

**Esther Goes Berserk!!!: "When You Are in the
'Balancing' Position, and Opponents Bid a
'Constructive Raise' to Either 2H or 2S,
Do NOT Let Opponents Play This Contract!!!"**

Bruce Thompson

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<https://esther-bridge.com/index.html>

Bruce: Today, we are honored to have with us Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, Quintuple Gold Emerald Life Master (20 Million+ ACBL MasterPoints), who will discuss **when you are in the "Balancing" position, and Opponents rationally bid a "Constructive Raise" to either 2H or 2S, do not, not, NOT let Opponents play this contract!!!** Esther, thanks for taking time to be with us today!

Esther: D**n it, Bruce! How many times do I have to tell you to **NEVER, ever** call me Esther! Always, **ALWAYS, ALWAYS** instead call me, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen!

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, in any case, thank you for talking to us today. As everyone knows, when you are bidding in an auction, and if you PASS, and the contract is then set, you are said to be in the **"Balancing"** position. For example, if you are sitting 4th in the auction, and it is 3 PASSEs to you, you are in the "Balancing" position.

Esther: Well, fair enough. But what I want to focus on today is "Balancing" *specifically* when both (1) Partner has PASSEd at every turn, and (2) the contract will be set with Opponents winning the auction in a *Suit contract* at either the 1-level or the 2-level.¹

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¹ Considerations for "Balancing" against a 1NT contract are different because, as we all know, "The hardest bid in bridge to make is 1NT!"

Bruce: Err, ok. Well, specifically which auction scenarios will we be considering here?

Esther: Well, my *Smpering Simpleton*, we will consider three auction scenarios involving "Balancing" against low-level contracts. Each of these 3 scenarios carries different *risk levels* for you to consider when deciding whether you should PASS, or make some bid other than PASS. To simplify things, let's assume that both Pairs are Not Vulnerable. Additional *reflection* would be required if Vulnerability differed from both sides Not Vulnerable, although the considerations would be similar, albeit more complicated.

Bruce: Well, OK, what is the first scenario?

Esther: Well, **first**, my *Malodorous Misanthrope*, let's consider a scenario in which (1) you open the bidding with a Suit bid, and your LHO overcalls with a Suit bid, and the overcall is then followed by 2 PASSES, and the bidding comes back to you in the "Balancing" position (e.g., You: 1**S**, LHO: 2**C**, Partner: PASS, RHO: PASS, You: ???). This is the scenario among the 3 scenarios that we are considering that carries the **most risk** for you to bid something other than PASS. This is also the scenario that is the most situation-specific, and about which it is most difficult to offer a general principle. Therefore, of course, no general principle is offered here with respect to Scenario #1.

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, what is the second scenario?

Esther: Well, **second**, let's say your LHO bids a Suit at the 1-level, and the next 2 players PASS, and the bidding then comes to you in the "Balancing" position. You bidding in this scenario (i.e., a higher 1-level Suit contract, or Double, or a non-jump 2-level Suit bid) carries **little risk**, and you should usually do so, especially if Opponents have bid 1**H** or 1**S**, which

carries higher bridge scores per Trick than a contract in a Minor Suit.²

In considering whether to Overcall, it can be helpful to use the Ron Klinger "**Suit Quality Test**" ("**SQT**") **Score** as a partial guide. Compute the "**SQT**" **Score** by adding together (1) the number of cards you hold in your alternative suit and (2) the number of Honors, including the Ten, that you hold in this Suit. You can generally bid to a level at or less than the "**SQT**" **Score** minus 6. For example, if you hold 5 Diamond cards and the A,Q,T of Diamonds, your "**SQT**" **Score** is $5 + 3 = 8$, so you can probably bid fairly safely at the $8 - 6 = 2$ level. *Remember:* Suit contracts are mainly about cards and distributions, and not mainly about HCPS!!!

Bruce: OK, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, what is the third scenario?

Esther: Well, **third**, (1) your RHO makes a 1-level Suit bid, especially if it is in a Major, and (2) you PASS, and (3) Opener's Partner makes a "constructive raise" showing at least 3-card support in the bid Suit, and exactly 8 to 10 HCPs, and (4) your Partner PASSes, and (5) your RHO PASSes. You are now in the "Balancing" position again. This time you bidding something other than "PASS" carries **very small risk**, and you should therefore **almost always not PASS in this scenario!!!** In the words of Ron Klinger, author of the Ron Klinger "**Suit Quality Test**" ("**SQT**") **Score**, in his book, 100 WINNING BRIDGE TIPS for the Improving Player

"Do not allow your opponents to play a Suit part-score at the two-level unless you have [both] length and strength in their Suit [and think you can set your Opponents]. If opponents hold a primary trump fit (they bid and supported a Suit) it is **almost always wrong** [for you] to PASS it out at the 2-level." (p. 40, emphasis added)

² An exception might be if you think your Opponent has bid a "convenient Minor" in search of a 4-card Major, or a "short Club," and you hold a "trump stack" in the bid Minor.

