

## CAUTIOUS BIDDER [133]

The WBU Mixed Pairs Championship, held last Sunday at Cardiff Bridge Club, limped into existence this year. It was intended that - for the first time - the event would be direct entry, and held over one weekend in Llandrindod. That was problematic, to say the least, and coupled with a lamentable lack of anything in the way of promotion or even a hint of publicity (one would almost suspect that someone in the Welsh Bridge Union was doing everything within their power to ensure that the event died a death), it looked for a time as if it was bound to be cancelled. Very late in the day (after the few entrants to that point had booked overnight accommodation) someone saw sense and the event was moved to Cardiff Bridge Club and held on just the one day. Entries immediately picked up, and we finished with a very respectable 18 pairs.

There are a number of challenges here for the newly appointed WBU Chief Executive (warm congratulations to Alan Stephenson on his appointment, and even more so on his courage). Pairs events struggle to maintain their place in the national tournament calendar, even in England, and if they are to survive in Wales this year's belated acknowledgement that they need to be held in the South is surely the way to go. Tournament bridge seems to be dying of neglect in the North, so for all the contribution currently being made the North might as well float off to Merseyside. The West and East Wales areas remain viable so it is logical to concentrate upon them as far as tournament bridge is concerned. The task in Mid and North Wales is much more daunting because it needs first and foremost to focus on the clubs, some of which appear almost moribund - or at least, incapable of generating players with an interest in venturing further afield. Bridge is a fantastic game, so if clubs are failing to renew themselves something is seriously amiss.

Back to Sunday. We had 18 pairs, 51 boards, and an all play all movement ably directed by Alan Screen. It was a very enjoyable day, with worthy winners in Debbie and Simon Richards. Many congratulations to them - especially to Debbie, whom it is great to see returning to play more regularly.

There were a host of stories I could tell, both comic and tragic (it was a Mixed Pairs, after all), and this next hand had elements of both, with perhaps a dash of technical interest thrown in. Sue and I played it late on, when I could sense our chances slipping away - which explains the bidding.

**Session 2; Board 26; Dealer East; all vulnerable**

	♠754	
	♥QJ7	
	♦K9	
	♣AKJ86	
♠J6		♠AKQ109832
♥AK2		♥108
♦AQ8654		♦2
♣92		♣Q3
	♠ void	
	♥96543	
	♦J1073	
	♣10754	

We sat East/West against Helen Houston and Steve Webb. Look away now.

<u>W</u>	<u>E</u>
	1S
2D	6S

We had suffered several mediocre results and I was getting desperate. Helen led the 6 of hearts - a fortunate start. Clearly I had eleven top tricks, and the possibility of a twelfth by means of a diamond finesse, or, by ruffing the diamonds good. It is a mistake in these circumstance to put all your eggs in one basket, and the immediate diamond finesse did not tempt me. Establishing the Queen of diamonds through ruffing was much more appealing, but that would require the diamonds to behave and I didn't fancy committing myself to that option either, although in this case it would have delivered thirteen tricks. So I equivocated and ran my spades.

This was the position with six cards remaining, and two trumps still to be played.

♠
♥QJ
♦K9
♣AK

♠	♠32
♥K2	♥10
♦AQ	♦2
♣92	♣Q3
♠	
♥96	
♦J107	
♣10	

As you can see, Steve Webb in the North seat is already feeling the pinch. As far as Steve knows he has the responsibility of guarding three suits. I played a further spade, discarding a club from dummy, and Steve - paying me the undeserved complement of believing that I would not have bid the slam holding two immediate club closers - discarded the King of clubs. Sorry Steve. I was then able to enter dummy and lead towards my club Queen.

The position is actually very interesting, and on my chosen line can always yield twelve tricks even if the defenders defend double dummy. On the penultimate spade, North can as it happens safely throw a heart. But look what happens then. I can play a heart to dummy's King, and ruff a heart back to hand. What is North to play on that card? He either has to bare his Ace of clubs, exposing himself to an end play, or he must bare the King of diamonds, which I as declarer then have to guess to drop. I think I might have got that right, if this was the order of play.

Best, from a defensive point of view, is to discard the nine of diamonds *early* and with studied casualness. Would you have managed that? I don't believe I would! Certainly it would have been a play somewhat out of keeping with a one day mixed pairs. As it was, Sue and I secured a very fortunate 'top', and Steve and Helen suffered an undeserved zero. There were plenty of those going around.

GD