

Esther Discusses "'8 Never, 9 Ever': A 'Rule' to Guide Suit Bidding in Competitive Part-Score Auctions"

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 discuss "'8 Never, 9 Ever': A 'Rule' to Guide Suit Bidding in Competitive Part-Score Auctions". 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, well, very sorry about that, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen. Well, perhaps before we discuss "'8 Never 9 Ever' as a 'Rule' to Guide Suit Bidding in Competitive Part-Score Auctions" we should first *briefly* review the more well-know "rule" for play as Declarer: "8 Ever, 9 Never" to avoid potential confusion.

Esther: Well, my *Beaudacious Bozo*, of course I will try to help you! The "8 Ever, 9 Never" "rule" is a guideline for play as Declarer and suggests that generally if your Partnership holds **8** cards in a Suit including the Ace, King, but you are missing the Queen, you should finesse for the missing Queen, but if you hold the Ace, King and **9** cards, instead you should play for the Queen "drop".

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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**.

Of course, there are exceptions to *all* bridge "rules" or guidelines. For example, *first*, in "Esther Bridge Lesson #110: Esther Discusses '1 of David Bird's 52 Great Bridge Bidding Tips on Declarer Play: 'Eight Ever, Nine Never', Maybe Not Always'",² *Second*, in "Esther Bridge Lesson #111: The 'Principle of Restricted Choice': Another Exception to the '8 Ever, 9 Never Bridge Rule for Declarer Play'", Esther discusses another exception to the "8 Ever, 9 Never Bridge Rule for Declarer Play". However, in the *present* lesson, Esther instead discusses the "Eight Never, Nine Ever" "rule" for bidding.

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, could you tell us who articulated the "Eight Never, Nine Ever" "rule" for bidding.

Esther: Well, my *Simpering Simpleton*, sure. First, here is a little history. The Lucas Bols company is a Dutch distillery company created in 1575! It claims to be the *oldest* commercial distillery in the world.

From 1974 until 1994 the world's greatest bridge players submitted bridge tips to be reviewed by a panel of distinguished bridge players who then identified the Bols Distillery Annual "Winning" Bridge Tip.

One year a Bols competition "tip" was submitted by Larry Cohen. Larry Cohen is famous throughout the bridge world for many things, including perhaps especially his 1992 book, To Bid or Not to Bid: The LAW of Total Tricks, which won the Best Bridge Book Award from the American Bridge Teachers' Association! Cohen's "Eight Never, Nine Ever" "rule" for bidding tip can be viewed at:

<https://haroldschogger.com/lcohen.htm>

Bruce: OK, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, can you now please discuss a Board that Cohen used as an illustration in his "Eight Never, Nine Ever" "rule" for bidding tip?

Esther: Well, my *Beaudacious Bupkus*, of course I will try to help you. Note that I have altered a few of the cards in Cohen's illustrative Board.

² Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons", go to: https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/8_ever.pdf

Dealer: **SOUTH**

		NORTH (8)	
		S: A 8 7	
		H: 8 7 3	
		D: K 8 6 4	
		C: J 9 4	
	WEST (11)		EAST (8)
S:	T 5		S: J 4 2
H:	K Q T 9 4		H: J 5 2
D:	T 7 3		D: Q J 5
C:	A Q 5		C: K 8 6 3
		SOUTH (13)	
		S: K Q 9 6 3	
		H: A 6	
		D: A 9 2	
		C: T 7 2	

Bidding

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1 S	2 H	2 S	3 H
???			

Bruce: Wow, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, the first 4 bids seem pretty sensible. The question is, what should SOUTH bid at his 2nd turn within the auction? Should SOUTH bid 3**S** or should SOUTH PASS?

Esther: Well, Bruce, that is indeed the question! Both Partnerships have shown HCPs, so the final contract will be set in a part-score contract. Furthermore, both Partnerships appear to have an 8-card "fit" in a Major. This, of course, is not rare! Indeed, when 1 Partnership has an 8-card "fit" the other Partnership is extremely likely to also hold a "reciprocal" 8+ card "fit".³ Indeed, *both* Partnerships may well have 2 *different* "fits" in 2 *different* Suits!

