

CAUTIOUS BIDDER [46]

The fifth round of matches in the Cardiff League was played this week. The atmosphere was positively decorous.

It has been observed, correctly, that a great many bridge contracts that are defeated could in fact have been made. It is also the case that a good many contracts that could - and perhaps should - be defeated, are allowed to make. Given the way I tend to bid, I am always comforted by the latter thought.

The hand below gave rise to a useful swing.

Board 8; Dealer West; both non-vulnerable

♠6	♠A8	♠QJ5432
♥AQ5	♥J9832	♥K6
♦1052	♦AQ	♦K87
♣Q109876	♣KJ53	♣42
	♠K1097	
	♥1074	
	♦J9643	
	♣A	

At the other table in our match North/South bid to an optimistic 3NT. The number of 'points' did not really warrant this, the hands did not fit especially well, and there was no obvious source of tricks. So 3NT went down.

Sue and I tried a different tack.

W	N	E	S
P	1H	1S	2D
P	2N	P	4H
P	P	P	

That was pretty optimistic as well. We play a weak no trump and five card majors, so my 1H opening was unexceptional. East might have made a weak jump overcall in spades, but opted for a simple 1S. Sue's 2D response was pushing it a bit, but I never mind that. Anyway, given my opening bid her hand had excellent trick potential and there was no obvious alternative. This was Teams, so bid up.

4H should go down, but still, without my doing anything clever, and without the defenders perpetrating any egregious errors, the contract made. I thought it instructive to follow the play, and to work out precisely where it was that the defensive wheels came off. Bear in mind that at trick one the defence was winning, which is to say that I didn't have ten tricks.

This is how it went:

*Queen of spades to declarer's Ace
*Heart towards dummy, East taking his King
*spade returned, low from dummy, ruffed by West with the Queen of trumps
*diamond from West, taken by declarer with his Ace
*club to the Ace
*King of spades, ruffed by West with the Ace of trumps, declarer discarding his Queen of diamonds.

That was effectively it. I had the remainder of the tricks. So at what point did the defence move from the black into the red?

The first thing to say is that they were, in my view, unlucky. East had no reason to suppose that his partner's spade ruffs would have to be with master trumps. From his point of view the defence would have looked reasonable enough.

There are various things that the defence might have done differently, but it's perhaps not entirely obvious at what point in the hand the critical juncture was reached. This came in fact at trick four. When West ruffed his partner's spade continuation with the Queen of trumps, it looks very tempting to do as he did and play back a diamond. You might even say it looked obvious. Had I been in West's seat I might have done the same.

It was unfortunate for the defenders that I, having observed West's need to ruff with the Queen, had an obvious alternative to pinning my hopes on the diamond finesse (which as it happens I was convinced would lose).

But for the defence, the diamond could wait. There was something much more urgent that West had to do at trick four, and that was to place the Ace of trumps on the table. If you consider the whole hand, and particularly the ruffing potential in dummy, that is fairly clearly the play that needs to be made.

I suppose it's a case of seeing one obvious play, but then taking time to reflect on what might be a better one.

GD