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**"3 Bridge Computer Simulation Studies:
PASS 1NT or Bid Transfer,
PASS 1NT or Bid Stayman, and
Raise Partner's 1NT to 3NT or Bid 5D?"**

Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen¹

To return to the "Esther Bridge Lessons," CLICK:

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

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Some bridge questions about best bridge bidding practices can best be addressed using empirical bridge research methods. There are 2 possible empirical bridge research strategies. *First*, a huge number of relevant Boards from a large bridge competition can be studied. *Second*, computers can be used to simulate the play of Boards with certain fixed features (e.g., SOUTH's Hand is "fixed" to always hold certain cards) across a large number of otherwise randomly-dealt Hands played a very large number of times (e.g., 10,000 times).

The "Esther Bridge Lessons" website includes several reports of bridge empirical research. For example, "Esther Dialogue Lesson #81 summarizes some *empirical research* on the question, "What Does Research Say About Bidding 3NT vs 4H/4S When Opener Bids 1NT and Responder Can Support Both 4H/4S and 3NT Contracts?":

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

And "Esther Bridge 'Pop' Quiz #67" discusses *empirical research* about the importance of Jacoby Transfers even when as Responder you hold a very "weak" Hand, "Responding to Partner's 1NT Opening Bid When You Hold an *Extremely Weak Hand*, Including the Importance of 'Playing the Room'":

https://esther-bridge.com/quiz/q0067_q.pdf

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¹As 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**.

Here **3** bridge computer simulation studies conducted by Richard Pavlicek are summarized. These studies are presented on the "Bridge Simulations" section of his "For Bridge Players" bridge website. Initially, however, a brief bio may be appreciated.

About Richard Pavlicek

Richard Pavlicek (1945-) has won **11** North American Bridge Championships, including a record-setting **3** straight wins in the Reisinger Board-a-Match Teams, 1982-84, and again in 1990. He won the 1973 inaugural Grand National Teams tournament and repeated a win there in 1997. He has written or co-authored several bridge books, including with co-author William S. Root their 1981 book, Modern Bridge Conventions. From 1984 until 1990 Pavlicek was the Bridge Columnist for the Fort Lauderdale News and Sun-Sentinel.

#1: Jacoby Transfer or PASS 1NT?

One quandary that some newer bridge players confront when they sit as Responder to a Partner opening 1NT, while Opponents are silent throughout the auction, and as Responder you hold a very weak Hand but also a 5-card Major. Is it better to PASS or execute a Jacoby Transfer. In his web report of a simulation Richard Pavlicek conducted, titled "Transfer or Pass?", Pavlicek conducted a computer simulation involving 10,000 randomly-dealt Boards in which in every case Partner was Dealer and opened 1NT, your RHO PASSED, and you sitting SOUTH held:

YOU
 SOUTH (8)
S: T 9 8 7 6
H: A T 7
D: Q 6
C: 9 6 5

N/S were constrained to be playing a 1NT opening bid as requiring **15-17** HCPs but allowing a 5-card Major. EAST's Hands were constrained to not be "strong" enough to Overcall.

Pavicek scored the results for both N/S Vulnerable and N/S Not Vulnerable. He also computed results for both MatchPoint and international Match Point (IMPs) scoring. Here are the results:

Final Contract	Trick Average	Contracts Made %	Overtrick %
1NT	7.25	76.0%	42.82%
2S	8.40	83.7%	45.39%

From all three perspectives, Trick Average, Contracts Made, and Overtrick Percentages, executing the Jacoby Transfer to Spades even holding only the Spade T,9,8,7,6 was the superior bidding decision. MatchPoint scoring yield a Net gain of the 2S bid totalling across the 10,000 deals of +305,690 for N/S Not Vulnerable and +369,190 for N/S Vulnerable. In IMPs the net advantage for N/S Not Vulnerable was +10,602 and for N/S Vulnerable was +11,869. As Pavlicek characterizes the results:

“Not even close. Transferring to [S]pades is a big winner at any form of scoring and vulnerability. In practice the edge would be even greater, because West will sometimes *compete*, then knowing about the [S]pade suit will allow [O]pener to compete further with a fit. Or in the words of Archie Bunker, ‘Case closed!’”

#2: Bid Stayman or PASS 1NT?

For this simulation study NORTH as Dealer bid 1NT, EAST PASSEd, and you sitting SOUTH as Responder held 2 4-card Majors and again 8 HCPs:

YOU
SOUTH (8)
S: J 7 6 3
H: J 8 7 4
D: 7 4
C: A Q 5

N/S were constrained to be playing a 1NT opening bid as requiring 15-17 HCPs but allowing a 5-card Major. EAST's Hands were constrained to not be "strong" enough to Overcall.

Pavlicek compared 3 bidding decisions by Responder SOUTH: (1) PASS Partner's 1NT bid, (2) bid 2C Stayman and then PASS, and (3) bid 2C Stayman and then raise.

Final Contract	Trick Average	Contracts Made %	Overtrick %
1NT	7.89	90.0%	67.11%
2M	8.66	77.0%	50.21%
3M	8.66	52.4%	13.66%
Comparison	NV MPs	NV IMPs	Vul MPs
2C, PASS v 1NT PASS	+132,920	+4,389	+218,970
2C, PASS v 1NT Raise	+88,340	+2,970	-58,460
2C Raise v 1NT PASS	+44,580	-726	+277,430
			Vul IMPs
			+6,108
			+34
			+3,104

With you as Responder holding **2** 4-card Majors headed by Jacks and **8** HCPs with 6 of the HCPs in a *single* Suit, Clubs, the best decision is to try to find a "fit" in a Major and PASS Opener's **2M** response.

#3: Set NT Contract or Bid **5D**?

For this simulation study NORTH as Dealer bid **2NT**, EAST PASSEd, and you sitting SOUTH as Responder held 2 HCPs with 6 Diamonds headed by the Queen:

YOU
SOUTH (2)
S: 4 3
H: 5
D: Q T 9 6 5 4
C: 8 6 3 2

N/S were constrained to be playing a **2NT** opening bid as requiring **20-21** HCPs but allowing a 5-card Major. EAST's Hands were constrained to not be "strong" enough to Overcall.

Pavlicek compared **3** bidding decisions by Responder SOUTH: (1) PASS Partner's **2NT** bid, (2) bid **3NT**, or (3) bid **5D**.

Final Contract	Trick Average	Contracts Made %		Overtrick %
2NT N	7.18	38.0%		18.51%
3NT N	7.18	18.5%		4.03%
5D S	9.82	21.6%		13.89%
Comparison	NV MPs	NV IMPs	Vul MPs	Vul IMPs
5D S v	+268,170	+4,762	+627,020	+8,331
2NT N				
5D S v	+446,750	+12,257	+842,850	+18,518
3NT N				
2NT N v	+178,580	+11,039	+215,830	+11,784
3NT N				

As Pavlicek characterizes the results:

“Results may be surprising, particularly that raising to 3 NT is the worst choice at any form of scoring and vulnerability... Five [D]iamonds is the all-around winner, though not by a wide margin over passing 2 NT.”

Of course, in this simulation Pavlicek assigned very "low" non-Honors to SOUTH's holdings, and better "spot" cards can make a bid difference when playing NT contracts. Every simulation is bounded by the constraints imposed by the researcher and will never generalize perfectly to all other situations.