

CAUTIOUS BIDDER [119]

High level bidding judgement is one of the most important elements of the game, but it is not something you will find discussed in many bridge classes. To be fair, it's not an easy thing to teach - there is no substitute for having 'been there', which is to say, most players need plenty of experience of these decisions before they are likely to make a habit of getting them right.

Take this hand from the Malvern Congress Swiss Teams, played at the weekend.

Dealer North; E/W vul

	♠632	
	♥83	
	♦105	
	♣AQ8654	
♠108		♠AQJ94
♥AQ92		♥J107
♦AK872		♦QJ963
♣J3		♣void
	♠K75	
	♥K654	
	♦4	
	♣K10972	

At both tables in our match North took advantage of the favourable vulnerability to open the bidding Three Clubs. (If you are not in the habit of doing that at these colours, then you need to re-think your approach to the game since you are showering your opponents with IMPs).

East has three options following North's pre-emptive opening. She can Pass, Double, or bid Three Spades. Pass is feeble in the extreme given the powerful 5/5/3 shape, so that would not be my choice (obviously). There is a risk of getting too high on a misfit, but that's the point of pre-empts - to create risk. In this instance it is a risk that just has to be taken.

So, Three Spades or Double? I tend in general to opt for the suit bid when I have a decent 5 card major, but certainly in this instance Double works just as well, and possibly better. Either is acceptable, in my view.

What should South bid, if anything? If anything?! Give me a break: South has to bid Five Clubs. It's automatic to continue the barrage. That indeed was the sequence at both tables in our match: 3C – X – 5C.

Now we come to West, and the crux of the hand. What should West do over the opponents' Five Clubs call? The bid found at both tables in our match was Double. This was passed out (naturally), and went for a 500 penalty. A poor return indeed when East/West have a vulnerable slam on their way.

Was this just unlucky - a case of aggressive pre-emption gaining its just reward? No, I don't think so. Double is the wrong bid on the West hand. West has a powerful collection opposite partner's Double at the 3 level, and a healthy 5/4 shape. The opponents are

putting it to you, and you mustn't let them succeed in their nefarious intentions. The vulnerability, especially, argues for bidding on since you can surely make game, as a minimum. Any penalty is likely to represent meagre pickings in comparison. So West should bid Five Diamonds.

Will East go on to slam following a Five Diamond call from partner? Possibly; possibly not. It's not 100% clear in my view. The club void is a bonus, but the three card heart holding is a worry. So you might pass. I wouldn't blame anyone for passing. You don't want to punish an enterprising partner. But West shouldn't double Five Clubs; West has to bid - that is my main point.

How long does it take to get these calls right? Well, it depends, of course, on whether you are prepared to learn from experience. Most bridge players are 100% committed to not learning from experience. They prefer to carry on making the same decisions they've always made. But let's say you are one of those rare souls who wants to get better - how long will it take in that case? The answer is: years. Years and years. But enjoyable whilst you're about it.

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