

CAUTIOUS BIDDER [107]

I doubt that anyone reading this column will be unaware that Patrick Jourdain died last week, succumbing with merciful rapidity to pancreatic cancer. He had played for the Welsh Open team in the European Championships less than six weeks previously. Patrick will leave a void in Welsh bridge, and in Cardiff bridge club, which will be impossible to fill. He was of course a brilliant player, but also a distinctive, quirky personality who inspired widespread affection. His was a voice of sanity in the often fevered world of Welsh bridge – I suspect we'll discover now he's gone just how important that was.

Patrick's personal style was emollient. He had ego, as all bridge players of his level do, but he was highly intelligent, with a dry wit, and most of his observations were downbeat. His place in the bridge firmament was secure, and Patrick was always happy to talk bridge as an equal with lesser players. All of us who played in the Thursday night game at Cardiff found it a pleasure to play against Patrick, irrespective of the result, and we all learned from him.

Patrick played at the Cardiff club for as long as he could. I made a note of the following hand from three weeks ago because I was fairly certain, as was he, that he was dying, and I wanted something, some hand, as a personal memorial. Patrick would not have thanked me for the choice because there is nothing especially technical about it – just Patrick maximising his chances in his usual methodical, painstaking way. He was very ill by this stage, but Patrick was still Patrick.

This was the hand.

Dealer East; N/S vul

	♠9	
	♥J1064	
	♦AK74	
	♣Q1092	
♠876		♠AK104
♥A53		♥98
♦9		♦QJ532
♣AK8753		♣J4
	♠QJ532	
	♥KQ72	
	♦1086	
	♣6	

Patrick sat North, playing with an inexperienced partner. We bid as follows:

E	S	W	N
1♦	P	2♣	P
2♦	X	P	2♥
P	P	3♣	X
P	3♥	P	P
X	P	P	P

I think we can draw a veil over that. If Patrick was less than thrilled at his partner's removal of his penalty double of Sue's Three Clubs, he didn't show it.

I led my Jack of clubs; Sue won and returned a diamond, which Patrick won in hand with the Ace. He advanced his singleton spade, which I won with King, before giving Sue her diamond ruff. So far the defence has taken three tricks. Sue might have played Ace and another heart at this point, but she opted to return a spade, which Patrick ruffed. He then ruffed a club, before playing a second diamond towards his hand. This was my suit, so Sue opted not to ruff, enabling Patrick's diamond King to become his fourth winner. From there he cross-ruffed the hand: club ruff; spade ruff; club ruff; spade ruff. And then, finally, a further club ruff with a high heart as I impotently discarded.

The defence was generous, but then it often is. Patrick had played the hand as he played every hand: calmly, counting the cards in every suit, and with a sure grasp of the necessary lay-out and the defensive frailties that might result in nine tricks. Sue and I both congratulated him, but it was plain that Patrick was feeling too wretched to take much pleasure in the hand. "It's possible you might have defeated it", was all he said.

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