Bruce: OK, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, what should SOUTH bid: 3**S** or PASS?

³ Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons", see: "8 *Different Categories* of Important Bridge Probabilities/Statistics Lesson": https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/8_probs.pdf

Esther: Well, my *Malodous Misanthrope*, SOUTH should invoke Cohen's "**Eight Never, Nine Ever" "rule" for bidding tip. This "rule" says, "In a competitive auction, if both your Partnership and your Opponents are bidding and have both found an 8-card 'fit', '**Eight Never', meaning that you and Partner should never advance the bidding in these circumstances to the 3 level!!! If, on the other hand, your Partnership has shown a 9-card 'fit', then you should set the final contract at 3S!"****

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, isn't this simply an invocation of the "**Law of Total Tricks**" as articulated by Cohen in his award-winning 1992 bridge book? The **LOTT** says, "in a Suit contract, pretty much independent of HCPs, you will preponderantly make a contract set no higher than the number of Trump cards your Partnership holds - 6." In one of her bridge lessons Esther summarizes empirical research showing that the **LOTT** is generally correct.⁴ Of course, the **LOTT** working requires that both Partners making Suit bids must hold the preponderance of their points in their bid Suit(s) (i.e., the Partners' bid Suits have reasonable "Suit Quality").

Esther: Well, Bruce, exactly: BINGO! What more can you expect other than Cohen "pounding this table" in his bridge bidding "tip" about the import of the **LOTT**?

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, did Cohen present in his "**Eight Never, Nine Ever" "rule" for bidding tip a second Board further illustrating his "tip"?**

Esther: Well, my *Dandruff-ridden Dufus*, yes, he did. I have made a few changes in this Board as presented below.

⁴ Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons", go to:

https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/LOTT_bad.pdf

Dealer: **SOUTH**

NORTH (8)

S: A 8 7
H: 8 7 3
D: K 8 6 4
C: J 9 4

WEST (11)

S: T 5
H: K Q T 9 4
D: T 7 3
C: A Q 5

EAST (10)

S: Q J
H: J 5 2
D: Q J 5
C: K 8 6 3 2

SOUTH (11)

S: K 9 6 4 3 2
H: A 6
D: A 9 2
C: T 7

Bidding

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1 S	2 H	2 S	3 H
???			

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, here are the HCPs that N/S and E/W held on these 2 Boards:

Board #1		Board #2	
N/S	E/W	N/S	E/W
8+13=21	11+8=19	8+11=19	11+10=21

On Board #1 N/S held 21 HCPs but only 8 Trump cards. On Board #2 N/S held only 19 HCPs but 9 Trump cards. Yet you (and Cohen) are arguing that on Board #1 N/S should not set a 3**S** contract, while on Board #2 N/S should instead set a 3**S** contract!

Esther: Well, Bruce, that is exactly what Cohen argued in his "**Eight Never, Nine Ever**" "rule" for bidding tip! It is called the "**Law of Total Tricks**"! It is called a *la* Marty Bergen's 1996 award-winning bridge book, Points Schmoints! Cohen argued that on Board #1...

"The [E/W O]pponents were due to fail in Three Hearts, losing five top [T]ricks. You'll [sitting N/S] also fail if you bid Three Spades, as you have five sure losers after the obvious [H]eart lead. Does this full deal contain anything surprising? No, it is a typical layout for this everyday auction. Both [P]artnerships have a eight card fit and

both sides can take only eight [T]ricks. Why should you go minus when they are going minus?"

However, on Board #2 Cohen noted that "Three Hearts is still down one, but now [holding 9 Trump cards] you can make Three Spades. Your ninth Spade translates into a ninth [T]rick... Over and over again, throughout the bridge world, people bid three over three with only eight [T]rumps, and find that both three-level contracts fail. Instead of going +50 or +100, players go minus the same number." Cohen also shared that "I have given my self-learned advice to my grandfather and now he is the king of the senior circuit. He simply follows the reversed golden rule [for bidding]: '**Eight Never, nine Ever'." [emphases added]**