

CAUTIOUS BIDDER [120]

The Welsh Premier League, which functions as the trial to aid selection for the teams to represent Wales in the home international championships, concluded this past weekend. The results can be found by following the link on the Home page of the WBU website. The Plackett team's lead from the first weekend was reduced somewhat, but they still emerged victorious, with the Tedd team in second place, and Murphy third. Denning/Thomas remained top of the Pairs (X-IMP) rankings, with Rees/Jones in second place.

The following hand was **Board 39** in the final match, by which stage most of us were feeling a little frazzled, especially those teams that were playing four-handed. I'm afraid it showed.

Dealer South; Both vul

	♠QJ	
	♥8642	
	♦942	
	♣K1098	
♠A108		♠4
♥AK7		♥QJ1093
♦653		♦AJ10
♣AQ72		♣J543
	♠K976532	
	♥5	
	♦KQ87	
	♣6	

You might think that the routine contract on the hand is Four Hearts played by East/West. Not quite. Four Hearts was the final contract at just three of the eight tables in play, once making and twice going down. Two pairs played in Three No Trumps, which doesn't look optimal, but made on each occasion, no doubt assisted by the somewhat fortunate spade position. One pair played in Five Hearts, down one, and there was one heroic Six Hearts, also down one. That leaves just one other result, which I will come to in a moment.

First let us consider how the play might go in Four Hearts. At my table Sue, sitting West, was declarer after South had opened a weak Two Spades. North led the Queen of spades and Sue won. She has five heart tricks, and a spade, and therefore requires four tricks from the minor suits. Deciding that two of those could come from diamonds, Sue opted to take a diamond finesse at trick two. South won, and returned his singleton club. Sue let this ride, so North was able to win, and give his partner a club ruff. That is three tricks lost already, but declarer is not dead yet. She has her five trumps, a spade, and now just two clubs. A second finesse in diamonds, if successful, would see her home. A reasonable prospect, especially given South's weak opening.

As you can see, South has both diamond honours. However, after all the hearts had been played, plus the two remaining clubs, Sue was down to a two card ending. She had the 10 of spades in hand, plus a diamond, facing Ace/Jack of diamonds in the dummy. And what is South down to? What South *should* have come down to was a singleton diamond honour (following a *smooth* diamond discard) and the King of spades. In which case Sue would have taken the diamond finesse and gone two down.

But it had been a long weekend for South, and he discarded his King of spades, retaining two diamonds. Unfortunately it had also been a long weekend for Sue, and she did not realise that her spade 10 had become good. So she took the diamond finesse anyway, for one down.

Perhaps, reading this, you're thinking that the standard in the Premier League is not all it's cracked up to be, and you ought to give it a go yourself next year. I don't blame you - and that's before I tell you what happened at the final table in play, which was the other table in our match.

Our team-mates were Simon Gottshchalk and Chris Rochelle. Anyone who knows Simon cannot but be aware that he has a multitude of bees buzzing in his bonnet, and it's very difficult when in his company to avoid being buzzed by them. His latest, which I'm distressed to say he got from Sue, is the notion of 'the gap'. Most good players do not accept that there is a 'gap' between hands that merit a one level opening and those that fall within the category of a Weak Two. But Sue has always held that there is such a gap, and that with such hands it is necessary in the first instance to pass.

Sue was unwise enough to convey this theory to Simon, and he has adopted it with enthusiasm. Simon now sees gaps everywhere, and he saw one on this hand. Accordingly the bidding at the table where Simon and Chris Rochelle sat North/South was as follows.

<u>W</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>S</u>
			P*
1C	P	1H	1S**
1NT	P	2C	2S***
X****	P	P	P*****

*in the gap (allegedly)

**the gap is revealed to partner (maybe)

***the full flowering of gap bidding

****a hapless victim of gap theory

*****full gap theory requires a re-double at this point, but Simon departs from his own methods

Who can blame West for doubling? Gap theory is still in its infancy, and he'd probably never come across it before. Two Spades doubled made up one, for 870 to North/South and a 13 IMP gain (a shell-shocked West mis-defended to concede the overtrick).

Truly, an idea whose time has come.

GD