

## CAUTIOUS BIDDER [137]

The Webber Cup - the WBU Teams of 4 - was held at Crossgates in mid Wales this past weekend. The Webber, along with every other Welsh event, is now direct entry. Nine teams attended, which I suppose says everything about the current state of Welsh bridge. A nine teams event can still be challenging, and very enjoyable - and this one was both; it is just a shame that more regular 'club' players cannot be expected to join in the fun.

My team finished second despite having the highest positive IMPs total - as can easily happen when IMP scores are converted to Victory Points. The purpose of the conversion is to limit the impact of big wins against the weaker teams and is standard in events such as this, so nothing to complain about. Still, I think I'll file it under 'mildly annoying'.

Luck comes and goes in bridge, as we all know, and I had a slice of fortune on the following hand, played against the eventual winners.

### Board 2, Session 4; East dealt; N/S vulnerable

	♠3	
	♥KJ6	
	♦Q108	
	♣KQ9762	
♠AK62		♠874
♥Q8543		♥72
♦63		♦AKJ9754
♣104		♣3
	♠QJ1095	
	♥A109	
	♦2	
	♣AJ85	

Tony Ratcliff opened Three Diamonds as East - the soul of orthodoxy in this instance, although I was well aware that that didn't have to be in his case. Sue overcalled Three Spades. What do you do as North when Three Spades comes round to you? You could Pass, I suppose, but I couldn't possibly bring myself to do that. Four Clubs might work out well (it would have done so on this hand, as Five Clubs is the one legitimate making game, provided you're a good guesser), but I can't see through the backs of the cards so that didn't tempt me either. No, Three No Trumps it had to be, although without any great conviction. But that's what pre-emptive openings do - they force you to make what you think is the most practical bid, albeit with no certainty that you're doing the right thing.

What should Tony lead against 3NT? Plainly he didn't want to bash out the top diamonds as I surely have the Queen for my bid. His partner, Mike Tedd, suggested subsequently that he might have played just one top diamond, then switched to whichever major was suggested by the sight of dummy and by his partner's card (high for a spade switch; low for a heart). All very well, but that does rather assume that East will have two diamonds - what if he only has one? Tony thought he had to lead a major (I would have thought the same) and he guessed to lead a heart. Unlucky for him, and a fortunate nine tricks for me. As can be seen, a spade lead would have yielded the first nine tricks for the defence.

This next hand saw accurate defence in both rooms, and less than perfect declarer play.

**Board 21; Session 3; North dealt; N/S vulnerable**

	♠AKQJ	
	♥QJ5	
	♦J5	
	♣K982	
♠10432		♠95
♥A92		♥1076
♦A108		♦Q9643
♣A63		♣J107
	♠876	
	♥K843	
	♦K72	
	♣Q54	

Sue and I sat North/South, and bid as follows.

W	N	E	S
P	1C	P	1H
P	1N	P	2N
P	3N	all pass	

East started with a low diamond, and the experienced West thought for ages before contributing the 10. (I didn't like that, but what can you do? - not that it was decisive in this instance.) I took with the Jack and immediately played on hearts. West held up until the third round, and exited with a spade. Blast! I should probably have cashed my spades first. I cashed them now, discarding a club on the final spade. That discard, it turned out, was a fatal error, although even double dummy it's not so easy to see why. I then tried a club to the Queen, but West could win, then exit with a further club. I could not now prevent East gaining the lead and pushing a diamond through dummy's holding. One down.

This hand offers a rich study to anyone interested in the minutiae of card play. I find that the Deep Finesse programme helps enormously in understanding the possibilities inherent in complex hands, and that is certainly the case here. The club discard on the fourth spade was a mistake. As the play went, I could have thrown either a diamond or the thirteenth heart, followed by a diamond exit, thereby forcing my opponents to open up the club suit.

By the way, can you see what opening lead East must find in order to defeat the contract? It has to be a passive heart or spade. Passivity wins the day for both declarer and defence.

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