

CAUTIOUS BIDDER [37]

The Malvern Congress these days has a tenuous relationship with the Malvern Hills. It has undergone a series of moves, finally migrating to a prep school north of Worcester, but it is still competently organised by the Worcestershire Bridge Association, and Sue and I continue to enjoy it. This year we played in just the Swiss Teams, held last Sunday, along with our team-mates Aida Aris and Simon Gottschalk. Fifty-two teams participated – an impressive turn-out.

This was a critical hand late in the event.

Board 46; Dealer East; neither vulnerable

	♠7643	
	♥843	
	♦J932	
	♣Q4	
♠AQJ5		♠2
♥A96		♥KQJ52
♦AK107		♦8654
♣KJ		♣A62
	♠K1098	
	♥107	
	♦Q	
	♣1098753	

Simon and Aida, sitting East/West, bid as follows (Simon was East).

W	N	E	S
		1H	P
1S	P	2D	P
3C*	P	3H	P
4N*	P	5S*	P
6H	P	P	P

This was a well judged auction. Some would decline to open with Simon's hand, but I am firmly of the view that it's right to do so. It's not just any old ten count. The playing strength (and the easy rebid) amply justify opening, even if opening on those values would horrify traditionalists. Aida's quiet 1S response with her flat 22 point hand was also correct – no need to jump around, using up your own bidding space. Aida's 'fourth suit' bid of 3C was likewise well judged, creating the game force, following which Simon opted to rebid his heart suit rather than bid the tenuous 3NT when holding just the one club stop.

Aida drove to slam, as was inevitable, but she did well to avoid the non-making 6D, allowing that Simon might only have small cards in the suit. She also resisted the temptation to bid the grand slam in hearts. Simon had limited his hand, so she judged correctly that twelve tricks could well be the limit.

The opening 10 of clubs lead went to the Jack, Queen and Ace. Simon's next move was to advance his singleton 2 of spades and take an immediate finesse. Well done. He didn't care whether the finesse lost or succeeded, but he'd spotted that in order to ensure his contract he needed two spade tricks.

When the Queen of spades held the trick it simply remained for Simon to draw two rounds of trumps, ruff a club with the 9 of hearts, return to hand with a spade ruff, and claim. The Ace of spades took care of one diamond loser. Had the spade finesse lost, there would have been two spade winners in dummy, so the end result would have been the same.

At the other table in our match East/West likewise bid to Six Hearts. Sue found the attacking lead of the 10 of spades, and declarer took her Ace (no matter). She then drew two rounds of trumps, followed by the King and Ace of clubs, and a third club ruffed with the 9 of hearts. So far so good.

But then declarer had a blind spot. She needed to establish a spade winner. Instead, she ruffed a spade back to hand, drew my last trump, and cashed the Ace and King of diamonds. Oops. Diamonds didn't break, so she was down. Too late by that stage to establish a spade winner – she was out of entries to dummy.

That was a lucky one for us. Another way to go down would have been for declarer to ruff her third club with the 6 of hearts before drawing trumps, only to be over-ruffed by my 8.

So, count your winners, and take care. It's not enough to have a plan. It may not be a very good plan, so take your time and look for a better one. I think that was Bobby Fischer's advice to terrible chess players such as myself: when you think you've found a good move, look for a better one. Yes indeed; I must try that.

GD