

**Esther Discusses "Opponents Open a 3-Level
7-Card Spade Preempt, and You As Declarer
Are Playing a 4H Contract: *Where Is Your
Missing Trump Queen, and What Is Your 'Line
of Play' ?"***

Bruce Thompson

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Esther: Today, we are honored to have with us Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, Quintuple Gold Emerald Life Master (20 Million+ ACBL MasterPoints), who will discuss "Opponents Open a 3-Level 7-Card Spade Preempt, and You As Declarer Are Playing a 4H Contract: *Where Is Your Missing Trump Queen, and What Is Your 'Line of Play' ?"*

Bruce: Well, Esther, thank you for talking to 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, very sorry about that, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen. Why don't you first talk a bit about the initial bidding on the following Board?

499er 11/5/23

Dealer: **EAST**

Vul: **N/S**

NORTH (9)

S: T 8 6
H: Q T 7
D: K Q 8
C: Q 9 6 2

WEST (14)

S: --
H: A J 9 3
D: A 6 5 2
C: A J T 8 4

EAST (11)

S: A 4 3
H: K 6 5 4
D: J T 9 3
C: K 3

SOUTH (6)

S: K Q J 9 7 5 2
H: 8 2
D: 7 4
C: 7 5

Bidding

EAST	SOUTH	WEST	NORTH
PASS	3S	DBL	PASS
4H	PASS	PASS	PASS

Esther: Well, my *Malodorous Misanthrope*, sitting EAST as Dealer I also would probably PASS. I hold 11 HCPs, and my Count for the "Rule of 20" is (1) **11** HCPs + (2) **8** cards in my longest 2 Suits = **19, not 20**. Of course, some people play the "Rule of 19" rather than the "Rule of 20"¹. I might feel differently if EAST held 2 Aces rather than 1.

Bruce: OK, Est... Errr..., I mean, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen. What do you think of SOUTH's **3S** preempt bid?

Esther: Well, my *Simpering Simpleton*, SOUTH holds (1) 7 Spades, great Suit Quality with a Ron Klinger "**Suit Quality Test**" ("**SQT**") **Score** of 7 cards + 3 Honors (including the Ten, if SOUTH had held the Ten) = **10**, which supports a bid at the 10 - 6 = 4 level, and (2) a weak Hand with only **6** HCPs. This is a bid that perfectly "limits" and describes SOUTH's Hand!

¹ Some players also play a variation of the "Rule of 20" involving a 3rd element, rather than 2 elements, called the "Rule of 22".

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, then what do you think of WEST's DOUBLE? Should WEST instead have bid 4C, given that WEST holds 14 HCPs with 5 Clubs including 3 Honors?

Esther: Well, my *Bodacious Bupkus*, WEST has an excellent Hand for a "Takeout/'Demand' Double". WEST could bid 4C, but might end up playing a contract in a Minors! Boo! WEST holds (1) a Spade Void, which is excellent, (2) good "Suit Quality" in each unbid Suit, and (3) **14** HCPs. And when I DOUBLE a Major, I almost always am promising 4 cards in the unbid Major, which is exactly what I have here, or otherwise with 5 cards I would Overcall in the unbid Major.

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, here NORTH holds 3 Spades, and knows that N/S together hold $7 + 3 = 10$ Spades. The "**Law of Total Tricks**" says that a $10 - 6 = 4$ -level bid *may* be reasonable. Should NORTH have bid 4S?

Esther: Well, Bruce, the problem is that, although NORTH does hold 3 of SOUTH's Spades, NORTH's hand is "flat", and so has few ruffing opportunities. Plus knows that SOUTH's Hand is "weak", and NORTH himself holds only 9 HCPs, so a 4S bid would be a giant stretch! So I think the PASS is prudent.

Bruce: OK, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, EAST expects that E/W holds $4 + 4 = 8$ Heart Trump cards, and (2) ~ 13 HCPs + 11 HCPs = **25** HCPs, and so bids 4H. The 4H bid is PASSEd out, and the contract is set in the EAST. SOUTH leads the King of Spades, and Dummy comes down. Declarer EAST sees a Spade Void in Dummy. Should Dummy ruff in Dummy???

Esther: Well, my *Dandruff-ridden Dufus*, no. Playing a Suit contract, your entire focus should be on **dumping "losers"**. As Declarer, count your "losers", and **dump them!** So slough a Diamond "loser" from Dummy. You can not later ruff Diamonds in Declarer's Hand, because Declarer holds so many Diamonds, so the only way to "dump" a Diamond "loser" is to slough a low, "loser" Diamond on SOUTH's King of Spades, and then overtake with the Ace of Spades in Declarer's Hand.

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, what then should be Declarer EAST's "Line of Play" plan for drawing Trump?

