

**Esther Discusses "Even When You and Partner
'Correctly' Execute a '2 Over 1'
Bidding Sequence a
'Makeable' Contract is Still *Not* Guaranteed"**

Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen¹

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Bruce: Today, we are honored to have with us Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, Quintuple Gold Emerald Life Master (20 Million+ ACBL MasterPoints), who will talk us through "**Even When You and Partner 'Correctly' Execute a '2 Over 1' Bidding Sequence a 'Makeable' Contract is Still *Not* Guaranteed**". Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, thanks for taking the 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 Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen! Always, **ALWAYS, ALWAYS** instead call me, Esther, because I am such a "warm and caring" person!

Bruce: Well, yes, sorry about that, Esther! Well, Esther, at the outset, would you briefly remind us about the basic elements of the "**2 Over 1**" bidding convention?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. I taught the "**2 Over 1**" bidding convention in my "Esther Bridge Convention Lesson #1":
<https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/2 over 1.pdf>
Put briefly, the "**2 Over 1**" bidding convention is "off" if (1) either player in your Partnership **PASSes** at his **1st** turn within the auction, or (2) either Opponent bids something other than **PASS** before you and your Partner have both bid.

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¹ As noted in an article in the Winter/Spring, 2024 article in The American Bridge Teachers' Association (ABTA) Journal, https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/ABTA_1_24.pdf, Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen in fact is a hypothetical, and not a real person! So this article was really, really written by **Bruce Thompson**.

Furthermore, the "2 Over 1" bidding convention is potentially "on" *only* when the opening bidder in your Partnership bids only 1S, 1H, or 1D.²

The "2 Over 1" bidding convention is triggered *only* when the Responder in your Partnerships makes a 2-level bid in a Suit "lower" than the Opener's bid Suit. Responding Partner shows Opener (1) at least opening points and (2) at least 5 cards if the Response bid is 2H, and 4+ cards if the Minors are bid at the 2 level by Responder, in each of (and only) the following **6 (and ONLY exactly 6)**

"Positive 2/1" bidding sequences:

1. 1S, 2H ["I have 5+ Hearts, ~13+ points."]
2. 1S, 2D ["I have 4+ Diamonds, ~13+ points."]
3. 1S, 2C ["I have 4+ Clubs, ~13+ points."]
4. 1H, 2D ["I have 4+ Diamonds, ~13+ points."]
5. 1H, 2C ["I have 4+ Clubs, ~13+ points."]
6. 1D, 2C ["I have 4+ Clubs, ~13+ points."]

"~" = "approximately"

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klink-, err, I mean Esther, why is the "2 Over 1" convention so important for bridge players, even newer bridge, to use?

Esther: Well, my *inquisitive interlocutor*, I will certainly try to help you. The "2 Over 1" convention is so important because when your Partnership triggers one of the **6** specified bidding sequences then both you and Partner know **early** in the auction, such that you and Partner have more "bidding space" to converse, that you and Partner are *definitely* going to set a final contract somewhere between at least 3NT and 4S.

Note that executing one of the **6** specified bidding sequences does not, *NOT* mean that you and Partner will definitely be setting a final contract that is a Game contract. I have elaborated on this in my "Esther Bridge Lesson #185: Yes, Virginia, Indeed *Sometimes* a '2 Over 1' Bidding Sequence

Is NOT 'Game Forcing'!":

https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/2_1NotGF.pdf

² Some Partnerships only play the "2 Over 1" bidding convention over opening bids of 1S or 1H because more HCPs are usually required to make a 5D Game contract.

Bruce: Errr, well, Esther... Are you actually being *nice* to me?

Esther: Well, my *studious salamander*, of course I am being "nice" to you! Why wouldn't I be "nice" to you?

Bruce: Errr, well, Esther... Hmmm... I assume that you are going to talk us through some bridge Boards as concrete examples of what you wish to discuss. From where did these examples and many of these ideas originate?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. These examples and many of these ideas are drawn from Marty Bergen's excellent article, "Better Bridge With Bergen: Improve Your Bidding Judgment – Cont'd", published in the June, 2026 issue of the **ACBL Bridge Bulletin** (p. 61). I may have altered some of the cards in the examples.

Bruce: Errr, well, Esther... Would you tell us a little about who this Marty Bergen bridge player and author is?

Esther: Well, my *loquacious linkster*, of course!

About Marty Bergen

Marty Bergen (1948 -) is a 10-time National Bridge Champion. Bergen has written a column in the ACBL Bridge Bulletin since 1976. Two of his 69+ bridge books/booklets have won "Best Bridge Book of the Year Awards" from the American Bridge Teachers' Association. His 1996 book, Points Schmoints!, one of the best book award winners, has been especially influential. One of Esther's *most treasured* bridge books is Bergen's 2011 little "pocket book", Pocket Posh: Tips for Bridge Players. Bergen has invented quite a few bridge conventions/systems including DON'T, Bergen Limit Raises, and in the first few pages of Points Schmoints!, the "Rule of 20".

Bruce: Hmmm, well, Esther... Would you now go ahead and talk us through the first example?

Esther: Well, Bruce, of course. In all these examples (1) N/S are both silent throughout the auction and (2) Vulnerability does not matter.