Also see Ron Klinger's *impassioned* discussion of his "**3-over-2 Rule**" where Klinger *emphatically* elaborates these views in his 2014 web posting, "Partscore Competitive Bidding by Ron Klinger".³ If Klinger names it a "**Rule**", these arguments simply must be *important!*

Bruce: OK, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen. Well, do *any other* bridge experts also hold this opinion?

Esther: Well, Bruce, yes indeed! How about **Rhoda Walsh**? **Rhoda Walsh** (1933 -) is an American bridge player who resides in Los Angeles. She is an attorney. She has won **12** North American Bridge Championships and was Runner-up in **6** North American Bridge Championships. She is inactive in curating her "Rhoda's Rules" bridge website:

<https://rhodasrules.com>

However, her website is still online and includes numerous "Rhoda's Rules" as well as numerous "Bridge Stories". Here is her "**Rule #19**":

"Rhoda's Rules" "Rule #19"

"Rule: When your opponents stop at the two level, you should give thought to balancing, *particularly if they have shown a fit*. To balance, you need proper shape for the balance (a five or more card suit or support for any suit partner may bid). Your high card point count is *immaterial*. **Rationale:** When your opponents stop at the two level, your side *invariably* has half the deck, which is eighteen to twenty-two high card points. Due to your combined strength, you are quite likely to make your contract or push your opponents to venture too high." [italics added]

Bruce: OK, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen. Well, I see that you feel quite strongly indeed about this! **Why?**

Esther: Well, because **#1**, the Opponents hold at least 8 cards in the bid Major, and the (critically important)

³ Go to:

<https://csbnews.org/partscore-competitive-bidding-by-ron-klinger/>

"Law of Total Tricks"⁴ says that they will very, very likely make their 2-level contract.

One Opponent holds ~13 HCPs, and 5+ cards in Hearts or Spades, and the other Opponent holds 8-10 HCPs and 3+ cards in Partner's bid Suit. Opponents are going to make a positive score on this Board, if they are allowed to play this contract. You will win when your Partnerships has more positive than negative Board Bridge Scores. Do NOT let Opponents get an easy, slam-dunk positive Board Bridge Score, if you can possibly avoid it!!!

Furthermore, #2, Opponents may be aware of, and applied the "Rule of 5"⁵, and thus *correctly* determined that they cannot make a game contract in the bid Major! On the other hand, also remember that Opponents have stopped at the 2-level, *which implies that Partner likely also holds some HCPs!!!*

Opponents bidding Scenario #3 are virtually certain to make a Board Bridge Score of either +60 or +90, while you will score -60 or -90. However, if you can secure a reasonable 3-level bid, and make it, you will score either +60/+80, or +60/+90, while Opponents will obtain a *negative* Board Bridge Score. Of course, Opponents may Double you, which is either good or bad for you. But more likely they will bid higher in their Major, and possibly obtain a *negative* score for being pushed too high! At least you will have made them work for their score!

Bruce: OK, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, are there any *special dangers* that you should be aware of when bidding in the "Balancing" position in these 3 scenarios, and especially Scenario #3?

⁴ Please see, among other lessons, Esther Bridge Lesson #6, "Esther Discusses *Bidding the Law of Total Tricks Versus HCPs*".

⁵ Please see, among other lessons, "Esther Bridge Lesson: #7, "Esther Comments Once Again About the 'Rule of 5'".

Esther: Well, yes, indeed, my *Dandruff-ridden Dufus*! It is **critically important** that Partner understands that you bidding in these scenarios has special meanings and does not necessarily show a lot of HCPs!!! In the words of the Hamilton (ON) Bridge Centre web posting, "Balancing Bids: General Principles"⁶:

"The biggest danger is your partner. When you are making a Balancing bid, you are bidding on what you believe to be the **combined assets of the partnership**. In other words, you are bidding partner's points as well as your own. Make sure your partner understands this... When you sit down with a new partner, ask about Balancing bids. If your new partner doesn't know what you are talking about, **don't make any balancing bids**. Partner will insist on bidding when he shouldn't, and you will get bad results." [underlining added]

⁶ See: <https://www.hamiltonbridge.com/Articles/BalancingGeneral.html>