

CAUTIOUS BIDDER [113]

This past weekend saw a slightly unfortunate clash between the Stan Berger pairs and the recently resuscitated Ladies' Pairs and Teams. After several years in which the latter event has been talked about, and entries solicited, but not actually played, this year it actually happened – so well done to all those involved in breathing new life into what I confess to have considered to be a corpse. The only unfortunate thing was that the date chosen had already been set for the Stan Berger. I suppose, since the Ladies' event was comparatively late out of the blocks, it was bound to clash with something, but it is to be hoped that such clashes will be avoided in future (as they easily can be, with a bit of co-operation on everyone's part).

Anyway, the Ladies' event appears to have been a notable success, which means that the effort put into reviving it was well worth it. The Stan Berger meanwhile was somewhat depleted, especially following a few late withdrawals, leaving just ten pairs. Nonetheless a good competition resulted, with two complete Howell movements under Bill Parkinson's direction. I think everyone enjoyed it, with my partner Jason He and myself doing our best to add to that enjoyment.

The field was quite tightly packed, with Filip and Diane Kurbalija winning, and Sue and Aida 2nd. This hand, which Jason and I played against the eventual winners, was a missed opportunity for all but one of the North/South Pairs.

Dealer East; Both non-vul

	♠85	
	♥Q8753	
	♦9	
	♣A10976	
♠KQJ106		♠A9432
♥62		♥K10
♦83		♦KQJ52
♣KQJ2		♣4
	♠7	
	♥AJ94	
	♦A10764	
	♣853	

At our table the bidding was as follows:

W	N	E	S
		1S	2D
3D	P	3S	P
4S	P	P	P

The final contract was the same at all tables, making eleven tricks (twice), ten tricks (also twice), and nine tricks once. So a contract that 'should' be defeated by two tricks made four times out of five. To what extent that 'should' deserves to be in scare quotes is really the subject of this article.

At our table Jason, having essayed quite a brave 2D overcall (I approve), led a MUD club. I took my Ace and played back a diamond. Jason won, and led a further diamond (the

seven as it happens) for me to ruff. It is not hard to see, looking at all four hands, what I need to do now. A heart from me at this point defeats the contract by two tricks. But I played back a club and that was that – Diane could win, draw trumps, and park her two heart losers on winning clubs.

I spent the rest of the round wondering how culpable this was – it's a hand that looks so easy for the defence. For example, had Jason opted to start with Ace and another diamond I could not have failed to return a heart, collecting my Ace of clubs in due course for two down. Even with the club lead, Jason might of course have cashed his Ace of hearts before giving me my diamond ruff. But - and I think this is quite a big 'but' - he would not have been confident that my diamond was a singleton. The same applies, perhaps, to his choice of the seven of diamonds as the card with which to give me my ruff. The seven was obviously not his lowest, but nor was it his highest. Again, had Jason been sure I was able to ruff this card he might have felt able to be a little more emphatic.

But I am still inclined to feel I should have got this right. I spent part of the last week watching the finals of the World Bridge Games on BBO: I didn't see too many contracts, down two tricks, being let through. In this case I had to ask myself which was more likely – that Jason, having overcalled 2D, had a singleton club or the Ace of hearts. He'd led a club, but the heart Ace was quite likely on the bidding. And was the 7 of diamonds not best read as requesting a heart return? On the whole I think it was. So I think I was at fault. By no means alone, as it transpired, but that's not much consolation.

GD