

Esther Discusses "On Bridge Defense When Should You 'Cover an Honor with an Honor'?"

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 talk us through "**On Bridge Defense When Should You 'Cover an Honor with an Honor'?**". 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 such a "warm and caring" person!

Bruce: Errr, well, in any case, Esther, at the start would you please briefly explain why being strategic about your decisions on whether or not to "cover" an Honor led from the Dummy or by the Declarer?

Esther: Well, my *inquisitive interlocutor*, I will certainly try to help you. There are **3** basic strategic purposes that should govern your decision about whether to "Cover an Honor with an Honor":

1. By covering an Honor led from the Dummy you remove the Declarer's further opportunities to finesse.
2. By covering an Honor led from the Dummy you are "protecting" your Partner if Partner holds a high card in the led Suit thus reducing the Declarer's Tricks in in the led Suit and thereby giving Partner

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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**.

a better opportunity to "win" later.

3. However, if you do not "cover" a led Honor you may "promote" an Opponent's "low" card into a "winner".

Bruce: Errr, well, Esther... Are you actually being *nice* to me?

Esther: Well, my *studious salamander*, of course I am being "nice" to you! Why wouldn't I be "nice" to you?

Bruce: Errr, well, Esther... Hmmm... Well, is there a "**General Rule**" about when you should always "cover"? Or should you never "cover"? Or what?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. On the ACBL website there is a lesson posted on "When to Cover an Honor with an Honor"
https://web2.acbl.org/CommunityLessons/11_14_23.pdf
Let's talk through some of the lesson's examples of when to "cover" or not "cover" (i.e., "duck"). I have changed some of the cards in the examples. Let's presume that in all cases SOUTH is playing a Spade contract.

Rule #1

Only "cover" the *last* of visible "touching" Honors.

Dummy

NORTH

S: Q J 9 4

YOU

EAST

S: K 6 2

WEST

S: T 8 3

SOUTH

S: A 7 5

If Declarer SOUTH leads the NORTH Dummy's Spade Queen do not "cover" with your Spade King. If you "cover" with your Spade King SOUTH will "win" with the Spade Ace, finesse toward the Dummy's 9 and potentially "win" all **4** Spade Tricks!

Bruce: Errr, well, Esther... Is there another case in which you should not "cover"?

Esther: Well, my *loquacious linkster*, of course!

Rule #2

Do not "cover" when the Opponents have known length.

Dummy

NORTH

S: A 6 5 4 2

WEST
S: K 6

YOU
EAST
S: --

SOUTH
S: Q J T 9 8 3

Let's say that Declarer SOUTH opened the bidding with a 2S bid and the final contract was set at 4S. Sitting WEST you know that SOUTH holds 6 Spades and the exposed NORTH Dummy holds 5 Spades, so with your 2 Spades you know that Partner EAST is void in Trump Spade cards. When Declarer SOUTH leads the Spade Queen do not "cover"! There is *nothing* to gain by playing your Spade King. You have to hope that Declarer SOUTH will play the NORTH Dummy's Spade Ace in the hope of "dropping" EAST's Spade King. Afterall, a 1-1 "split" has a 52.0% probability while a 2-0 "split" has a 48.0% probability.²

Bruce: Hmmm, well, Esther... Is there another "rule" about when to not "cover"?

Esther: Well, Bruce, of course.

Rule #3

Do not "cover" when a "short Suit" is exposed or expected.
Dummy
NORTH
S: A 2

YOU
WEST
S: K 7 5 3

Here Declarer SOUTH leads the Spade Queen. Do not "cover". SOUTH may hold the Spade Q, J, T, x. If you "cover" SOUTH's Spade Queen with your Spade King you would then be giving N/S 3 Spade Tricks "off the top".

Bruce: Hmmm, well, Esther... Are there converse cases in which when playing Defense you *instead* should "cover"?

Esther: Well, Bruce, yes...

Rule #4

Do "cover" when you hold immediate "lower" Honors.

² Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons" see "A Comprehensive List of 8 Different Categories of Bridge Probabilities, and How These May Help Guide Your Bidding and Play":
https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/8_probs.pdf

Dummy
NORTH

S: A 2

YOU

WEST

S: K J T 9

Here Declarer SOUTH leads the Spade Queen. Here sitting EAST do "cover" because on these holdings you know that once Declarer "covers" with the NORTH Dummy's Ace your Spade J,T,9 will all **3** be "promoted" into "winners".

Bruce: Hmmm, well, Esther... Is there another "Rule"?

Esther: Well, Bruce...

Rule #5

Do "cover" when you hold immediate "short" Honors.

Dummy

NORTH

S: T 2

YOU

EAST

WEST

S: K 8 6 3

S: J 4

SOUTH

S: A Q 9 7 5

Here Declarer SOUTH leads the NORTH Dummy's Spade Ten. Do "cover". You are definitely going to "lose" your Spade Jack, but if you "cover" you force SOUTH to play his Spade Queen and you may be "protecting" some of Partner's "long" Spades, such as the Spade 8 card.

Bruce: Errrr, well, Esther... Surely there is yet another "Rule" about when to "cover"?

Esther: Well, my *studly salamander*, of course.

Rule #6

Do "cover" when the *last* of visible "touching" Honors is led.

