

CAUTIOUS BIDDER [41]

The Cardiff Mixed Pairs event was played over two weeks, the first of which went well for us (just as well, since the second session was a nightmare). We played this hand early on. It's a fairly routine slam, but routine slams tend to score well in the club game. Let's take a look at it.

Board 2; Dealer East; North/South vulnerable

	♠J1072	
	♥J10743	
	♦K7	
	♣87	
♠AK93		♠Q6
♥K		♥A8
♦AQJ98		♦10543
♣KJ9		♣A10643
	♠854	
	♥Q9652	
	♦62	
	♣Q52	

This was the bidding at our table, where Sue and I sat East/West. There are a few points of interest.

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

I am a firm believer in playing a weak no trump in club and indeed in tournament bridge. Even at the top levels of the game (which I don't inhabit) the costs and benefits are finely balanced. At less rarified levels, and especially when playing matchpointed pairs, the weak no trump confers an advantage. It comes up far more often (an interesting mathematical fact) and most pairs have developed better methods over this opening than they have following a 1NT rebid. Also, you avoid the short club opening and wide range 1NT response, each of which can create problems for their adherents. So I like to open a weak no trump on as many hands as possible, even shifting the range in a downward direction (to 10-13) at favourable vulnerability, as on this hand.

I also favour four suit transfers (including 2S for clubs and, as here, 2NT for diamonds). It's much harder to bid minor suit slams without this agreement. As with all transfer sequences, responder has the option of indicating liking for the suit shown by partner. On the above sequence my 3D rebid said that I had a good holding in diamonds (generally headed by an honour, but a 4 card suit is good enough). Playing transfers, responder can then show a second suit, so Sue's 3S call was natural. 4D confirmed that we were playing in that strain and invited cue bidding. I might have cue bid my heart control, but as I had the bare minimum I contented myself with 5D. Sue had no hesitation in bidding the slam.

As you can see, there was nothing to the play. In effect you have the diamond finesse for

Seven, so when the finesse lost I could claim my twelve tricks. Note that whilst 6NT will score better (worth having at matchpoints), it is an inferior contract, requiring declarer to guess the location of the Queen of clubs. Playing in 6D, there is no club guess; the potential club loser can be discarded on the Ace of hearts. You may not be able to work that out during the bidding, but it doesn't matter; playing in an eight or nine card fit will usually generate an additional trick.

I enjoyed this next one. Again we sat East/West.

Board 6; Dealer East; East/West vulnerable

	♠983	
	♥K10964	
	♦Q98	
	♣A8	
♠Q762		♠AJ105
♥J		♥AQ753
♦KJ65		♦A103
♣9763		♣2
	♠K4	
	♥82	
	♦742	
	♣KQJ1054	

We bid as follows.

W	N	E	S
		1H	2C
X	P	4S	P
P	P		

Note that Sue's Double promised four cards in spades – the unbid major. We make that an absolute rule; X doesn't show the more usual "other two suits" - not as far as we are concerned. Accordingly I could be confident of the eight card spade fit, and judged that my hand was worth game.

South led the King of clubs. There are various possible lines, but with clubs marked as being in the South hand, the cross-ruff looked the best bet (it seemed only fair that North should have most of the hearts).

If you're planning a cross-ruff, best cash your side suit winners first. If you don't take this precaution, your opponents may be able to discard from those suits, in which case your winners may suffer a cruel fate. Accordingly, I ruffed the second club, and embarked on diamonds. Greedily, I finessed (the wrong way), and lost to the Queen. Serve me right.

A spade was returned. No finesse this time, because a) I didn't think it would work; and b) I couldn't afford it. So, up with the Ace of spades. Then, nothing for it but to attempt to cash my two top diamonds. Luckily for me, my opponents followed to two more rounds of diamonds.....whew!

Now for the cross-ruff. Jack of hearts to the Ace (it would be foolish to finesse, as it represents risk with no reward); followed by a heart ruff; club ruff; heart ruff; club ruff.

That third club ruff (it was the third because I'd also ruffed at trick 2) was with my last spade in hand. With two tricks to go I had two hearts remaining in hand, whilst in dummy I had the Queen of spades (now singleton) and the thirteenth diamond. South had the King of spades (also singleton) and a master club. I led a heart, and South, despite having the master trump, could not prevent me from making my Queen.

In truth I am not much of a one for fancy declarer plays, and I had rather stumbled on this one. Still, it gave me a buzz. I had made my Queen of trumps *en passant* – the *coup en passant* being a term borrowed from the world of chess. So, not just a fancy declarer play, but a fancy declarer play with a foreign name (happily avoiding the more usual *petit déjeuner de chien*). Probably a first for this column.

GD