

## CAUTIOUS BIDDER [135]

The Welsh Bridge Union is struggling to adapt to what appears to be a shrinking tournament population, at least as far as Pairs events are concerned. This season both the Mixed and Open events were converted to direct entry – the Mixed being switched to Cardiff at the last minute, and the Open held as usual in Llandrindod over last weekend. The Mixed survived as a result of the move, and the Open survived – just about – without it. In the event we had twenty pairs at the weekend, a reasonable enough standard, and an enjoyable event directed with her usual aplomb by Sarah Amos.

It's worth noting, given that the event was held in the Mid, where the twenty pairs came from. This was the breakdown:

North Wales: 6 players  
Mid Wales: 1 player  
West Wales: 14 players  
East Wales: 19 players

Nothing new there. This is a fairly typical breakdown of regional participation in WBU events in recent times. But it does of course bring into question the practice of dragging everyone to Mid Wales to play. If these events were held in the South, and enthusiastically promoted within local clubs (an important caveat), there is scope for much greater numbers to be involved. Stick with mid Wales and we will continue to get just the tournament hard core, which is shrinking. The challenge which this presents to the WBU should not be underestimated. Playing all our events in the South would bring into question the continued viability of the WBU as a separate NBO, but the present pattern of entries does point us in that direction.

One other small general point: should we be continuing to score national pairs events by matchpoints? Some people like matchpoints, I suppose, but we should recognise that matchpoints were invented because a way had to be found to score events in which pairs play different boards against different opponents, in order to achieve a unified ranking across the field. But it is completely artificial. Now that we have computers it's a matter of choice as to whether we continue to score by matchpoints. The alternative, X-imping against the field, is available at a click of a mouse, so we have the choice. Nothing can match Teams bridge, but as long as we are playing Pairs, X-imping is the nearest we can get to it.

I'll give just one hand from the weekend. By way of preamble, Sue and I do not play two over one game force; we do not employ 'Minorwood'; our RKCB includes 30/41 (not best, as we shall see); and our cue bidding style is to show our first control, whether that be Ace, King, singleton or void. As with any other pair, we need guiding principles which determine the trump suit that is being agreed via a cue when suit agreement is implicit. So, for example, what is the agreed trump suit on these auctions? My answer is given in brackets, but I wouldn't be confident of introducing these sequences in an unfamiliar partnership, and even where you think partner should be on the same wavelength, she may not be.

1C - 1S - 2C - 2H - 4C (hearts)  
 1C - 1S - 2D - 4C (clubs)  
 1S - 2C - 2D - 4D (diamonds)  
 1C - 1S - 2H - 2S - 4C (spades)

Do you agree? What's obvious to me may not be obvious to you, and vice versa. On the following hand my partner had a nagging uncertainty as to whether the bidding had been correctly interpreted, and that was sufficient to deflect us from the optimum contract.

**Board 32, Saturday; West dealt; E/W vulnerable**

	♠9	
	♥AK3	
	♦Q653	
	♣AQJ98	
♠KQ105		♠7643
♥Q865		♥J94
♦KJ84		♦10972
♣4		♣75
	♠AJ82	
	♥1072	
	♦A	
	♣K10632	

W	N	E	S
P	1C	P	1S
X	2D	P	4C
P	4H	P	4S
X	?		

Sue intended Four Clubs as setting the suit, which also seemed clear enough to me. Four Hearts was a cue, and incidentally (and importantly) denied first or second round control in diamonds; Four Spades was a further cue. I then had a problem as North since a Roman Key card enquiry might elicit a Five Diamond response (one control), taking us over the top. But I was rescued, in a manner of speaking, by West's double.

I could now temporise with a redouble, which I hoped would be taken as showing a spade control. Sue was looking at the singleton Ace of diamonds, which must address what would have been my problem, so I thought she might have been able to bid the club slam with confidence, but that is not how it looked to her. She was afraid that her Four Clubs call had been misinterpreted, and so signed off in Five Clubs. An opportunity missed – one of several over the course of the weekend.

The event was won comfortably enough by John Salisbury and Mike Tedd, with Liz Atkinson and Filippo Cavallari in a commendable second place.

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