Dummy

NORTH

S: Q J 9 2

YOU

EAST

S: K 6 4

WEST

S: T 8 3

SOUTH

S: A 7 5

After SOUTH leads the NORTH Dummy Spade Queen and you "duck", on the next Trick when Declarer SOUTH next leads the Spade Jack sitting EAST "cover" with your King to force SOUTH to "cover" with his Spade Ace. This will "promote" partner WEST's Ten if he indeed holds that card, as is likely.

Bruce: Errr, well, Esther... Can we now talk through these principles as invoked on the play of an entire Board?

Esther: Well, my *studious salmon*, sure. I will use an example a Board presented by **Richard Pavlicek** in one of his newspaper bridge columns.

About **Richard Pavlicek**

Richard Pavlicek (1945-) has won **11** North American Bridge Championships, including a record-setting **3** straight wins in the Reisinger Board-a-Match Teams, 1982-84, and again in 1990. He won the 1973 inaugural Grand National Teams tournament and repeated a win there in 1997. He has written or co-authored several bridge books, including with co-author William S. Root their 1981 book, Modern Bridge Conventions. From 1984 until 1990 Pavlicek was the Bridge Columnist for the Fort Lauderdale News and Sun-Sentinel. Esther particularly likes his re-posts of his newspaper bridge columns:

<https://www.rpbridge.net/rpco.htm>

The present example is from the 9/16/84 Pavlicek newspaper bridge column, "Cover an Honor with an Honor?":

<https://www.rpbridge.net/7b22.htm>

Esther may have altered some of the cards in the example.

Dealer: **EAST**

Vul: **N/S**

NORTH (14)

S: K J 4

H: A 7 5 3

D: Q J 4

C: K 9 2

WEST (4)

S: 3 2

H: J 9 8 6

D: T 6 2

C: Q J T 8

EAST (9)

S: 7 6 5

H: Q T 4

D: K 8 7 5

C: A 7 5

SOUTH (13)

S: A Q T 9 8

H: K 2

D: A 9 3

C: 6 4 3

Bidding

EAST	SOUTH	WEST	NORTH
PASS	1S	PASS	3S
PASS	4S	PASS	PASS
PASS			

WEST leads the Club Queen as the "top" of a "touching" Honor card sequence. Declarer SOUTH "covers" with the Club King and EAST "wins" Trick #1 with his Club Ace. E/W "win" Tricks #2 and #3 with WEST's Club J,T. On Trick #4 WEST then shifted to a Trump Spade lead. On Tricks #5 and #6 Declarer SOUTH "drew" all the E/W Trump Spade cards. On Trick #7 Declarer SOUTH leads the NORTH Dummy's Diamond Queen from the "touching" Q,J Honor sequence.

Bruce: Errr, well, Esther... Should EAST on Trick #7 then "cover" with his Diamond King?

Esther: Well, Bruce, not if you had been paying any attention to what I have been teaching. But let's talk through EAST "covering" on Trick #7 with Diamond King.

If on Trick #7 EAST "covers" with his Diamond King

On Trick #8 Declarer SOUTH "cashes" his Heart King "winner". On Trick #9 SOUTH leads to the NORTH Dummy Heart Ace. On Trick #10 Declarer SOUTH leads a "low" Heart from the NORTH Dummy and ruffs from his own Hand.

After Trick #10 N/S have "won" 7 Tricks and E/W have "won" 3 Tricks. The 3 cards now held in the 4 Hands are:

NORTH (14)

S:
H: 7
D: J 4
C:

WEST (4)

S:
H: J
D: T 6
C:

EAST (9)

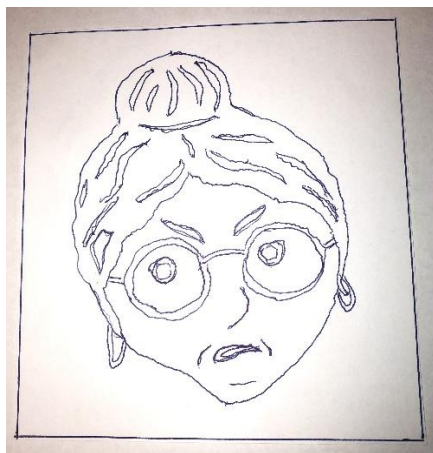
S:
H:
D: 8 7 5
C:

SOUTH (13)

S: Q
H:
D: 9 3
C:

On Trick #11 Declarer SOUTH leads his Trump Spade Queen "winner" in order to execute a "Squeeze Play" <https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/squeeze.pdf> against WEST. WEST must keep his Heart Jack and must then discard his Diamond 6. On Trick #12 Declarer SOUTH will lead his own Diamond 9 and will "win" the last 2 Tricks no matter how WEST plays on Trick #12. This "Squeeze Play" would not have been possible if only EAST had "ducked" rather than "covered" on Trick #7. As Pavlicek emphasizes:

"Nicely played? Yes, but declarer cannot take all the credit for squeezing West. East was [himself] a contributor when he covered the [Dummy's] diamond queen with the [diamond] King. Had East played low, declarer could not have brought about the squeeze."



Esther says:

On his website Richard Pavlicek also has posted an interactive bridge exercise where you can practice deciding whether to “cover” or “duck”:

<https://www.rpbridge.net/4w29.htm>