

UNLIKELY EVENTS Bruce Thompson

As bridge teachers, we often teach our bridge learners to focus on the probabilities of what bridge events are most likely. For example, we emphasize the probabilities of "missing" honors dropping or of various trump suit "splits." But sometimes we must also teach the somewhat contradictory message that, when you can only make your contract by assuming that an extremely unlikely event will occur, then that is exactly what you must assume when playing as declarer.



By Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen

"Concrete" is better than "theoretical" and "realistic" is better than "abbreviated"

When we are teaching, we are trying to persuade bridge learners that what we are teaching has relevance to real-world bridge. If we fail in this persuasive effort our students will be less inclined to learn what we are teaching.

Learners are more likely to absorb what we are teaching when we use concrete bridge examples rather than abstract theories. And our examples are better when the examples are most similar to what the bridge learners will see at actual bridge tables in actual competitions.

Bridge Master

The Bridge Base Online website includes a series of free "Bridge Master" lessons that many bridge learners find useful. The illustrative board used to teach today's bridge principal is from Level 2, Lesson B19.

♠ K Q J 10
 ♥ K 9 6 4
 ♦ A Q
 ♣ K J 10

♠ A 5 4 3
 ♥ A 10 3 2
 ♦ 4 3 2
 ♣ A K

West leads the ♦ 5 and declarer (South) can see that he is missing five trumps. When an odd number of cards are missing, the most likely split is the most nearly-equal split. The probability of a 3-2 split is

67.8% while the probability of a 4-1 split is 28.3%.

Declarer first counts his losers and can see that he will lose one diamond trick if East holds the ♦ K. At trick one, declarer finesses the ♦ Q which loses to the king. Now declarer must take every remaining trick to make his 6♥ contract!

There is danger of also losing one or two trumps, missing the ♥ Q J.

Thus, South's contract is in considerable danger.

The very unlikely event that South must assume has occurred

Declarer can see that the *only* way he can make his contract is if two events both have occurred. First, the trumps must split 3-2. Second, one opponent must hold ♥ Q J doubleton!

There are exactly 10 divisions of the missing cards: ♥ Q J 8 7 6:

Q J	8 7 6
Q 8	J 7 6
Q 7	J 8 6
Q 6	J 8 7
J 8	Q 7 6
J 7	Q 8 6
J 6	Q 8 7
8 7	Q J 8
8 6	Q J 7
7 6	Q J 8

Only one of the 10 splits includes ♥ Q J, an *unlikely* 10% probability event within another event, the 3-2 split! But you must assume an unlikely event has occurred if that is the only way to successfully make your contract! And on this board, assuming an unlikely event has occurred actually works! That's the *only* way the declarer can make the 6♥ contract. □

Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen is a hypothetical and not real person who has earned 20+ million ACBL Masterpoints who, in her "Esther Bridge Lessons" website, esther-bridge.com/index, teaches Bruce Thompson, her hapless bridge student, in lessons structured as Socratic dialogue. This article was written by Bruce.

