

Esther Discusses "4th Suit Bid as *Game Forcing*, And Why to Use the 4th Suit Game Forcing Bid"

Bruce Thompson

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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 "**4th Suit Bid as *Game Forcing*, And Why to Use the 4th Suit Game Forcing Bid**". 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!

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! I do understand that young girls can indeed be quite vicious to each other. Well, in any case, Esther, I recently encountered what I found to be an unusual bidding sequence, and I wonder if you would be so kind as to comment on this bidding sequence on an actual Board, and explain the bidding to me and our intrepid readers! Here is the relevant Board:

Board #18
 Knoxville 499er 10/9/23
 Vul: N/S
 Dealer: EAST

	NORTH (16)	
	S: A	
	H: J 7	
	D: A Q J T 2	
	C: K J 6 5 4	
WEST (7)		EAST (8)
S: K J T 3		S: 8 7 6 4
H: 8 6 5		H: Q 9 2
D: K 9 8 7 5		D: 4 3
C: T		C: A Q 7 3
	SOUTH (9)	
	S: Q 9 5 2	
	H: A K T 4 3	
	D: 6	
	C: 9 8 2	

Bidding

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

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. I must say initially that SOUTH's initial opening bid of 1H is "quite intriguing"²! As you know, Bruce, I am an *impassioned* advocate for using Marty's "Rule of 20"³ as one guide to opening the bidding in any position! This "Rule" favors

¹ These N/S Partners were playing "2 Over 1", and this response bid of 2D by NORTH says, "Partner, I hold (1) 13+ HCPs and (2) at least 4 Diamonds." Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons", see: "Convention #1: '2 Over 1' ('2/1')".

² In "bridge parlance", when Esther uses this particular expression, she means "insane, and also incredibly dumb!"

³ Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons", see: "Lesson #25: 40 or so Bridge Bidding/Play 'Rules'". Also, note that in his fabulous, fantastic, great little 2011 "pocket book", so called because the book is small and can fit in your shirt or pants pocket, titled pocket posh tips for bridge players, Marty Bergen wisely writes, "Any hand with 5-5 distribution has great potential. This is especially true when you have good suits, and really gets exciting once you find a fit" (p. 17). Of course, a hand 2-suited 5-4 also still has appeal, especially if both Suits are the 2 Majors, and especially if the hand also holds a void or a singleton, as does SOUTH's hand on this Board!

bidding 2-Suited Hands, that play extremely well in Suit contracts, and not in **NT** contracts, and says you can, and should, open with a Suit bid, if the sum of (1) your HCPs and (2) the number of cards in your longest 2 Suits is **20** or more! But here SOUTH's 9 HCPs + 9 cards in his longest 2 Suits equals **18**, which appears to be *less than 20*! Now some people "fudge" the "Rule of 20", and open when their total equals 19. But I think 18 is pushing things a bit too much, especially when you are not sitting 3rd or 4th! At the same time, I do take note that SOUTH is 2-Suited in the Majors, which is indeed important!

Bruce: OK, fair enough. But now let's take the bidding as it occurred and discuss the remainder of the bidding. E/W both PASSED at each turn, which given their holdings makes sense. And obviously NORTH's 2**D** response, holding 16 HCPs and 5 Diamonds is reasonable, although responding 2**C** might have been preferable, because a 2**C** bid eats up less bidding space, and NORTH can show his Diamonds later in the auction. Now what do you think of NORTH's next response of 2**S**?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I think this is the correct bid by SOUTH! SOUTH is saying, "Partner, I hold 5+ Hearts, but in fact I am 2-Suited in the Majors." SOUTH showing exactly 4-5⁴ Spades/Hearts holding both Majors means that there is now a **74% probability**⁵ of N/S now finding an **8-card fit** in a **Major!!!!**

Bruce: Well, OK, Ms. Klink..., errr, I mean, Esther. NORTH then bid 3**C**!!! What is the world *does this bid mean*???? So far:

1. NORTH denied support for SOUTH's Hearts; and
2. SOUTH denied support for NORTH's Diamonds; and now
3. NORTH denied support for SOUTH's Spades!!! But...
4. NORTH is now showing a **4th Suit**: Clubs\$\$\$@!##?