WEST (17) S: A J 6 4 3 H: A J 8 5 3 D: Q C: K Q	EAST (12) S: K 2 H: 9 2 D: A J 9 6 3 C: A 7 4 3
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Bidding

WEST 1S 2H 3H 3NT	EAST 2D* 2NT 3S** PASS
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*****"Partner, I hold (1) ~13 HCPs and (2) 4+ Diamonds. Our final contract will be set at *least* somewhere between 3**NT** and 4**S**."

******"Partner, when I initially bid 2**D** rather than 2**H**, 3**H**, or 4**H** I denied holding 3+ Hearts. But I do hold 2 Hearts."

Bruce: Hmmm, well, Esther... Is WEST's 3**NT** contract guaranteed to "make"?

Esther: Well, Bruce, no, indeed. The "2 Over 1" convention does not guarantee that your final contract will "make". Instead, the "2 Over 1" convention helps ensure that your final contract is usually both *reasonable* and *optimal* given your Partnership's holdings.

Bruce: Hmmm, well, Esther... Well, will this 3**NT** contract on this Board "make"?

Esther: Well, Bruce... Of course, that depends in part on how well your N/S Opponents play. But as Bergen noted,

"And while 3NT is the correct contract for E-W, note that despite the 29 combined HCP and three five-card suits, on a bad day, even nine tricks are not guaranteed." (p. 61)

On this Board Declarer EAST will see as "certain" "winners" 2 Spades, the Spade A,K, 1 Heart, the Heart Ace, 2 Diamonds the Diamond Ace and Diamond Jack, and 3 Clubs, the Club A,K,Q for a total of 2 + 1 + 2 + 3 = 8 Tricks.

Bruce: Errr, well, Esther... Can you now give us a second example?

Esther: Well, my *studly salamander*, of course.

WEST (13)
S: A Q 8 7 5 3
H: J 8
D: J 5 3
C: A J

EAST (11)
S: 2
H: A Q T 9 5
D: K Q 9 6 2
C: 8 5

Bidding

WEST

1**S**

2**S****

3**H*****

PASS

EAST

2**H***

3**D**

4**H**

PASS

*"Partner, I hold (1) ~13 HCPs and (2) 5+ Hearts. Our final contract will be set at least somewhere between 3**NT** and 4**S**."

**"Partner, I hold 6+ Spades".

***"Partner, if I held 3+ Hearts in my 2nd turn in the auction I would have 'supported' your Hearts. But I do hold 2 Hearts".

Bruce: Errr, well, Esther... Is EAST's 4**H** contract "makeable"?

Esther: Well, my *studious salmon*, before we talk about whether the final 4**H** contract is "makeable" let's talk about the 3**NT** contract alternative. Sitting E/W your Partnership has bid all Suits except so in a 3**NT** N/S will absolutely, positively lead Clubs on Trick #1. And your Partnership will get "slaughtered" in Clubs because both NORTH and SOUTH know that they can "kill" you there.

Alternatively, in 4**H** you *may* "lose" 1 Trick to the N/S Trump Heart King, you *will* "lose" 1 Trick to the N/S Diamond Ace, and you *will* "lose" 1 Club Trick. So, the prospects for your 4**H** contract are favorable. All this was made possible by WEST's willingness to "show" his 2 Heart cards. WEST clearly followed Bergen's advice:

"When unsure what to do, be *flexible* by making the *cheapest* reasonable bid." (p. 61, italics added)

Bruce: Errr, well, Esther... Do you have another example?

Esther: Well, Bruce, yes, indeed:

WEST (11)
S: K T 7 5 4 2
H: 8 6
D: A T
C: A T 8

EAST (12)
S: A
H: J T 7 5 4 3
D: J 2
C: K Q J 9

Bidding

WEST

1**S**

2**S****

3**D*****

4**H**

EAST

2**H***

3**C**

3**H******

PASS

*"Partner, I hold (1) ~13 HCPs and (2) 5+ Hearts. Our final contract will be set at *least* somewhere between 3**NT** and 4**S**."

**"Partner, I hold 6+ Spades".

***This is an Alertable bid used by some Partners and is artificial to keep the bidding open and does not "show" Diamonds. It says, "Partner, I don't like **NT** and I don't have any other reasonable bid."

****"Partner, I hold a 6th Heart card."

Bruce: Errr, well, Esther... Is EAST's 4**H** contract "makeable"?

Esther: Well, Bruce, as you know, and as Larry Cohen emphasized in his excellent article, "Trump Suit Contracts—Step 1" (p. 47), published in the January, 2026 issue of the ACBL Bridge Bulletin:

"The *key* to making the ['Line of Play'] plan is to calculate ['losers'] only from one side (the long-trump Hand)". (p. 47) [emphases added]

Here EAST will "lose" 1 Diamond. EAST sees N/S together hold 13 - 6 - 2 = 5 Trump Hearts which include the Heart A,K,Q,9. The most likely N/S Trump Heart "split" is 3-2.³ EAST must also hope that the N/S Heart A,K,Q,9 are "split" across the 2 N/S Hands. If this occurs, EAST's 4**H** contract is potentially "makeable".

³ Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons" see "A Comprehensive List of 8 Different Categories of Bridge Probabilities, and How These May Help Guide Your Bidding and Play": https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/8_probs.pdf