

## CAUTIOUS BIDDER [32]

Last Sunday the West Wales Bridge Association held an open Swiss Pairs event – a commendable initiative. The event was directed by our own Sarah Amos and several pairs from the East attended, contributing to a total entry of thirty pairs. Sue and I failed to distinguish ourselves, with the following hand, played against Mike Pownall and Tony Disley, providing one instance of our self-harming tendencies.

**Session One; Board 12; Dealer West; North/South vul**

	♠83	
	♥1063	
	♦AKQ72	
	♣875	
♠QJ1054		♠76
♥7		♥AKQ9852
♦1096		♦J5
♣AQ104		♣63
	♠AK92	
	♥J4	
	♦843	
	♣KJ92	

No need to set out the auction in full. Mike, sitting East, opened Four Hearts and played there. Sue led the spade King, which held the trick (8 of spades from me).

My 8 had to be a singleton or top of a doubleton. Still, Sue had no wish to set up a stack of spade winners in dummy so she decided – reasonably enough – that she needed to switch. Her choice was a diamond. Which diamond? It's normal, holding three small cards, to begin with the middle card of three, followed by the highest, then the lowest. This 'middle-up-down' carding method is pretty universal in UK bridge, although other carding agreements are of course possible. However, in this instance Sue thought she had a problem. Leading a low card will generally indicate possession of an honour in the suit, and Sue was worried that her middle diamond, which happened to be the 4, would suggest to her dopey partner that she held a high diamond and so would welcome the return of the suit. In order to help him avoid this mistake (and he is distressingly prone to error these days) she chose instead to advance the diamond 8.

Sue couldn't know that I had such a splendid diamond holding so I silently congratulated her on finding the diamond switch. I won, and played a second diamond winner, Sue following with the 4 (note: the 4, not the 3, Sue having a principled objection to giving the wrong count twice in the same suit on the one hand). Simpleton that I am, I read Sue for a doubleton diamond and carried on with my third 'winning' diamond. It was disappointing to see Mike ruff that card, although the true cost wasn't immediately apparent.

Mike Pownall has been around the block a few times and he was about to punish us for our mis-defence. He ran off all his hearts, and Sue was to find herself in the python-like grip of a positional squeeze. She was the guardian of both black suits, and had to discard before dummy. If you're not familiar with squeeze play you might like to try it yourself, perhaps employing actual playing cards to make the position clear. Mike needed the club finesse to succeed, but he needed that anyway, so the positional squeeze was merely an added bonus. It was a play he could execute in his sleep.

Could we have done better – without Sue cashing her second spade winner at trick two? Of course. Having cashed my second diamond winner, I needed to switch back to spades. There's no squeeze in that case – we would have cashed our four winners. But I was diverted by my partner's presumed doubleton diamond. Had Sue shown her true length in diamonds I would have needed to recognise that it was essential to return a spade at trick 4. Would I have been up to that, rather than woodenly carrying on with a third diamond? I hope so, but since the situation didn't arise in that form, I'll make no claims.

Should I perhaps have taken more note of Mike's Jack of diamonds? If the Jack was a true card, Mike had a doubleton and Sue must have started with three diamonds. But what if the Jack wasn't a true card? What if Mike had started with three diamonds and a singleton spade? He might still have dropped the Jack on the second round of the suit. If that was the layout and I had switched to a spade after cashing just two diamonds, Mike would ruff and the spade/club squeeze would still operate. I'd have to leave the country.

For the future, I'll ask Sue not to make these 'helpful' adjustments to normal carding, in the manner of a friendly girl guide helping some doddering old fool cross the road whilst steering him into the path of oncoming traffic.

Under the Swiss format one's reward for playing badly is to be drawn to play opponents who are playing equally badly. See this next hand, which arose in the second session.

### Session Two; Board 16; Dealer West; East/West vul

	♠96	
	♥K853	
	♦Q10	
	♣Q7543	
♠K84		♠AQJ75
♥Q		♥A762
♦732		♦AK96
♣AK10962		♣-
	♠1032	
	♥J1094	
	♦J854	
	♣J8	

West opened and East drove to slam in spades. Sue led a trump. Declarer went through various contortions, but failed to arrive at twelve tricks. Should she have made it? Certainly. Bridge is a game of logic, and counting. If you don't like counting you can still enjoy the game, but it doesn't do much for your prospects.

The necessary thinking is best done at trick one. Declarer needed twelve tricks. How could she arrive at that number? She might reasonably expect to make five spades (the number of spades in the long trump hand, augmented by the King in dummy). Plus the Ace of hearts, the Ace/King of diamonds, and the Ace/King of clubs. That's ten. Two more tricks are needed. They can only come from heart ruffs in the dummy (the short trump hand).

So, where to win the opening spade lead? With the King! - you need that card to pull its full weight. After all, trumps may break 4/1, in which case you can't afford to use the King for

ruffing.

So here we go: King of spades; heart to the Ace; heart ruff; diamond to hand; second heart ruff; last time in dummy(!) - don't forget to cash the Ace/King of clubs, discarding two diamonds; then diamond back to hand; draw trumps; claim, conceding one heart loser.

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