

CAUTIOUS BIDDER [129]

This past weekend saw the trial to aid selection for the two teams that will represent Wales in the Lady Milne, the Ladies Home International, in Wrexham on the weekend of 21/22/23 April. Fourteen pairs competed in the trial. The following two hands struck me as being of interest. Both involve potential Grand Slams – never easy to bid – and the first, at least, is not that easy to make.

I would be quite content to be in Six Spades on the hand below, but in the LM trial five pairs played in Six Spades, while two bid the Grand. Of those in Six Spades, three made twelve tricks and so their contract; one made an overtrick; and one went down. The two pairs who bid the Grand both went down, one of them by two tricks.

This incidentally demonstrates the 'charm' of X-IMP pairs: those pairs whose direct opponents went down in the slam had an undeserved bonus, whilst those whose opponents bid and made the routine Six Spades were punished for sitting in those seats. You just have to hope that the luck associated with these arbitrary elements evens out over the 91 boards played – which it doesn't always, of course.

Board 45, Saturday North dealt; both vul

	♠KQJ52	
	♥8	
	♦AQ1075	
	♣72	
♠93		♠874
♥732		♥Q109
♦J643		♦K982
♣KJ109		♣654
	♠A106	
	♥AKJ654	
	♦void	
	♣AQ83	

Those pairs that climbed to Seven Spades were pushing their luck, but having bid the Grand how would you have played to make it? The layout is quite favourable, so thirteen tricks should result.

Say you get a trump lead, which is as good as anything from a defensive viewpoint. Where are your tricks coming from? Well, obviously you have to make something of the heart suit. So, win the spade in hand, with either the Ace or 10. Then play Ace, King and another heart, ruffing high for safety. Good news! - the Queen appears. How many tricks does that give you?

You have five trump tricks in the North hand, and now five heart winners, aside from the ruff (don't double count!). That's ten. You need another three tricks. You have the two minor suit Aces, so you need one more. The safest means of getting that extra trick is to ruff the diamond in the South (short trump) hand – but be careful not to block the suit! So if you've retained the Ace, use that to ruff. Then trump to dummy, and one further round of

trumps, cash the Ace of diamonds, and re-enter the South hand with the Ace of clubs. The South hand is now high. That line requires the Queen of hearts to fall in three rounds, and for trumps to break 3/2. Perhaps better to content yourself with the small slam!

This next one is much easier to play, but still not easy to bid. Six of the seven North/South pairs played in a small slam, and just one bid the Grand (although not very convincingly, it has to be said). How would you and your favourite partner set about it?

Board 10, Sunday East dealt; both vul

	♠1084	
	♥K10843	
	♦KQ3	
	♣A8	
♠7		♠65
♥J95		♥Q62
♦AJ10985		♦7642
♣102		♣J964
	♠AKQJ932	
	♥A7	
	♦void	
	♣KQ73	

In order to bid Seven, South has to be reasonably confident that North has the King of hearts, and that is not so easy to establish. This is one possible sequence.

S	N
2C*	2H**
2S	3S
5D***	5S
7S	

The Acol Two Clubs starting point on strong hands is notoriously inefficient, but most pairs in Wales play that (or they open 2D on your strongest hands – which is worse). It is probably key to bidding the Grand that North gives a positive response. South bids her spades, and North sets the suit. What should South bid next? I quite like the immediate 'Exclusion' bid of Five Diamonds, asking partner how many Aces she holds outside the diamond suit. North shows one Ace, which must be the Ace of clubs, and bearing in mind partner's initial positive South can be reasonably confident that Seven is 'on'. But certainly not easy, and hardly surprising that most didn't bid it.

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