

## **Esther Discusses "A Special Situation When You Are On Defense Against a Suit Contract and You MUST Lead Trump"**

**Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen<sup>1</sup>**

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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 "**A Special Situation When You are On Defense Against a Suit Contract and You MUST Lead Trump**". 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 so "warm and caring"!

**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, is there anything you wish to

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<sup>1</sup> 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](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**.

emphasize before you begin to delve into today's bridge lesson?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. First, I want to emphasize that a previous "Esther Bridge Lesson" #65: "**On Lead Against Opponents' Suit Contract, When Should You Lead Trump?**"<sup>2</sup> deals *extensively* with this important topic:

[https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/Tr\\_Lead.pdf](https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/Tr_Lead.pdf)

Second, I want to emphasize that today's lesson deals more narrowly with the *special situation* in which you are defending against your Opponents' Suit contract and (1) you hold 1 or more Trump cards, (2) Partner has shown out of Trump, and (3) both Declarer and Dummy still hold Trump cards.

Third, the ideas presenter here today are drawn from Michael Berkowitz's excellent article, "Lessons Learned: Picking Your Moment", from the August, 2025 issue of the ACBL Bridge Bulletin (p. 48). Esther may have altered some of the cards in the examples.

**Bruce:** Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther, well, what is Berkowitz's main argument in his excellent article about defending against Opponents' bridge Suit contract?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, Berkowitz puts his argument most succinctly:

"I don't love rules in bridge, but here's a pretty good one: If you have the last trump remaining as a defender and both [D]eclarer and [D]ummy have trumps left, you want to lead the trump. This is true whether you have the high trump or a low one. With a high one, [D]eclarer is going to let you win it eventually, but leading draws two of the opponents' trumps. With a low trump, you still want to lead it (generally) because you can force [D]eclarer to use up two trumps when they [sic] may not be ready to." (p. 48)

**Bruce:** Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther, can you talk us through some examples?

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<sup>2</sup> Many of the ideas presented "**Esther Bridge Lesson #65**" were drawn from Ron Klinger's excellent 2003 book, 100 WINNING BRIDGE TIPS for the Improving Player.

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, of course I will try to help you. Let's say that you are sitting WEST and the auction has proceeded:

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
2 <b>C</b>	PASS	2 <b>D*</b>	PASS
2 <b>NT</b>	PASS	3 <b>C**</b>	PASS
3 <b>H</b>	PASS	3 <b>NT</b>	PASS
4 <b>S</b>	PASS	PASS	PASS

\*2**D** "waiting"  
\*\*"Stayman"

The Dummy and you, WEST, hold:

NORTH (4)

**S:** A 8 5 3  
**H:** 8 5  
**D:** 9 5 4 3  
**C:** 5 4 3

WEST (6)

**S:** J 7 6  
**H:** K J T 9  
**D:** T 7  
**C:** J T 9 8

**Bruce:** Errr, well, hmmm... Well, let's say that you sitting WEST on Trick #1 lead the Club Jack. Partner EAST plays the Club 7 which in the E/W Partnership is "encouraging". Declarer SOUTH "wins" with the Club Ace. On Trick #2 Declarer SOUTH "cashes" his own Trump Spade King and EAST plays the Trump Spade Ten. On Trick #3 Declarer SOUTH leads a "low" Trump Spade to the NORTH Dummy Trump Spade Ace and EAST plays the Trump Spade Queen. On Trick #4 Declarer SOUTH leads a "low" Heart from the NORTH Dummy, Partner EAST plays the Heart 2, Declarer SOUTH plays the Heart Queen, and you sitting WEST "win" with your Heart King. Now what should WEST play on lead on Trick #5?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, sitting WEST you see the NORTH Dummy now holds 2 remaining "low" Trump Spades, but also now a singleton mid-level Heart. Declarer SOUTH can still ruff 2 Hearts in the NORTH Dummy. You sitting WEST now hold the "top" Trump Spade, the Spade Jack, and Partner has 0 Trump Spades remaining. You must immediately "cash" the Trump Spade Jack. If you do so, Declarer SOUTH can ruff 1, but not 2, Hearts in the NORTH Dummy! This will preclude Declarer SOUTH from "dumping" 2 of his "loser" Hearts by ruffing in the NORTH Dummy.

