

CAUTIOUS BIDDER [130]

This past weekend saw the trial to aid selection for the team to represent Wales in this season's Teltscher Trophy, the Seniors Home International, otherwise known as the 'Seniors Camrose'. I didn't play this year (too young), and in fact the entry was down, with only eight pairs competing. Still, seven 14 board matches made for a robust trial. The following hand demonstrates the fine margins that so often apply in bridge, with big swings flowing from close decisions or obscure chances. What do you make of it?

Board 49, Saturday North dealt; neither vulnerable

	♠10984	
	♥1082	
	♦10	
	♣Q10962	
♠73		♠KQJ2
♥QJ974		♥AK653
♦AK7		♦J9
♣A73		♣J4
	♠A65	
	♥void	
	♦Q865432	
	♣K85	

Of the four tables in play, two East/West pairs bid to the heart slam, and two rested in game. Were the slam bidders over-optimistic? I would say probably yes, but one declarer made his (or her) contract. I haven't discovered whether he or she had help. In fact twelve tricks can always be made, even without assistance from the defence (although such assistance is often provided), but it's not a line you'll find unaided.

Let's start with the bidding. East is non-minimum, but those two Jacks are nothing to write home about. I would say the key decision lies with West: having located the splendid heart fit, is her hand worth a slam invitation? To my mind West falls just below the strength required for a Jacoby 2NT response to partner's One Heart opening – although it's close.

A complicating factor might be a weak jump overcall - Three Diamonds - from South. It's the sort of bid that many players make almost routinely - myself included. On this hand that one feeble little squeak might make all the difference, and - for the defence - not in a good way.

If we study the two hands we can see clearly enough that declarer has a potential club loser to accompany the inevitable losing spade. Were the spade Ace to be onside, in the North hand, it would take a club lead to threaten the slam as declarer would in due course be able to discard dummy's losing clubs on his established spade winners. In the absence of a club lead, that is certainly declarer's first and principal hope. Or South might cash the Ace of spades at trick one – seldom right, and immediately fatal here.

But there is another faint hope, apart from the spade Ace being onside, and it is part of the enduring fascination of the game that the best players are able to seek out and maximise these obscure chances. First, and simplest, if South has overcalled diamonds and followed

up by leading the suit, it is certainly with the odds to run the lead round to declarer's Jack. Again, slam made. What about *without* the overcall? In that case you'd need to play for a singleton Queen or 10 – and the singleton Queen is the obvious choice since it could be in either hand.

And finally, *with* the diamond overcall, but followed by a club lead? Would it cost in that case for declarer, having drawn trumps, to advance the Jack of diamonds? South will cover, and when the singleton 10 falls from North, declarer will experience a warm glow of satisfaction (modestly disguised, of course). It wasn't much of a chance, but you'd be cross with yourself if you hadn't tried it, wouldn't you?

The table records show that where the slam made, South led a diamond (I'm guessing, but this probably followed a diamond overcall). Where declarer went down, South led a club.

And the moral of the story? - because all good stories must have a moral. Well, perhaps it's not such a good idea to make a weak jump overcall, even with a seven carder, when you have an unsupported honour in the suit. Also, when defending against a slam, don't be afraid to lead away from an unsupported King.

GD