

CAUTIOUS BIDDER [45]

The first tournament of the new year was the Midland Counties Congress, held at the West Midlands Bridge Club in Solihull – a members club that owns its own salubrious premises, turning the rest of us green with envy. These days I struggle to muster the enthusiasm for two days travelling, so we played in just the Swiss Teams on the Sunday, Sue partnering Chris Rochelle and Nalini Dewan bravely consenting to partner me.

This was a hand on which Nalini and I did not shine, but which equally defeated our opponents at the other table.

Board 31; Dealer South; North/South vulnerable

	♠A32	
	♥KJ8	
	♦842	
	♣KQ94	
♠K109		♠QJ754
♥32		♥AQ9
♦AQJ97		♦10653
♣A75		♣J
	♠86	
	♥107654	
	♦K	
	♣108632	

Nalini and I sat East/West, and bid as follows.

<u>W</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>S</u>
			P
1N	P	2H*	P
2S	P	P	P

Something amiss there, given that I emerged with 12 tricks for the unusual and inglorious score of +230. What went wrong? Well, a couple of things, both instructive.

First, Nalini's hand as West is not a weak no trump opening – not in my book. Only 14 points, but a powerful five card diamond suit with an Ace and King outside. That's a strong – not a weak – 1NT opener, whatever the points tell you. So the bidding should go: 1D - 1S - 1N - 2C* - 2S - 4S. Easy-peasy.

Alternatively, if West opens 1N, she should break the transfer following my 2H (showing spades). Not Nalini's fault – we hadn't discussed this. But we have now. When the opener is upper range for her 1N, it's fine to break the transfer with just 3 card support for partner's major. After all, you have at least an 8 card fit, so show some enthusiasm. I've been employing this method for thirty years – and it works: when upper range with three OR four card support, bid 2N in response to the transfer. Responder should then 're-transfer' to get the hand played the right way up. So, in this instance: 1N - 2H* - 2N* - 3H* - 3S - 4S. Easy-peasy again. Oh well, next time.

We did better on this next one.

Board 49; Dealer North; both non-vulnerable

	♠J7643	
	♥2	
	♦7	
	♣KQJ543	
♠AK102		♠Q
♥QJ85		♥AK964
♦AJ10		♦KQ96
♣72		♣A96
	♠985	
	♥1073	
	♦85432	
	♣108	

Nalini and I were again East/West, and bid as follows.

W	N	E	S
	P	1H	P
2N*	P	3D	P
3S*	P	4N*	P
5S*	P	7H	P
P	P		

The key to bidding the Grand was Nalini's 'Jacoby' 2N response to my 1H opening. This promised an eight card heart fit and (at least) slam interest. Well bid partner. I had a huge hand in context and it only remained to check for Aces. 5S promised two of the five 'Aces', plus the Queen of hearts. As you can see, there was nothing to the play since I had thirteen top tricks.

At the other table East/West had to cope with a bidding barrage from Chris and Sue, sitting North/South. This was their auction.

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

Well bid, team-mates. Bridge is a much easier game when the opponents are content to let you get on with it. But Chris and Sue had a useful agreement in their armoury – that the 2S opening promised spades and a minor. It's what Sue and I play, and it's a good weapon. Here it was put to excellent use by Chris, and Sue contributed enthusiastically. Their youthful opponents might still have bid the Grand, but it would have involved an element of guesswork so it's not surprising that they fell short. Well bid Chris and Sue – full marks for enterprise.

GD