

CAUTIOUS BIDDER [30]

Club bridge at Cardiff over the summer months is enlivened by the Isabel Evans Summer Ladder, a three month competition in which players compete to achieve the highest average percentage score over Tuesday and Wednesday evenings and Thursday afternoon. Your best six scores count towards your average. Obviously the more games you play, the better your chances. It also helps to play with a series of brilliant partners.

The summer ladder is named in honour of Isabel Evans because this was a competition that Isabel particularly enjoyed, and had won on three occasions. I have won it for the past few years and had every intention of doing so again this year. Unfortunately I've had to cope with a domestic uprising. Sue posted a series of fine scores though the mid and late summer, whilst I struggled. Maybe it was the heatwave. At the same time we were both under attack from Ian Evans and Richard Hughes, who were cutting a swathe through Thursday afternoons.

It's all over now, and Sue has won the summer ladder, a result that I have to pretend to be pleased about. My last chance to do something about it came last Wednesday, when I partnered Aida Aris. I needed to score about 70% and had spent the day in a trance-like state, seeking to build psychic energy. It didn't work. Things went awry from the very first round, when Aida and I played Steve Webb and Tim Barsby.

Board 2; Dealer East; North/South vul

	♠K106	
	♥52	
	♦Q1052	
	♣AK107	
♠Q7		♠J853
♥Q763		♥J1084
♦943		♦6
♣J953		♣8642
	♠A942	
	♥AK9	
	♦AKJ87	
	♣Q	

This was the bidding at our table. I was East, and Tim Barsby sat South.

W	N	E	S
		2D*	X
2H	3H*	P	4N
P	6N	P	P
P			

At favourable vulnerability I like to bid as much as possible on weak hands. The 2D opening was 'weak' (no argument there) and showed both majors. Aida bid 2H (she might have raised pre-emptively to 3H, to make life as difficult as possible for our opponents). Had we been doubled in Three Hearts we would have gone for minus 1100, which would have been an excellent score for us. As it was Tim and Steve did very well to reach the small slam in no trumps. Admittedly North/South are cold for Seven Diamonds, but that is a very difficult contract to reach given the opposition bidding. 6NT rated to give them a

more than reasonable score.

Playing in no trumps Tim had twelve tricks on top, but of course this was matchpoints, and with cavalier disregard for my summer ladder prospects he went in search of a thirteenth.

Aida led a low heart, and Tim won. He then played five rounds of diamonds, a club, and a spade. All the time he was doing something that is not exactly routine in club bridge, namely counting the opponents' discards. Eight rounds having been completed, Tim was in dummy with the following cards yet to be played. Neither Aida nor I were enjoying the experience.

	♠10	
	♥5	
	♦ -	
	♣AK10	
♠Q		♠J85
♥Q		♥J8
♦ -		♦ -
♣J95		♣ -
	♠A94	
	♥A9	
	♦ -	
	♣ -	

Tim next played a top club. I parted with a spade, as did declarer, as Aida followed suit. Next came another top club. What was I supposed to do now? I was down to J8 in both major suits, and had to find a card. A further spade discard would obviously be fatal, so, hoping for the best, I jettisoned my penultimate heart. But Tim, very annoyingly, had been counting the heart discards. He threw another spade, baring his Ace, and retained the Ace and 9 of hearts. He then crossed to hand, and the 9 of hearts was his thirteenth trick.

Aida had to maintain a club guard in order to prevent Tim having four winners in that suit. I had to guard spades. Neither of us was then able to keep a heart guard. A classic double squeeze. That's pretty classy play for a Wednesday evening. It almost reconciled me to losing the summer ladder. Well played Tim. And – through gritted teeth – well done Sue.

GD