

Esther Discusses "On Defense, The Importance of Estimating Not Only Declarer's HCPs, But Also *Declarer's Distribution*"

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 "**On Defense, The Importance of Estimating Not Only Declarer's HCPs, But Also *Declarer's Distribution***". 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, obviously once Dummy comes down each Defender must estimate how many HCPs are held in every Hand, and where various "top" Honors may lay. But today you seem to be suggesting that Defenders ought *also* estimate to whatever extent possible what the Declarer's specific card distribution is. Can you talk us through *how* to do this, and *why* this is so important?

Esther: Well, my *Boneheaded Bozo*, of course I will try to help you! First, I feel obligated to note that the present discussion is drawn from **Tip #91** (pp. 132-133) from Ron Klinger's 2003 book, 100 WINNING BRIDGE TIPS for the

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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**.

Improving Player. The examples have been slightly modified by Esther.

Bruce: Errr, well, Esther, ..err, I mean Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen. Who is this Mr. Klinger fellow? Could you tell us a little about him, please?

Esther: Well, Bruce, of course. **Ron Klinger** (1941-) is an Australian contract bridge player who has written more than **70** bridge books including his 1990 book, Guide to Better Card Play, which won the "American Bridge Teachers' Association (ABTA) Bridge Book of the Year Award." His book, Right Through the Pack Again, won the 2010 "International Bridge Press Association Book of the Year Award." He was Editor of Australian Bridge for 13 years (1972-1985). For many years he has written, and still currently writes, a weekly bridge column for both the Sydney Morning Herald and The Sun-Herald.

Klinger is also the inventor of the Ron Klinger "**Suit Quality Test ('SQT') Score**". The "**SQT Score**" is computed by adding together (1) the number of cards you hold in a Suit plus (2) the number of Honors (including the Ten) that you hold in the Suit. *Suit contracts* set no higher than "**SQT Score**" - 6 are generally pretty "safe".

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, back to our original topic. Please tell us about *how* to estimate the Declarer's distribution, and *why* this is so important?

Esther: Well, my *Simpering Simpleton*, sure.

NORTH (9)

S: K 6 2
H: K J T 5
D: 9 6 4
C: Q 7 3

WEST (7)

S: Q 9 8 3
H: A 9 4 3
D: T
C: J 9 8 6

EAST (8)

S: T
H: Q 7 6 2
D: K 7 2
C: K T 5 4 2

SOUTH (16)

S: A J 7 5 4
H: 8
D: A Q J 8 5 3
C: A

Bidding

NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	WEST
PASS	PASS	1 D	PASS
1 H	PASS	1 S	PASS
1 NT	PASS	3 S	PASS
4 S	PASS	PASS	PASS

On Trick #1 WEST leads his Club 6, Declarer SOUTH plays the NORTH Dummy 3, EAST plays his Club Ten, and SOUTH wins with his Club Ace singleton. On Trick #2 SOUTH leads his Heart 8 singleton. *Should WEST play his Heart Ace or force Declarer SOUTH to decide whether to play the Dummy's Heart King or the NORTH Dummy's Heart Jack?*

Bruce: Errr, well, Esther, ..err, I mean Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen. Well, how can E/W estimate Declarer SOUTH's card distribution?

Esther: Well, my *Beaudacious Bupkus*,

1. SOUTH's initial bid of 1**D** likely shows 4+ Diamonds and possibly 1 or 2 4-card Majors.
2. NORTH's bid as Responder shows 4+ Hearts.
3. SOUTH's 2nd bid of 3**S** shows a 5th Spade.
4. Because SOUTH *initially* bid Diamonds, and *later* showed 5 Spades, SOUTH **must** hold 6 Diamonds or else SOUTH would not have bid 1**D** at his *first* turn within the auction.
5. Once Dummy comes down, WEST knows that Declarer SOUTH holds 5 Spades, the NORTH Dummy holds 3 Spades, WEST

holds **4** Spades. Therefore WEST knows that EAST holds only **1** Spade.

6. Once Dummy comes down EAST knows that N/S hold $5 + 3 = 8$ Spades. EAST holds **1** Spade. Therefore, EAST knows that WEST holds **4** Spades.
7. During the auction NORTH showed **4** Hearts, and now that the NORTH Dummy has come down NORTH does indeed hold **4** Hearts. EAST holds **4** Hearts. WEST holds **4** Hearts. SOUTH did not "support" NORTH's Hearts. Both WEST and EAST know that Declarer SOUTH is **6-5** in Diamonds and Spades respectively. Therefore, SOUTH initially could have only held **1** Club and **1** Heart, **2** Clubs and **0** Hearts, or **2** Hearts and **0** Clubs.
8. After Declarer SOUTH wins Trick **#1** with his Club Ace, and then leads his Heart 8, both WEST and EAST know that SOUTH is now void in *both* Hearts and Clubs. So WEST knows he **must** take his Heart Ace winner on Trick **#2** or he will never be able to cash this Heart Ace! And then WEST should return the Club Jack.

Bruce: Wow, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, that's *very clear*! Can you give us another example of estimating Declarer's distribution, and how doing so can *improve* your bridge results?

NORTH (3)

S: 9 4
H: J T 7 6
D: J T 4
C: J 5 4 3

WEST (3)

S: --
H: 9 4 2
D: K 8 7 6 3 2
C: T 9 7 2

EAST (9)

S: T 8 7 5 4 3
H: 8
D: Q 9 5
C: A K 8

SOUTH (25)

S: A K Q J 6
H: A K Q 5 3
D: A
C: Q 6

Bidding

EAST	SOUTH	WEST	NORTH
PASS	2C	PASS	2D
PASS	2S	PASS	2NT
PASS	3H	PASS	4H
PASS	PASS	PASS	

Bruce: OK, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, again, thanks so much!
Would you now talk us through your *second* example?

Esther: Well, Bruce, on this Board WEST led the Club Ten. So...

1. SOUTH's 2S 2nd bid promises 5+ Spades.
2. EAST holds 6 Spades, sees 2 Spades in the NORTH Dummy, counts SOUTH's 5 Spades, and now knows that WEST holds 0 Spades!
3. EAST wins Trick #1 with his Club King, because on defense always win as cheaply as possible! This "signals" to Partner WEST that EAST also holds the Club Ace. EAST playing the Club Ace would deny EAST holding the Club King!
4. EAST must not "cash" his 2nd Club "winner" now. Instead, on Trick #2 EAST will lead a small Spade toward WEST so that WEST can ruff.
5. On Trick #3 WEST will lead a small Club toward EAST's "promised" Club Ace.
6. On Trick #4 EAST will lead a 2nd small Spade toward WEST so that WEST can ruff again, and thus "set" the N/S 4H contract "off the top" even though SOUTH holds a "ginormous" Hand, N/S hold 4 + 4+ = 8-9 Trump Hearts, and E/W hold a total of only 9 + 3 = 12 HCPs!

Bruce: My goodness, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, *thanks so much!* I now see quite clearly that it is very important to try to estimate (1) not only Declarer's HCPs, but also (2) Declarer's distribution, and how doing so will lead to *improved* bridge results!