

**"Yes, Virginia, Indeed Sometimes a  
'2 Over 1' Bidding Sequence  
Is NOT 'Game Forcing'!"**

**Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen<sup>1</sup>**

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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 **"Yes, Virginia, Indeed Sometimes a '2 Over 1' Bidding Sequence Is NOT 'Game Forcing'!"** 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 so "warm and caring"!

**Bruce:** Errr, well, sorry again about that, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther.

**Esther:** Well, Bruce. Please try to exercise at least a modicum of empathy, assuming you have at least the limited capacity to do so. Can you imagine how relentlessly all the other girls in grades K through 4 of my elementary school years relentlessly, endlessly tormented me about my last name, Klinktoast-Houstonhousen?

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

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<sup>1</sup> 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](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**.

**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](https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/2%20over%201.pdf)

Put briefly, the "2 Over 1" bidding convention is "off" if (1) either player in your Partnership *PASS*es at his 1<sup>st</sup> turn within the auction, or (2) either Opponent bids something other than *PASS* before you and your Partner have both bid. Furthermore, the "2 Over 1" bidding convention is potentially "on" *only* when the opening bidder in your Partnership bids only 1S, 1H, or 1D.<sup>2</sup>

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, sorry again about that, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther. Well, I have heard more experienced bridge players talking about a "2 Over 1" bidding sequence as being "Game Forcing". If your Partnership triggers the "2 Over 1" bidding sequence does this absolutely, *positively* guarantee that your Partnership is going to bid *at least* a Game contract?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, I will try to help you. No, indeed! Instead, this "2 Over 1" bidding sequence guarantees that your Partnership will set a final contract somewhere between *at least* a contract set between 3NT contract and 4S inclusive. But that final contract may be 4C or 4D, which

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<sup>2</sup> 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.

of course are not Game contracts! Your Partnership simply (1) might not have sufficient Club or Diamond cards to play a 5C or 5D contract, or (2) might not have sufficient HCPs to go to a 5-level contract.

**Bruce:** Well, Esther, if your Partnership holds ~26 HCPs if your Partnership has a decent "fit" in a Minor and a 4C or 4D contract seems reasonable couldn't you also usually "make" a 3NT contract?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, yes, you are indeed correct! But *usually* means usually and *NOT* always! Even with ~26 HCPs you do **not** want to be playing a 3NT contract unless your Partnership holds "stoppers" in all Suits and preferably multiple "stoppers" in each Suit!

**Bruce:** Well, Esther, could you give us an example of a Board on which Partners (1) hold ~26 HCPs, (2) do not have a "fit" in a Major, and (3) cannot "make" a 5-level contract in a Major?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. Here is an interesting Board on which the N/S Partners together hold 13 + 12 = 25 HCPs:

Dealer: **NORTH**

	NORTH (13)	
	<b>S:</b> Q J	
	<b>H:</b> K 3 2	
	<b>D:</b> A K T 8 5	
	<b>C:</b> 7 4 3	
WEST (7)		EAST (8)
<b>S:</b> T 7 5 3 2		<b>S:</b> A K
<b>H:</b> A T		<b>H:</b> 9 8 7 6 5
<b>D:</b> 3 2		<b>D:</b> J 9 7 6
<b>C:</b> Q J T 2		<b>C:</b> 9 5
	SOUTH (12)	
	<b>S:</b> 9 8 6 4	
	<b>H:</b> Q J 4	
	<b>D:</b> Q 4	
	<b>C:</b> A K 8 6	

**Bidding**

NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	WEST
1D	PASS	2C	PASS
2H	PASS	2NT	PASS
3NT	PASS	PASS	PASS

Here is a "Double Dummy Analysis" of this Board that show every possible "makeable" contract by every player:

	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>NT</b>
N	1	2	1	-	2
S	1	2	1	-	2
E	-	-	-	1	-
W	-	-	-	1	-

This "Double Dummy Analysis" was performed using the the online "Bridge Solver Double Dummy Analysis" website:

[https://dds.bridgewebs.com/bridgesolver/upload\\_from\\_chrome.htm](https://dds.bridgewebs.com/bridgesolver/upload_from_chrome.htm)

**Bruce:** Oh, my goodness, Esther. On this Board N/S cannot successfully "make" any contract set between the 3NT and the 4S levels!

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, the "2 Over 1" bidding convention is I believe the *most important* duplicate bridge convention because Partners need to know *early in the bidding* whether they can or they cannot "make" a contract set between 3NT and 4S so that if such a contract seems reasonable the players will know *to keep the conversation going* until they settle on what appears to be the optimal contract.

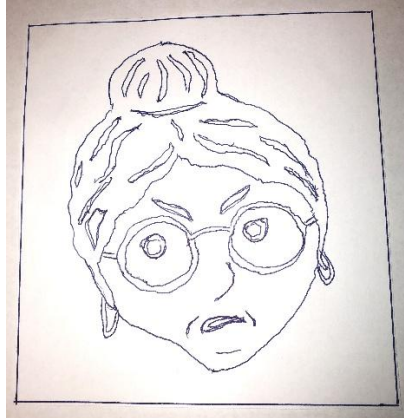
Bruce, I keep repeatedly emphasizing to you that Suit contracts are not primarily about HCPs. This is why you can sometimes "make" contracts holding *fewer*, sometimes very much *fewer*, HCPs than are typically required. For example, ACBL LifeMaster James Bond, 007, "made" a 7C DOUBLED REDOUBLED contract when his Partnership *together* held *only* 8 HCPs, as documented in the ACBL bridge documentary film, "Moonraker":

<https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/moonraker.pdf>

Similarly, in another "Esther Bridge Lesson" I presented a bridge Board on that was quite unusual in that any of the 4 players can "make" (1) either 5C and 5H contracts or 5D and 5S contracts and (2) a 3NT contract even though every player holds only exactly 10 HCPs:

<https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/Mirror H.pdf>

*Conversely*, even with what might be sufficient HCPs to *usually* "make" a Suit contract *sometimes* these HCPs are not enough, as was the case on the Board presented here! In the words of Marty Bergen in the title of his award-winning 1996 bridge book, Points Schmounts!, when it comes to Suit bidding and contracts!



**Take "Quacks" Into Account  
When You Are Doing "Hand Evaluation"**

As Marty Bergen emphasized in his extraordinary little 2011 bridge book, Pocket Posh: Tips for Bridge Players:

**"Beware of Hands with a Lot of Quacks"**

**The traditional 4-3-2-1 point count overrates queens and jacks. Too often, these cards are not worth their assigned values. This is especially true when they are not accompanied by higher honors. To express my disdain for queens and jacks, I often refer to them as 'quacks'.**

**When I have a hand that is dominated by quacks, I subtract a point (or two) and treat the hand as if it had fewer HCP than the traditional point count would indicate." (p. 11)**

On this Board NORTH's Hand held **2** "Quacks" and these were in an "unprotected"/"unguarded" Spade Q,J doubleton. And SOUTH held **3** "Quacks". All this goes to show that when you are "evaluating" your Hand (1) you can't be too mechanical and (2) you must "evaluate" your Hand from *numerous* perspectives!