

## CAUTIOUS BIDDER [40]

Last weekend saw the qualifying round of the English Bridge Union's prestigious Tollemache competition. The 'Tolle' is a teams of eight event (most counties play 5 pairs, allowing each pair an occasional rest), to which all the English counties and the four Welsh regions are invited. Of the Welsh, only East Wales takes up the invitation. This year our team comprised Sue and myself; Dave Birt and Gilly Clench; Chris Rochelle and Simon Gottschalk; Mike Pownall and Mia Deschepper; and the father/son combination of Simon and Jonny Richards. It was a stronger team than in the recent past, although not nearly as strong as in the East Wales 'glory' days (around fifteen years ago).

We were drawn in an eight team qualifying group, requiring us to play seven head to head matches, each of 14 boards. We won three of those, but three of the four losses were heavy, leaving us in last place in a closely fought group.

Bloodied but unbowed, I have the following observations.

High level teams bridge is as far removed from club bridge as it is possible to imagine. The bidding aggression on display is one stark difference. Many auctions are conducted at a level much higher than would be necessary against more 'civilised' opponents. Also, since everyone can play the cards (there are of course differences, but these are relatively minor), boards tend to be won and lost in the bidding. Bidding judgement is overridingly important, followed by defensive skill (in general) and judgement of the opening lead (in particular).

All those technical declarer plays so beloved of bridge writers – they hardly figure at all. My estimate of the varying level of importance attached to the component elements would be:

bidding: 75%

defence (general): 10%

the opening lead: 10%

declarer play: 5%

Let's look at a few hands.

### Session 2; Board 13; Dealer North; both vulnerable

	♠QJ10532	
	♥5	
	♦6	
	♣K9642	
♠A87		♠K64
♥AK76		♥Q10832
♦AKJ103		♦Q82
♣3		♣J10
	♠9	
	♥J94	
	♦9754	
	♣AQ875	

Sue and I sat East/West on this one (I was East) against Cambs & Hunts, the group winners. We were playing English international Dave Kendrick and his partner. As you can see, East/West are 'cold' for Six Diamonds or Six Hearts. Let's see how we got on.

W	N	E	S
	2S*	P	2N**
X	3H***	P	5C
X	P	P	P

Not so easy! 2S showed a weak hand with spades and a minor. 2N was an enquiry and (allegedly) constructive – that is to say, looking for game. Oh yes. 3H revealed North's second suit to be clubs and laid claim to being top of range (also arguable, but not a blatant fib). North's leap to 5C was what he'd had in mind from the outset. Sue did her best, doubling both times to show a good hand, and a hand with which she wished to compete. I didn't think I had enough to bid 5H over Five Clubs doubled, so that became the final contract. It went one down, so East/West collected 100. That is to say, 100 rather than 1430. Sue and I might each have done something different, but not so easy, was it?

At the other three tables in our match, the results were 5D by West +1; 4H by West +2; and 6H by East, making. The slam was bid by a Cambridge pair. So, coupled with the hopeless 5CX at our table, East Wales had a disastrous board.

Onwards and upwards. This next hand was played against Staffs and Shrops. Sue and I sat North/South against Paul Hackett and partner.

### Session 3; Board 19; Dealer South; East/West vulnerable

	♠10	
	♥1096	
	♦Q972	
	♣986532	
♠9754		♠AKJ832
♥QJ873		♥A54
♦J		♦10
♣Q107		♣KJ4
	♠Q8	
	♥K2	
	♦AK86543	
	♣A8	

This was our bidding (I was North). Given the chance I too can bid like a banshee.

W	N	E	S
			1D*
P	3D**	3S	5D
P	P	X	P
P	P		

Our 1D opening promises at least three cards in the suit. Our minor suit responses are 'inverted', so 3D was weak (no argument there). Sue bid on to game, not necessarily expecting to make, but secure in the knowledge that if 5D went down it was surely a good save against the likely East/West game. Well bid partner.

Sue had three inescapable losers, so East/West gained 100. They could of course have

made the vulnerable 4S, scoring 620, so that was an excellent board for us. It was replicated by Dave Birt and Gilly Clench at our other 'home' table, whereas both Staffordshire North/Souths sold out to Four Spades. So a huge board for East Wales, and sufficient to turn the match in our favour.

So much for the bidding. Now for an opening lead problem.

**Session 3; Board 9; Dealer North; East/West vulnerable**

♠AK3	♠J5	♠876
♥K10854	♥QJ6	♥972
♦J106	♦AQ854	♦K7
♣102	♣KQ6	♣J8543
	♠Q10942	
	♥A3	
	♦932	
	♣A97	

We played this one against the North-East. Sue and I sat North/South and bid as follows.

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

1D promised a minimum of three diamonds. The 1N rebid showed 14-17. 2C was 'checkback', and my 2D response denied three spades or four hearts and confessed to being lower range.

East led a club. I won in hand and followed the obvious line of playing on spades. Once the spade suit behaved I had my 9 tricks – three spades, two hearts, one diamond (no finesse, thank you) and three clubs. A routine board.

These were the results at the other three tables in our match:  
 3N by North, making; 3N by North, up one; and 3N by North, down three.

Down three?! What happened there? Well, this is what happened there. East led a heart. This was ducked, and West continued hearts. Jonny Richards, declarer on the hand, was now in severe trouble. Jonny calculated (correctly) that there was no point playing on spades. He would have to knock out both the Ace and the King, so the defence was ahead of him. So, forget the spades; he would need four diamond tricks. If he could bring the diamond suit in for that number he would have his nine. Accordingly, Jonny embarked on diamonds, following the normal line of playing low towards his Queen. Sadly, the King proved to be offside.....and the roof fell in. Bad luck – but credit to East for finding the heart lead.

Playing double dummy (with sight of all four hands), Jonny would of course have made his

contract, including four diamond winners. Unfortunately, promising player as he is, he cannot see through the backs of the cards.

It's a great event. I hope to be back next year.

GD