

CAUTIOUS BIDDER [26]

This week I've taken a hand from the Tuesday evening club game (24/7). It is my impression – although hard to prove – that the standard at Cardiff on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings has risen somewhat since I first started to play here. Either that or I'm getting worse. It makes it harder to score well, but I find it more enjoyable. It should also be a source of satisfaction to the players that they belong to a club where the average standard is above that of other clubs in the area (or indeed in Wales as a whole).

The following hand prompted these musings. It might be considered a routine slam, but there is no such thing as a routine slam in the club game. I thought the result across the field was interesting. Eight of the eleven East/West pairs bid to Six No Trumps, all of them making (one with a miraculous over-trick). One pair over-reached to Seven No Trumps, going down one, and just two pairs stopped in game.

This was the hand.

Board 25, Dealer North; East/West vul

	♠J52	
	♥J106	
	♦Q82	
	♣J1063	
♠AK		♠Q743
♥KQ5		♥A3
♦K963		♦A105
♣K987		♣AQ42
	♠10986	
	♥98742	
	♦J74	
	♣5	

You can see that the club suit breaks badly (requiring a double dummy line to arrive at four tricks), but that the diamonds are kind. This means that in a no trump contract declarer needs to desist from clubs after two rounds of the suit and turn her attention to diamonds. It's probably best to take an immediate finesse, catering for various possibilities, the most likely of which is the 3/3 break. Diamonds do indeed break 3/3 and that brings your total number of tricks to twelve. All declarers seem to have managed it.

When Sue and I played the hand, Sue (correctly) had her eye on higher things. This was our auction.

W	N	E	S
	P	1C	P
1D	P	1N	P
2C	P	2S	P
3C	P	3N	P
6N	P	P	P

We play a weak no trump, with 5 card majors. A minor suit opening promises a minimum of 3 cards in the suit.

Note that despite holding a strong hand as West, Sue did not make an immediate jump bid. It is very silly to use up your own bidding space, so despite holding 18 'points' she contented herself with a One Diamond response. Quite right too. My 1N rebid promised a balanced 15-17, and Sue's Two Clubs was 'checkback'. I had an undisclosed four card spade suit, so I showed it. Sue's Three Club bid then promised four cards in that suit and was 100% game forcing (NB any suit continuation is game forcing following the 2C enquiry – an absolutely vital component of the checkback method).

The reason for bidding Three Clubs was that Sue was not prepared at that stage to content herself with the small slam. She reasoned – correctly – that Seven Clubs might be 'on' and wanted to explore for a 4/4 club fit. This was because, if I held four clubs, to play in that strain would probably generate an extra trick. Good thinking! I should at this point have bid Four Clubs, owning up to my fourth club. But I didn't. I thought my hand was so flat that I might as well press on with no trumps. I should have trusted my partner.

Had I bid Four Clubs, as I should, we would have embarked on a cue-bidding sequence (Four Diamonds, then Four Hearts), then by a '5 Ace' Roman Key Card enquiry from West, following which we would have bid the Grand Slam in clubs. The full sequence would have been:

W	E
	1C
1D	1N
2C	2S
3C	4C
4D*	4H*
4N**	5D***
5H****	7C*****

*cue bid, showing first or second round control

**Roman Key Card Ace enquiry

*** 0 or 3 Aces (bound to be 3, in practice, given the rest of the auction)

**** do you also have the Queen of trumps?

***** looks like it

So, as you can see, this lapse of discipline on my part saved us from a very bad board. Seven Clubs is a more than reasonable contract – comfortably with the odds – but it doesn't make. If trumps break 3/2, Seven Clubs is 'cold'. You have twelve top winners and a ruff. But the 4/1 club break dooms the contract.

Even Six No Trumps was at risk on the 4/1 club break, requiring declarer to conjure up a third trick in diamonds – which duly materialised.

In a top class event I would expect around half the pairs to bid to Seven Clubs, all of them going one down. That is much less likely at club level, particularly given that the grand slam has to be in a minor, with just a 4/4 fit. Still, I think the result across the field last Tuesday was one to be quietly pleased about.

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