**Bruce:** Errr, well, hmmm... Well, did Declarer make the common mistake of drawing **2** Rounds of Trump Spades. If Declarer SOUTH had not done this and drew only 1 Round of Trump Spades Declarer SOUTH would still hold **3** Trump Spades in the NORTH Dummy?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, you are *precisely* correct. Declarer SOUTH should not have initially drawn **2** Rounds of Trump Spades! It would have been better for Declarer SOUTH to use **1** Trump Spade per Trick to ruff to "win" Tricks rather than **2** Trump Spades per Trick to "win" a given Trick. As it happened Declarer SOUTH held a Diamond doubleton A,K:

	<i>NORTH (4)</i>	
	<b>S:</b> A 8 5 3	
	<b>H:</b> 8 5	
	<b>D:</b> 9 5 4 3	
	<b>C:</b> 5 4 3	
<i>WEST (6)</i>		<i>EAST (7)</i>
<b>S:</b> J 7 6		<b>S:</b> Q T
<b>H:</b> K J T 9		<b>H:</b> 7 4 3
<b>D:</b> T 7		<b>D:</b> Q J 8 6 2
<b>C:</b> J T 9 8		<b>C:</b> Q 7 6
	<i>SOUTH (23)</i>	
	<b>S:</b> K 9 4 2	
	<b>H:</b> A Q 6 2	
	<b>D:</b> A K	
	<b>C:</b> A K 2	

**Bruce:** Hmmm... Well, how about a different Board? Let's say the auction still proceeded:

	SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
	<b>2C</b>	PASS	<b>2D*</b>	PASS
	<b>2NT</b>	PASS	<b>3C**</b>	PASS
	<b>3H</b>	PASS	<b>3NT</b>	PASS
	<b>4S</b>	PASS	PASS	PASS
	<b>*2D "waiting"</b>			
	<b>**"Stayman"</b>			

The 4 Hands held:

NORTH (4)

S: 8 5 4 3  
 H: 8 5 2  
 D: K J T 2  
 C: 5 4

WEST (11)

S: J 7 6  
 H: K Q J T  
 D: 9 6  
 C: A T 9 8

EAST (2)

S: Q T  
 H: 7 3  
 D: 8 5 4 3  
 C: 7 6 3 2

SOUTH (23)

S: A K 9 2  
 H: A 9 6 4  
 D: A Q  
 C: K Q J

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, on this Board WEST leads the Heart King on Trick #1 and Declarer SOUTH "wins" with his own Heart Ace. Declarer SOUTH on Tricks #2 and #3 "wins" with his own Trump Spade A,K and Partner EAST plays the Trump Spade T,Q. On Tricks #4 and #5 Declarer SOUTH leads his Diamond A,Q and "overtakes" the Diamond Queen on Trick #5 to enter the NORTH Dummy. On Trick #6 Declarer SOUTH leads the Diamond Jack from the NORTH Dummy.

**Bruce:** Hmmm... Well, on Trick #6 I sitting WEST am now void in Diamonds and I still hold 1 Trump Spade, the Spade Jack, which in fact is now the "top" Trump Spade. I want to try to wait to get the lead in either Clubs or Hearts and then be able to "drop" 2 of N/S's Trump Spades with my last remaining Trump Spade. Is that the right play for me to make?

**Esther:** Negatory, Bruce. If you get greedy and wait Declarer SOUTH will lead another of NORTH Dummy's Diamond Honors and "dump" a second Heart "loser" in his "closed" Hand. If you ruff on Trick #6 you will "win" a 2<sup>nd</sup> Trick with your Club Ace, and if Declarer SOUTH started with 4 Hearts you sitting WEST will also "win" 2 more Heart Tricks and set the N/S 4S contract. If Declarer SOUTH initially held only 3 Hearts you still will prevent Declarer SOUTH from making an Overtrick if you ruff on Trick #6.

**Bruce:** Errr, well, hmmm... Well, I suppose your "Take Home" message is, "If you have the opportunity to lead the sole remaining Trump card against Opponents' Suit contract and

Partner has shown 'out' of Trump cards I should *immediately* lead my remaining Trump card. And I should do so whether or not my sole remaining Trump card is 'high' or 'low'."

**Esther:** *BINGO*, Bruce! In duplicate bridge it pays not to get too greedy or too cute!