

CAUTIOUS BIDDER [110]

The Thursday evening game at Cardiff Bridge club has acquired a reputation as the 'strong' club night, which is unfortunate in that it deters some players from attending, and doubly unfortunate in that the calibre of bridge on display is often strong only if viewed from the perspective of planet Zog. Perhaps you'd care to judge for yourselves.

I should perhaps add that there is one feature of Thursday evenings that is distinctive, and that other clubs might care to imitate, namely that the scoring method employed is Pairs X-IMPs, which mimics Teams scoring and is therefore good practice for that form of the game.

This hand arose last Thursday. Sitting East/West, my partner and I bid efficiently to the non-making Six Spades. (Six Diamonds is an alternative, and just as bad.) Our bidding was as follows:

W	E
	1N
2C	2S
4C*	4H*
4N**	5D**
6S	

* controls

**RKCB – the response shows 1 of the 5 'Aces'

Dealer East; E/W vul

	♠943	
	♥A54	
	♦83	
	♣J9876	
♠AQ86		♠K1072
♥Q6		♥K3
♦AKJ5		♦Q1042
♣A52		♣K103
	♠J5	
	♥J109872	
	♦976	
	♣Q4	

As usual I was minimum for my opening bid (OK, sub minimum), and the mirror image hands meant that I was booked for a club loser in addition to the seemingly inevitable heart. However, if you study the hands carefully you will discover a small quirk that might give declarer hope. This is a favourite theme of mine: I have been in so many hopeless contracts that I am something of a specialist in detecting a glimmer of light where others (my favourite partner, for example) perceive only Stygian gloom.

Say you get the Jack of hearts lead, as seems most likely. Assuming you play low from dummy, is North going to put up the Ace? I don't think so. It wouldn't be right on general card play principles. Or if South finds another lead – say a trump – and in the fullness of time declarer plays a heart off the dummy, is North going to put up the Ace at that point?

Again, I don't think so.

If North withholds his Ace when the heart suit is first broached, Six Spades is not without hope. Declarer can run off all his trumps, followed by all his diamonds. The count has not been rectified, so there is no squeeze, but North has to do the right thing. He has to bare his Ace of hearts and retain three clubs. Will he do that? I guess he should, but some defenders would opt to retain a second heart, jettisoning a club, in which case declarer's 3 of clubs would become his twelfth trick. I agree it shouldn't happen, but in my experience it often does.

Another possibility is to draw just three rounds of trumps, then eliminate the other suit in which you are 4/4 (diamonds or spades), and exit with a heart. North may give a ruff and discard. Or he may exit with the Jack of clubs – stranger things have happened.

So what happened at the table? Was the heart lead ducked? Or, if no heart was led, did I guess to lead a low heart off the dummy? – and did North withhold his Ace? If he did withhold the Ace of hearts, did he retain three clubs in the end game?

Not exactly. You see, I haven't given you the full bidding sequence. When Six Spades came back round to him, South started thinking. Then he asked some questions. Then he thought some more. And finally he emerged with Seven Hearts. That of course was doubled, and went for 1700. You see what I mean about planet Zog?

Plus 1700 was of course a huge score for us, but I wouldn't have minded having a go at Six Spades. One East/West pair did bid to slam and play there – in Six Diamonds as it happens. They made it.

GD