

CAUTIOUS BIDDER [27]

The WBU August Green Point events were held at the Lysaght Institute in Newport last weekend – Pairs on the Saturday, Teams on Sunday. Colin Simcox was in sole charge (despite the event being held on two floors) and coped magnificently. Still, to expect one director to cope with thirty tables given this layout was hardly reasonable. I know we're trying to save money, but this should not put at risk the efficient running of the event. Fortunately for all of us, Colin is an amenable character, as well as being highly skilled in the role.

As usual there was no shortage of interesting hands. I've picked out this one from the Teams on Sunday.

Board 29, Dealer North; both vul

	♠9653	
	♥3	
	♦J643	
	♣K974	
♠AJ2		♠K84
♥AK54		♥J87
♦AQ		♦K109752
♣J852		♣Q
	♠Q107	
	♥Q10962	
	♦8	
	♣A1063	

There were 29 tables, and twenty-seven East/Wests played in Three No Trumps. (One pair played in Four Hearts and another in Five Diamonds, neither of them making.) This was the very simple auction at the table where Sue and I sat East/West.

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

Three No Trumps is obviously the place to be, but of the twenty-seven pairs who bid it, only eight made it (bumped up to nine following a director's ruling, which I'll come to later). How come?

The explanation is readily apparent. Look at that diamond suit. The contract is 'cold', but declarer needs to take care. Sue received a spade lead to the Queen and Ace. This is Teams bridge, so the overriding priority is to make your contract. The critical number you need to have in mind is nine (or four, if you're thinking losers). If diamonds break 3/2 you have an easy eleven tricks, but what if they don't? Any declarer who simply cashed Ace/Queen of diamonds and assumed that the King of spades would provide an entry to the remaining diamonds was booked for defeat when the diamonds didn't run.

Fortunately Sue had taken her morning Sanatogen. She spotted the potential problem in the diamond suit, and also noted that the club suit was safely 'stopped' (thanks to that

critical eight of clubs!). Accordingly at trick two she cashed the Ace of diamonds and then - 'key play', as Andrew Robson would say - overtook the Queen of diamonds with dummy's King. Her foresight was rewarded when diamonds did indeed break 4/1. No matter, she was able to continue the suit and establish her length winners in diamonds for the loss of one trick. North didn't find the club switch when in with the Jack of diamonds so Sue emerged with ten tricks in total.

An initial club lead would have been more threatening, but declarer may be able to work out that the club suit divides 4/4, in which case the need to take the safety play in diamonds still applies. The fact that a majority of declarers went down suggests that too many players are attuned to matchpoints, with its premium upon maximising the number of tricks garnered on each hand, in which case this classic safety play is liable to elude them.

At one table where declarer failed to find the winning line the director was called at the conclusion of the hand. The declarer reported that South had hesitated prior to contributing her singleton eight of diamonds, and that this had deflected her from overtaking the diamond Queen. This was presumably on the basis that when North followed to the second diamond she 'knew' the suit was breaking. Having spoken to the players, and established as best he could that the eight of diamonds had been played slowly (albeit strongly denied by South), the director ruled that there would be an adjustment to Three No Trumps making.

I wasn't at the table, so I can't comment on South's tempo, which was disputed. I know she is in general a deliberate player, so maybe there is room for differing interpretations. I understand the reason for adjusting the score, and I trust Colin's judgement implicitly in these situations. Nonetheless I do wonder – even allowing that declarer had drawn the inference she claimed from South's tempo – whether the adjustment in this case was right. After all, declarer had a 100% winning line. The contract was cast iron. Declarer abandoned that 100% line in favour of a markedly inferior line, based on her opponent's tempo. I am not a director (thank goodness), but I think this would be an interesting hand for discussion at a director's forum.

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