

CAUTIOUS BIDDER [116]

The Western League is an inter-area league comprising seven English counties along with East Wales. The League is played in three divisions over the winter months, generally on a Saturday, and the three division structure means there is scope for all East Wales members to get a game. Our organiser is Steve Webb, so get in touch with him if you haven't done so already.

Last weekend we played Devon. This was an instructive hand on which my partner earned a useful game swing for the East Wales A team.

Dealer North; both vul

	♠104	
	♥A1032	
	♦8	
	♣KJ10532	
♠AQJ73		♠8652
♥Q64		♥9
♦96		♦AQ7542
♣Q74		♣A9
	♠K9	
	♥KJ875	
	♦KJ103	
	♣86	

This was the bidding at our table, with Sue sitting West.

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

Obviously I couldn't underwrite Four Spades, but since I was bound to get there eventually I saw no point in faffing about in order to convey to the world at large what a difficult decision I thought I had. Anyway, it wasn't a difficult decision.

North cashed the Ace of hearts and switched to his singleton diamond, which Sue opted to duck to South's ten. The South player then gave his partner a diamond ruff, but Sue was in control.

She ruffed North's heart return; took a successful trump finesse; played a second round of trumps, the King falling; and crossed to the Ace of clubs in order to play Ace and another diamond. The diamonds were now established, and Sue still had the eight of trumps nestling in dummy with which to gain access to her diamond winners. Her Queen/seven of clubs went away on the two long diamonds, and that was ten tricks. Well played.

Can you see how the game might be defeated? I thought at the time that a club switch from South at trick three might do it, but in fact declarer should still prevail. No, in order to defeat the game, assuming optimal play by declarer, North has to lead a small heart at trick one!

You know what they tell you in beginners' classes: don't underlead side suit Aces against suit contracts? Good advice for the most part (which is more than can be said for a lot of the stuff taught in beginners' classes), but in bridge, for every rule there is a contra-example, and this is one. A low heart lead gives South a safe exit card, and also requires declarer do all her own work in generating tricks. She can't quite manage it.

So there you have it: next time you're defending a suit contract, underlead those side suit Aces!

GD