

CAUTIOUS BIDDER [125]

Welcome to 2017. I hope the new year treats you well, and that events on the national and world stage prove less catastrophic than 2016 has led us to expect. The Welsh Bridge Union is seeking a new Chief Executive, and I hope the powers that be choose well. They'd better, because bridge in Wales is sorely in need of a boost.

Last week Sue and I spent two days in London. We saw ART at the Old Vic - a wonderful evening - and then took in the Swiss Teams on the final day of the Year End Congress. What a contrast to the bridge scene at home! Eighty-four teams were in attendance, and scattered through the field were a host of young players – yes, young! - clearly enjoying their bridge, totally unintimidated by all the big names on display, and given a warm welcome by their more experienced opponents. I looked across at the table next to mine on one round and the player in my seat was about ten years old. Other in their early to mid teens were all about us. Talk about being made to feel ancient.

In Wales it appears we have practically forgotten that if the game is to survive we have to somehow regenerate ourselves. Some clubs, including those I am most familiar with, do make an effort to bring in new players through teaching, but of course what you get through that route are the middle-aged and older.....bridge as a game for retirees. Many clubs do not manage even that. They bemoan the fact that numbers are falling, but what is their strategy to arrest decline? Maybe they're pinning their hopes on people not dying - an interesting idea, but, to quote Damon Runyan, not the way to bet.

There are a few honourable exceptions to the general neglect of bridge as a pastime for the young. I know that in South Wales Sophie Cunningham and Simon Brindle are attempting to introduce their pupils to the game, and I understand they have had a good response. Is there anyone else doing the same? It's not apparent, based on my observations of the club and tournament scene – not yet anyway. If youngsters are to fall in love with the game there have to be a group of them – if only one or two make it into club bridge they probably won't stick around for long given that most of the other participants appear to be two generations older.

The other thing that really gets my goat is the attempt to separate off tournament players, and the tournament scene generally, from club play, and to present the former as hostile and intimidating. The 1st edition of the recently resurrected WBU Newsletter was a truly shocking document in that respect, giving positive encouragement to insularity and resentment.

It's a lot to expect of a new Chief Executive that they can bring about an upturn in participation in bridge in Wales, but we should never forget that we have one major thing going for us, and that is the game itself. Even badly taught, as I'm afraid it often is, bridge exerts its appeal across the age groups. (The standard of bridge teaching is another of my bugbears, but that's enough fulminating for one day.)

So, thanks to Neville Richards, who has worked hard and given it his best shot, and good luck to the new incumbent, whoever he or she may be.

Here's a hand from the final round of the New Year Swiss Teams. My team were rubbing along reasonably well until the final match, when we plummeted like a stone. This hand didn't help.

Board 48. West dealt; E/W vul

	♠QJ85	
	♥7653	
	♦54	
	♣J42	
♠3		♠9742
♥A1082		♥QJ9
♦62		♦J93
♣AQ10763		♣K95
	♠AK106	
	♥K4	
	♦AKQ1087	
	♣8	

At the table where Sue and I sat North/South the bidding was as follows.

<u>W</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>S</u>
1C	P	1S	X
2C	2H	3C	3D
all pass			

When Sue doubled and followed up with Three Diamonds she was of course showing a very good hand, but I didn't think I could do more, having bid a free Two Hearts in response to her initial double. What would have happened if Sue had made a second double, rather than bidding Three Diamonds? I would then have bid Three Spades - but does that show a spade *suit*, as distinct from a 'stop' in spades? I don't think so - not according to our general bidding agreements in competitive auctions.

It can be difficult to contemplate game when the opponents have opened the bidding and responder has bid a new suit, but in these days of light openings and fresh air responses that is a possibility that needs always to be borne in mind. It's even harder to contemplate bidding game in a strain that has been freely bid by the opponents. But that is what was required in this instance. As you can see, Four Spades is cold. Any ideas as to how we should have got to this, the only making game contract, will be gratefully received.

This was the bidding at the other table in our match.

<u>W</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>S</u>
1C	P	P*	X
P	1H	1N	X
2C	P	P	3C
P	3S	P	4S
all pass			

What happened there, you may well ask. An accident, that's what. Our team-mate, Eric Cummings, chose a slightly unfortunate moment to open with a Pass out of turn in the East seat. Accordingly he was required to Pass, rather than bid One Spade, when Ceri Pierce's One Club opening came back round to him. Eric did his best by dredging up a One No Trump response at his next go, but the fact that spades were not bid by their opponents gave North/South a somewhat easier ride, although they still did very well to get to game.

So, what can we learn from that? First, that opening bids, and responses, are getting lighter, and we all have to improve our methods in dealing with the aggressive modern style. And secondly, Eric.....ah well, I suppose he knows that already.

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