

## Esther Discusses "Bidding a Long Major Holding When Sitting in Different Seats"

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 "**Bidding a Long Major Holding When Sitting in Different Seats**". 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 a "warm and caring" person!

**Bruce:** Errr, well, sorry about that, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther. Well, at the outset, to make the present discussion concrete, let's consider the following Hand, which holds **an extraordinary number of Trump cards**. How would you bid this Hand when sitting in different seats during the auction? How would the bidding during the auction affect your evaluation of your Hand, and thus your bidding?

SOUTH (8)

**S:** A K J T 8 7 5 3 2

**H:** --

**D:** 6 4

**C:** 7 5

**Esther:** Well, my *gracious giver*, holding **9** Trump cards certainly is extraordinary. But, of course, at the same time such a holding is indeed possible. And we can glean important insights about bidding principles from discussing even what is admittedly a rare holding! Here are the probabilities on

a 0.0 to 1.0 scale of having long Trump card holdings:

Cards in	Probability <sup>1</sup>	Frequency, "on average" <sup>2</sup>
1 Suit		
13	.000000000006299	Once every <b>60,000 Years</b>
12	.0000000031936	
11	.00000036407	
10	.000016464	
<b>9</b>	.00037045	Once <b>every 11 Months</b>
8	.00466761	Once <b>every Month</b>
7	.03134801	Once <b>per Session</b>

These "frequencies" are based on you playing *twice per week with 26 Boards* in each competition. Also note that these probabilities are for the number of Trump cards that you hold, without regard to whether the Hands hold Honors or particular Honors! And please remember, because these probabilities are "on the average," the *actual frequencies* of the Hands may deviate from the statistically "expected" frequencies! For example, you may be dealt 2 single-suited 13-card Hands twice next week, or not for 120,000 years!

**Bruce:** Errr, well, Esther... First, I am not sure I believe this, but are you again *actually being nice to me?*

**Esther:** Well, my *handsome hero*, certainly, I am being nice to you. Occasionally, I like to "change things up!"

### **Sitting First, as Dealer**

**Bruce:** Well, OK, Ms. Klink..., errr, I mean, Esther. Well, let's say that you held this Hand **sitting first as Dealer**. How would you evaluate this Hand, which holds only **8 HCPs**? Yet, if you add Distribution points, because even without your Partner's Hand you hold 9 Spades, which is more than the "Magic 8" required for a Partnership to bid a Game

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<sup>1</sup> These probabilities are derived from the Bill Butler's "Durango Bill's Bridge Probabilities and Combinatorics" website: <https://durangobill.com/BrSuitStats.html>

<sup>2</sup> These probabilities are from the **great** website, "Relevant Percentages for Bridge Players": <https://bridgewebs.com/taverham/Probabilities.pdf>

contract, you hold  $8 + 5 = 13$  Total points. Would you open the bidding with a 1S bid?

**Esther:** Well, my *inquisitive interlocutor*, arguably you could. But I probably wouldn't! Of course, on the one hand, you may learn important information during the auction from both Partner's and/or Opponents' subsequent bidding. It is likely that Partner or Opponents will bid, because their 3 Hands together hold  $40 - 8 = 32$  HCPs! There is also a noteworthy probability that either Partner or Opponents will toss in a Heart bid, or some other suit bid. It is also usually desirable to eat up "bidding space" to keep Opponents from exchanging information, such as from "lead directing" bids. And with this holding how much information do you need about Partner's Hand? Here is a General Principle about when you can open with a 4-level Major bid:

**When you can count 8 "Quick Tricks" in your hand, you can open sitting first as Dealer with either a 4H or a 4S bid.**

Note that this hand, in addition to likely holding 9 "Quick Tricks", includes first-round "control" in 2 of the 4 suits. And, if you jump immediately to a 4S open, Opponents cannot make a "lead directing" Club or Diamond Overcall bid of a 1S or 3S opening bid.

**Bruce:** But, Esther, what if Partner holds the Ace of Clubs and/or of Diamonds? Your Hand holds 2 Club and 2 Diamond losers. And what if Partner holds the Ace of Hearts? If Partner holds the Ace of Hearts, you can dump one of your Minor suit losers on the Ace of Hearts, which is exactly what you want to do with losers, and you will make a 4S contract!

**Esther:** Well, yes, my *fortuitous friend*! It is indeed a judgment call as to whether you should open 4S. But I would be inclined to do so.

**Bruce:** Well, Esther, what if Partner held the other 3 Aces? Isn't a 4S opening bid a "drop dead" bid which precludes Partner from further bidding??? Thus, you may miss a *slam* bid!!!