Esther: Well, Bruce, first you have to think about is, "What is the likely Trump split?", and second, "Where is the missing Queen of Trump Hearts?" First, when there is an Odd number of cards out, the "split" is much more likely to be almost even, rather than lopsided:

4 Cards Out	5 Cards Out	6 Cards Out
2-2 40.7%	3-2 67.8%	3-3 35.5%
3-1 49.7%	4-1 28.3%	4-2 48.4%
49.7/40.7= 1.2	67.8/28.3= 2.4	48.4/35.5= 1.4

The *probabilities* for your Partnership together holding a given number of cards between your 2 Hands are:

# Cards	7	8	9	10	11 ²
%	16%	48%	28%	9%	2%

Thus, the *most likely* (**48%**) number of cards you and Partner will together hold will involve an **8-card fit**. An 8-card fit is **3.0** times more likely than a 7-card fit ($48\% / 16\% = 3.0$), **1.7** times more likely than a 9-card fit, **5.3** times more likely than a 10-card fit, and **24.0** times more likely than an 11-card fit! Therefore, the "split" probabilities when there is an Odd number of cards "out", and especially 5 cards "out", are *especially worth remembering!*

Bruce: OK, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, so you expect a 3-2 rather than a 4-1 Trump "split"? Even though you know that SOUTH holds a long 7-card Suit?

Esther: Well, Bruce, if the "split" is 3-2, then here NORTH, given SOUTH's long holding in Spades, is likely the Hand holding the 3 Trump cards. And if the "split" is 4-1, again NORTH is likely the rascal holding 4 Trump cards.

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, what does this mean, second, about where the missing Trump Heart

² GOOGLE search for "**Relevant Probabilities for Bridge Players**", or go to: <https://www.bridgewebs.com/taverham/Probabilities.pdf>

Queen is located, and how does this affect your "Line of Play"?

Esther: Well, Bruce, after you as Declarer EAST take Trick #1 with your Spade Ace, you want to begin drawing Trump. You know that SOUTH has very long Spades, which means that SOUTH is "short" in other Suits, which means that SOUTH may start trumping Suits other than Spades *quite early!* So "drawing Trump" fast seems especially smart on this Board! And a **CARDINAL BRIDGE PRINCIPLE of PREEMINENT IMPORTANCE** is:

Draw missing cards *ALWAYS, ALWAYS, ALWAYS* playing "Low to High", and never "High to Low".³ Your goal is to "drop" intermediate cards! If you play "High to Low", the Opponents will always *both* play their *lowest* 2 cards, and you will not drop any intermediate cards. Thus, you will not "promote" any of your own remaining intermediate cards!!!

Bruce: OK, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, so what "Line of Play" would you use to draw the 5 missing Heart Trump cards?

Esther: Well, Bruce, here is what I think:

1. I think NORTH holds **3** rather than 2 Trump Hearts, because I know that SOUTH holds a ridiculously long Spade Suit, and so SOUTH is likely to be shorter in Hearts.
2. I think that NORTH holds my missing Trump Queen, "protected" by 2 smaller Trump Heart cards, given that SOUTH's Hand is "weak", and unlikely to hold many Honors in Suits other than Spades. So, if I draw 2 Rounds of Trump straightaway with my A,K, I will *definitely* lose a Heart Trump Trick to NORTH's Trump Queen.

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, what then is your plan for "drawing" Trump?

³ The exception is if your Partnership holds a **HUGE** number of cards in the Suit, such as 11 or 12. If you hold 11 or 12 cards in a Suit, knock yourself out playing "High to Low", if you wish. (And if your Partnership holds 13 cards in a Suit, drawing missing cards will not be necessary!)

Esther: Well, Bruce, after I as Declarer EAST win Trick #1 with my Spade Ace, I will lead my 4 of Hearts toward Dummy's Heart Ace. SOUTH will "follow Suit" low. I play my Dummy Heart Ace, and NORTH will then also "follow Suit" low. I am now missing 3 of the originally 5 missing Trump Hearts. I think that NORTH holds 2 of the remaining Trump Hearts, including the "protected" Heart Queen (Q,x).

Bruce: Well, OK, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, what, if anything, can you do to avoid eventually losing to NORTH's Heart Queen???

Esther: Well, Bruce, once I am in Dummy, on Trick #3 I will lead Dummy's Heart Jack. If NORTH "ducks", I will also myself "duck" in my Declarer's Hand. If NORTH "covers" my Jack with the Heart Queen, then I will overtake with Declarer's Heart King. In either case, if I am correct that NORTH holds both (1) 3 Hearts and (2) the Heart Queen, I will still take all 3 of the Heart Tricks, losing none! And, my *Malodorous Misanthrope*, losing **none** is *better* than losing **one**!