

CAUTIOUS BIDDER [42]

The South Wales Congress, held each year in Porthcawl, is one of my favourite events. This year it was celebrating its 65th anniversary. I used to travel over from Bath (and later, Bristol) and I remember being struck by the cosmopolitan nature of the event, with around half the field being made up of English and Irish visitors. I was also struck by the number of Green points on offer (I liked getting them in those days). We seem to have lost the Irish, but the Congress still attracts a good smattering of experienced English tournament players.

The Congress programme comprises Men's and Ladies' Pairs on Friday afternoon; Mixed Pairs on Friday evening; Open Pairs qualifying round and final for the 'Red Dragon' Trophy on Saturday; and the Teams Championship – likewise a qualifier and final – on Sunday.

I'll give a couple of hands from the Friday evening, when my partner was in fine form. By the time it came to the Teams final on Sunday - our fifth session of bridge in three days - we were both exhausted, but these two hands show what Sue is capable of when she's feeling sharp.

Board 6; Dealer East; East/West vulnerable

	♠964	
	♥A1065	
	♦A	
	♣AKQ76	
♠K10		♠J83
♥QJ87		♥943
♦Q107		♦K86542
♣10942		♣3
	♠AQ752	
	♥K2	
	♦J93	
	♣J85	

We were North/South, with Sue in the South seat. We bid as follows.

<u>W</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>S</u>
		P	1S
P	2C	P	2S
P	4C*	P	4H*
P	4N*	P	5C*
P	5D*	P	5H*
P	6S	P	

4C was a cue, agreeing spades as trumps. There followed a further cue and then a Roman Key Card enquiry. 5D asked for the Queen of trumps, and 5H said South held it, along with the King of hearts.

Sue's opening was bottom of range, and my bidding was typically aggressive. West led a top heart.

As you can see, declarer has plenty of side suit winners, but her trump holding is fragile to

say the least. Most declarers would look no further than the spade finesse, but Sue saw a possible extra chance. Still leaving herself the option of playing towards her Queen of trumps, her first move was to cash the Ace. This produced a small card on her right, and the 10 on her left.

Noting this, Sue's next move was to cross to the Ace of diamonds and play another spade towards her hand. East seemed unperturbed, contributing another low card (the 8).

Sue contemplated West's play of the 10 on the first round. Could West have played a false card – the 10 from 10 and a little one? Not possible – she'd seen all the low spades. Might West's original holding have been Jack/10 doubleton? Possible, but in that case the principle of restricted choice would come into play (West might have contributed the Jack). Sue decided that West's most likely original holding was doubleton King/10. So, after some agonising, she contributed a low card from hand.....and, slowly and reluctantly, West's King fell. Sue could then draw East's final trump and claim her contract.

Well done partner! – that was quite some play. It came early in the event and was a welcome confidence-booster, setting us on our way.

This next one was the *piece de resistance*.

Board 22; Dealer East; East/West vulnerable

	♠9765	
	♥103	
	♦7	
	♣A109854	
♠J84		♠KQ32
♥KQJ85		♥4
♦854		♦K10963
♣Q3		♣J72
	♠A10	
	♥A9762	
	♦AQJ2	
	♣K6	

We were still North/South. This was our bidding.

W	N	E	S
		P	1H
P	1S	P	2N
P	3H	P	3N

Some players would pass with the North hand, and I can't say I blame them. But when I'm faced with a choice between aggression and caution, I generally go the same way. Bidding on beyond 2NT might seem reckless, but I didn't see much point, even at matchpoints, in coming to rest on the pinhead of 2NT. Either that club suit was running or it wasn't. It didn't seem to be the time for half-measures.

Unfortunately for Sue (and for her optimistic partner), you can see that the club suit isn't running. Dummy was effectively dead. Still, Sue found a way. She ducked the King of hearts lead, and took the second heart with her Ace. Then she advanced the 6 of clubs –

small club from West – and inserted dummy's 8. East took her Jack (I don't think the possibility of ducking occurred to her), and played back a diamond.

Sue needed the diamond finesse, so she took it. Happily, her Queen held. Then she played the club King. Again happily – well, more than happily – West's Queen appeared and Sue overtook with dummy's Ace. The club suit was now running and Sue had her nine tricks. Well played, my resourceful partner!

Should West have read the position and withheld her Jack of clubs? Yes, if she'd paused to work out what declarer was up to, withholding the Jack had to be right. That would have been fine play. But all credit to Sue for spotting her only chance, and playing for it.

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