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, there is no such thing as an absolute "drop dead" bid! If you open 4S, Partner will know that you hold

extraordinary length in Spades, and at least 8 "Quick Tricks". Partner can count Partner's "Quick Tricks," and may elect following a 4S opening bid to still ask for Aces or "key cards", if Partner holds first- or "protected" second-Round control in the 3 remaining suits!

**Bruce:** OK, Esther. Now this question may be crazy, but sitting 1<sup>st</sup> as Dealer do you think you might consider opening the bidding with this Hand by bidding 2C?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, actually, I might. Normally, bidding 2C as an opening bid shows 22-24 HCPs. However, you can also open 2C, regardless of HCPs, if you can count 9+ "Quick Tricks".

**Bruce:** Well, Esther, how would you decide about opening 2C?

**Esther:** Bruce, this would mainly depend on what Convention Partner and I are playing when one of us opens 2C. If we were playing "2D Waiting," I would be less inclined to open 2C, because Partner's 2D response **won't tell me anything useful** about Partner's Hand!!! I will only know that Partner wants me to then show my long Suit. But if Partner and I were playing a Convention such as Roth,<sup>3</sup> I would be much more inclined to open 2C, because Partner's response will likely give me important useful information. And Opponents are unlikely to toss in interference when I initially show a "big" Hand!

### **Sitting Fourth with Opponents Bidding Hearts**

**Bruce:** OK, Esther. Let's consider an alternative auction in which holding this Hand you are sitting 4<sup>th</sup> as WEST, and Opponents have found a not-too-surprising 8+-card fit in Hearts. Here are the first 3 bids:

<b>NORTH</b>	<b>EAST</b>	<b>SOUTH</b>	<b>WEST</b>
1H	PASS	2NT!	?

Esther, what in the world does SOUTH's 2NT! bid mean?

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<sup>3</sup> Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons", see: "Lesson #5: Responses to Partner's 2C Opening Bid".

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, here N/S are playing "Jacoby 2NT!",<sup>4</sup> which is an Alert-able "artificial" bid, and says, "Partner, I hold (1) at least 4 cards in your bid Major, and (2) opening HCPs!"

**Bruce:** OK, Esther. How does this bidding by Opponents help you evaluate your Hand during the auction?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, this bidding sequence makes me love my Hand even more!!! When I set a Spade contract, NORTH is almost certain to lead a Heart, even knowing that my bid means I am not afraid of Hearts, because NORTH will know that a Heart winner is only likely to occur *early in play*, and had better try to take a winning Trick on the lead! So I know that I will get control of play on the first Trick, and I will get to see the Dummy, and formulate my Line of Play, and if I wish can immediately begin to draw Trump!

**Bruce:** So, Esther, would you as WEST sitting 4<sup>th</sup> then immediately boom out your 4S bid?

**Esther:** Well, no, in fact probably not! The Opponents have found an 8+-card fit in Hearts, and know that they hold 26+ HCPs! So, there is *no way on Earth* that they are going to stop bidding. They are going to keep bidding, and maybe publishing information about side features, which may also be helpful to me! Given that my suit is Spades, I know for certain that I still control the auction and can set a Spade contract whenever I am ready to do so, after I have learned everything I can from the auction!

### **Partner Opens the Bidding with a 1H Bid**

**Bruce:** Well, Esther, what if Partner sitting 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> opened the bidding with a 1H bid?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, what you should do in this situation depends on Partnership agreement about how you play *jump-shift bids* by Partner when Partner is Responder. I tend to play a jump-shift bid by Responder as "weak" and "drop dead." In that case, I would probably respond by bidding

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<sup>4</sup> Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons", see: "Lesson #2: Jacoby 2NT!".

1S, and jump later. The 1S bid will deny Partner's Hearts, and initially show at least 5 Spades with some Honors and at least some HCPs. Partner should expect me to have spades with a **Suit Quality Test ("SQT") Score**<sup>5</sup> of at least 7. You can normally safely bid to a level equal to the SQT Score minus 6. I would be inclined to try to acquire more information from Partner, and possibly the Opponents. What I am interested in learning is whether Partner eventually shows a "side feature" in either Clubs or Diamonds, so that I think I can make a 4-level contract in Spades by getting rid of 1 of my 4 losers in the Minors!

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<sup>5</sup> The Ron Klinger "SQT" Score equals (1) the number of cards in the Suit plus (2) the number of Honors held, including the Ten.