

CAUTIOUS BIDDER [43]

The final WBU event of this calendar year was held last Sunday. This was the WBU Graded Masters (alternatively, the Ranked Masters) in which the field is divided by reference to players' master point rank. It is the one event of the year when the spectacularly meaningless bridge master point system has any practical utility (apart, of course, from generating money for the national body).

This being Wales, we don't have many entries to our various tournaments, so the top rank for this event had to encompass everyone with a ranking of Senior Life Master or above. That element of the competition was held at just the one venue (Gwent Bridge Club). It was attended by nine pairs from the Cardiff region, plus one heroic couple who had travelled from Reading. There was no-one from the Mid, the North, or indeed the West. In other words the game wasn't too far removed from any Thursday evening at Cardiff Bridge Club. We played 45 boards, and scoring was by X-imps.

The other ranks played in four centres, in each of the four Welsh regions, so a glorified Simultaneous Pairs. The result of this lower ranks competition has still to be announced as I write, and perhaps will never be announced given the problems inherent in resolving a simultaneous event in which the participants' actual ranking lies buried within the files of the WBU Membership Secretary.

I can however report that the top section was won, fairly comfortably, by Filip and Diane Kurbalija. This next hand was one that Sue and I played against them (Filip and Diane sitting East/West).

Board 4; Dealer West; both vulnerable

	♠943	
	♥QJ95	
	♦J10	
	♣Q865	
♠AJ87		♠K1062
♥K108		♥A7
♦8		♦K753
♣K10942		♣J73
	♠Q5	
	♥6432	
	♦AQ9642	
	♣A	

This was the bidding at our table.

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

Filip and Diane play a strong no trump, 5 card majors, and a potentially short One Club opening with transfer responses. Once you know that, the bidding is reasonably self-explanatory.

I led the Jack of diamonds in response to my partner's diamond overcall. This held, so I continued with the 10 of diamonds which Filip ruffed. Many players would embark on trumps now, but Filip decided to postpone his decision in the trump suit. Instead he led a heart to dummy's Ace, and then a club off the dummy. Not obvious perhaps, but declarer has good instincts and his line proved to be a winning one.

Sue perforce took the first club with her Ace. She then thought it might be a good idea to try to give her partner a diamond ruff, possibly promoting a trump winner in the process, so she played a third diamond. Let's see how that went.....

Aware that I was out of diamonds, Filip knew there was no point in ruffing low, so he ruffed with his Jack. The Jack held. From a defensive point of view, not best.

No longer in any doubt about the location of the Queen of trumps, Filip then played two top trumps, felling Sue's Queen, and a third round of the suit to draw my last trump. He then conceded a trick to my Queen of clubs, that being the defence's third and final trick.

Well played. The spade game was bid and made at three of the five tables. Given the arcane arithmetic of pairs X-imping, that meant that Filip and Diane gained just over 5 IMPs on the board, whilst Sue and I incurred the same number of minus IMPs.

Thanks, once again, to Helen Houston, our hard-working and efficient Tournament Organiser who also doubled as Entry Secretary.

That's it for now folks. The sherry and mince pies beckon.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

GD