

CAUTIOUS BIDDER [127]

Last weekend Sue and I played our third Western League match of the season, against Avon, and since the previous two encounters had ended in defeat – one, a real shellacking – we were as they say 'due a win' (not that you're ever 'due' anything in bridge, except continual reminders of your own fallibility, both psychological and cerebral). Anyway, this proved to be our moment, along with that of team-mates Mike Best and Simon Richards.

The Gwent dealing machine had excelled itself, producing a host of exciting hands – so much so that I've found it difficult to choose between them. I've opted for these two, on the first of which Sue and I sat East/West.

Board 15 South dealt; N/S vul

	♠K32	
	♥Q1093	
	♦J5	
	♣10872	
♠A107654		♠QJ
♥2		♥AJ754
♦108742		♦KQ63
♣3		♣96
	♠98	
	♥K86	
	♦A9	
	♣AKQJ54	

I'm quite proud of our efforts on this one. The bidding was as follows.

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

Sue and I play Ghestem, a much maligned convention – maligned for the ridiculous reason, in my opinion, that some players forget they're playing it. I read a piece by Michael Byrne in a recent issue of *English Bridge* that advanced this hoary argument. Whilst I have great respect for Byrne, this is a silly reason for denigrating a method - as silly as arguing against any other agreement for that same reason. It is true that many pairs adopt methods that they only half understand, and that under the pressure of competition they are quite likely to forget, but that's their problem – more fool them. My advice to any serious pair is that system is something that needs to be absolutely ingrained – don't play it otherwise.

Anyway, back to this hand. Sue and I have fought a long battle (ten years and counting) with me trying to persuade her to be more aggressive on distributional hands, especially where we have located a fit. Her bid of Two Clubs on this hand (Ghestem, showing spades and diamonds) suggests I may be winning. Just four 'points' partner – well bid! My immediate impulse was to raise to some level in diamonds, where we had our principal fit, but then I reconsidered. Where, if anywhere, was our most likely game? Concluding that

with the right hand opposite, Four Spades might have chances, that is what I bid. Incidentally, I never mind if contracts go down. I'm used to it, and after all, what might the opponents be able to make? On this hand they can make ten tricks in clubs – what is there to worry about? No, the thing that really bugs me is underbidding, and no-one could accuse us of that on this hand.

As you can see there was no defence to Four Spades. The best North/South can do is sacrifice in Five Clubs, and hardly surprisingly they were not inclined to do that. Some might say that Four Spades was a trifle fortunate – and I would agree with them. But if you don't bid it, you can't be fortunate, can you? Just don't be upset when you go down, as you're bound to do from time to time. The bridge scoring system is a wonderful thing; it's there for your protection, as well as to punish you when you step out of line.

On this next one we were revisited by the ghost of Theodore Lightner. 'Teddy' Lightner was an American bridge professional – a contemporary and team-mate of the great bridge publicist, Ely Culbertson. Lightner was a theorist, and his most well known invention was the Lightner double of a high level contract to suggest an unusual lead – generally in a side suit where the doubler had a void, enabling him to ruff and thereby (on a good day) to defeat the contract.

Board 29 North dealt; both vul

	♠3	
	♥QJ542	
	♦AKQJ10	
	♣KQ	
♠Q874		♠J9652
♥1073		♥void
♦void		♦8642
♣J87643		♣A1095
	♠AK10	
	♥AK986	
	♦9753	
	♣2	

Sue and I sat North/South on this one, and the bidding was as follows.

N	E	S	W
1H	P	2N*	P
4N	P	5C	P
6H	P	P	X
all pass			

Sue's 2NT response was Jacoby, showing a heart fit and at least slam interest. The only information I needed concerned missing Aces, so I wheeled out Roman Key Card Blackwood and Sue gave me three (or at least I hoped it was three; with no Ace in her hand she would have dreamt up a very strange Jacoby). Brian Goalby, the Avon player in the West seat, doubled. Teddy's ghost was roaming amongst us!

I knew what to expect next, but didn't see there was much I could do about it. (As you can see, there was something I could have done about it – convert to Six No Trumps – but that was at least as likely to be wrong as right, or so I thought, so I left things as they were and

awaited the arrival of the opening lead with more than usual interest.

East of course would have known he was facing a Lightner double, and he cogitated for a while before eventually emerging with.....

A spade.

Whose fault was that? I think probably East's. He knew his partner had a void, and he tried to guess the suit. Reasonably enough, he guessed spades. But whilst the Lightner double is commonly taken to call for a ruff at trick one, there can be no objection to cashing an Ace first – unless perhaps you think that will be ruffed by declarer. That might have been the reason East did not begin with his Ace of clubs. Had he done so, Brian in the West seat would doubtless have played his lowest possible card, asking for a diamond, and the diamond ruff would then have followed.

Do you know what Six Hearts doubled and vulnerable, making plus one actually scores? Well you do now: it's 1860. In the other room our team-mates defeated the slam – I never discovered whether this was with Theodore's help. Anyway, well done. A gain of 1960 translates to 18 IMPs, which as it happens was a large portion of our eventual winning margin.

I would readily concede that the bridge gods were smiling upon us on these two hands.

GD