If NORTH holds Clubs, and one Partner or the other holds all 3 of the other 3 Suits, why didn't NORTH simply bid 3**NT**?????

Esther: Well, Bruce, this is a so-called "forcing" bid. There are **2 kinds** of "forcing" bids: (1) "forcing" for 1 Round,

⁴ NORTH knows that if SOUTH was 5-5 in the Majors, SOUTH instead would have bid Spades first, and Hearts second!

⁵ Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons, see the "Probabilities Section"!

and (2) Game forcing. For example, in the Standard American Yellow Card (SAYC), most players play if Opponents PASS at every turn, you open 1**H**, and Partner responds by shifting to 2**C** or 2**D**, then Partner/Opener is expected to bid a second time, because your 2**C** or 2**D** bid is "forcing for 1 Round". But most Partners play "**4th Suit Game Forcing**". So, NORTH's bid here says, "Partner, I DEMAND that we bid to at least a Game contract! We can bid to 3**NT**, or 4 of a Major, or 5 of a Minor, but we must bid to Game!!!"⁶

Bruce: OK. Well, are there any special requirements as regards bidding "**4th Suit Game Forcing**"?

Esther: Well, of course!!! Here are several requirements for making this bid:

1. The "**4th Suit Game Forcing**" bid **must** be the **4th bid** in the auction within your Partnership. (Opponents will usually be PASSing if your Partnership holds this many HCPs.)
2. **Only the RESPONDER** (NEVER the OPENER) can make a "**4th Suit Game Forcing**" bid.
3. If the RESPONDER is a PASSEd Hand, the 4th Suit bid is not "Game Forcing"!
4. Some Partnerships play the 4th Suit bid as possibly "artificial" and not necessarily showing cards in the bid 4th Suit, in which case the bid **must** be Alerted!⁷

Bruce: Well, OK, Ms. Klink..., errr, I mean, Esther. Any final thoughts about this "**4th Suit Game Forcing**" bid?

Esther: Well, Bruce, yes indeed! Here is what my dear friend, fellow Quintuple Gold Emerald Life Master (20 Million+ ACBL MasterPoints), Larry Cohen, had to say in his bridge website "Learning Center" 5/1/14 posting "Fourth Suit Forcing"⁸:

⁶ Some Partners play "4th Suit Forcing" as forcing only at least to a contract between 3**NT** and 4**S**. As with most things in bridge, this is a matter of "Partnership Agreement"!

⁷ Esther prefers to play a "**4th Suit Game Forcing**" bid as showing at least 3 cards and at least 1 top Honor in the newly bid 4th Suit, and such a bid does not have to be Alerted!

⁸ See: <https://www.larryco.com/bridge-learning-center/detail/550>.

“Fourth Suit Forcing should be part of any player’s arsenal. I wouldn’t even think of it as a convention. It is really a **necessity**.” [Emphasis added.]

Bruce: Well, OK, Esther. But on this BOARD, **WHY** did the RESPONDER, NORTH, bid “4th Suit Game Forcing” on this Board? Why didn’t NORTH simply bid 3**NT** instead???

Esther: Well, Bruce, there are generally 2 possible reasons **WHY** RESPONDER may bid “4th Suit Game Forcing” rather than 3**NT** in similar situations:

1. RESPONDER thinks the contract may play better if OPENER is the Declarer; or
2. RESPONDER thinks that OPENER has all the necessary information to set the final contract, and RESPONDER thinks that OPENER is better situated to make the decision about setting the final contract.

On the present Board, with poor fits across all 4 Suits, the obvious contract was 3**NT**. And NORTH thought that a 3**NT** contract would play better with SOUTH as Declarer, because NORTH thought that SOUTH would have better control of transportation sitting as Declarer!