theory is one thing; could the hand be made in practice? As you can see, declarer has two more or less inescapable trump losers. She is also bound to lose a club. She cannot therefore afford to lose a diamond, or for that matter a heart.

West led a heart and Sue took her Ace. There are a number of possible lines, but Sue decided to go after heart ruffs in the dummy. Fair enough. She ruffed a heart, and then played a club to hand, East contributing a helpful 10 (giving true count in the suit). West took her Ace, but found herself with no very attractive return. She tried the King of diamonds – a reasonable shot. Sue won, and cashed the Queen of clubs. She then played the Jack of clubs, being reasonably confident that West would follow to this card. East ruffed this, and Sue over-ruffed.

We have reached the critical point in the hand. Sue now needs to lay down her Ace of spades. After all, provided she ruffs her third heart, and discards her losing diamond on a winning club, she can afford two trump losers.

But Sue ruffed her third heart immediately, without playing the Ace of trumps. Now, having ruffed the heart, when she played a winning club off dummy East could ruff in. Sue's losing diamond in hand could not be discarded – or if it was, her total of losers would rise to four.

Fortunately for Sue, this is not what happened. East unaccountably decided to preserve his second low trump for another day. He perhaps thought his partner could ruff this trick just as well as he. Anyway, he discarded. Sue's diamond went away, and it was indeed West who had to ruff. But in doing so she fatally weakened her own trump holding. Accordingly, when Sue (belatedly) played the Ace of spades, West's Queen fell. So declarer lost just a club, a ruff, and *one* spade. Contract made.

Did I mention the opponents' frailties? Playing in the European Championships (say), declarer would have had to get this right, because the opponents would not be so generous. But the contract itself was a good one.

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