

**Esther Discusses "On Defense, 'Keeping Length'
with Dummy, and/or 'Keeping Length' with
Declarer: An Important *Bridge Principle*
Underappreciated by Many Beginning Players"**

Bruce Thompson

To return to the "Esther Bridge Lessons," CLICK:

<https://esther-bridge.com/index.html>

To return to the "Esther Bridge 'Pop' Quizzes", CLICK:

<https://esther-bridge.com/quiz.html>

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 Defense, 'Keeping Length' with Dummy, and/or 'Keeping Length' with Declarer: An Important *Bridge Principle Underappreciated by Many Beginning Players***". 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.

Esther: Well, my *gracious giver*, don't worry too much about it! As you know, I am a very patient bridge teacher! Now, Bruce, at the outset I feel obligated to note that the present discussion is drawn from **Tip #90** (pp. 130-131) from Ron Klinger's 2003 book, 100 WINNING BRIDGE TIPS for the Improving Player. The examples have been slightly modified by Esther.

Bruce: Errr, well, Esther... Ummm... Errr... 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!"

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther. 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, Esther... Ummm... Well, thank you *very much* indeed for that review. Now Esther, before we get into the details of today's lesson, would you first briefly *explain* what you mean by "**keeping length with...**"?

Esther: Well, my *inquisitive interlocutor*, I would be happy to help you! The phrase, "**keeping length with...**", simply means that as a Defender, you retain the number of cards in the Suit held in Dummy, or that you believe the Declarer likely holds. This will become clearer as we explore some examples. But don't try to overthink this. This simple principle is not that complicated. But understanding *why* doing this is important on defense is something that you do need to understand!

"Keeping Length" with Dummy

Bruce: Well, Esther, what is the **Cardinal Bridge Principle** involved in **"Keeping Length" with Dummy**?

Esther: Well, my *fortuitous friend*, let's say that you are sitting EAST on defense while NORTH is the Dummy, and in one Suit the 4 Hands hold:

	NORTH	
	A Q 7 4	
WEST		EAST
J T 8		9 6 3 2
	SOUTH	
	K 5	

The basic idea is that sitting EAST on defense you should not discard *any* cards in a Suit that *might* later win Tricks against the Dummy. Of course, it is not important to **"keep length" with Dummy** if all the Dummy's cards in a Suit are higher than all your cards!

Bruce: Well, ummm..., Esther, can you give us another example of **"keeping length" with Dummy**?

Esther: Well, Bruce, of course! Here is another example with you sitting EAST on defense while NORTH is the Dummy, and in one Suit the 4 Hands hold:

	NORTH	
	K Q 8 7 3	
WEST		EAST
J 6		9 5 4 2
	SOUTH	
	A T	

N/S has **3** certain "winners", *but* if EAST discards from this Suit and Declarer SOUTH has an "entry" to the NORTH Dummy N/S will take **5** Tricks.

Bruce: Well, Esther, that is interesting! How about one final example?

Esther: Well, Bruce, sure. Here is another example with you sitting EAST on defense while NORTH is the Dummy, and in one Suit the NORTH and EAST Hands hold:

NORTH
S: A 6
H: 8 7 3
D: A 7 6 3
C: A K 5 3

EAST
S: 8 7
H: J T 9 4
D: T 5 4 2
C: 8 4 2

EAST	SOUTH	WEST	NORTH
PASS	1NT¹	PASS	3NT
PASS	PASS	PASS	

¹N/S are playing "weak" **1NT** openings showing a "balanced" Hand and **13+** HCPs.

Here WEST "on lead" plays his Spade King, thus promising his Spade Queen. Declarer SOUTH "ducks" in the NORTH Dummy on Trick #1 based on the "Rule of 7". On Trick #2 WEST leads the Spade Queen (yes, indeed!; **more on this in a moment**) to "knock out" the NORTH Dummy Spade Ace.

On Trick #3 the NORTH Dummy Club 3 is led toward Declarer SOUTH's Club Queen. Declarer SOUTH then leads back to the NORTH Dummy Clubs, and on Tricks #3-#5 Defender WEST plays the Club T,9,6 **in that order**. What should EAST discard when the 4th Club is played from the NORTH Dummy? EAST should (1) "throw" the Heart 4 and (2) retain 4 Diamonds, thus "keeping length" with Dummy.

Now **why** did WEST use his Spade Queen to "knock out" the NORTH Dummy Spade Ace??? And **why** did WEST play his 3 Clubs "high to low", T,9,6??? SOUTH actually held:

S: 9 4 3 **H:** K Q 6 5 **D:** K Q 8 **C:** Q J 7 (13)

First, WEST playing the Spade Queen, an unnecessarily "high" Spade, is a "signal" to Partner EAST saying, "Partner, I hold 'winners' in the *highest* Suit below this Spade Suit, meaning Hearts!" Second, playing the 3 Club cards in the order *opposite* of the "normal" order also is a "signal" that WEST holds "winners" in a "higher" Suit, Hearts.

Bruce: WOW, Esther, good stuff indeed!!! Could we now turn our attention to "Keeping Length" with Dummy?

"Keeping Length" with Declarer

Esther: Well, yes, my *beaudacious beauty*, of course. But first I will emphasize what Klinger (2003) says about this problem:

"Keeping length with [D]eclarer is **more difficult** since [D]eclarer's [H]and is not visible but the bidding often reveals what [D]eclarer would rather keep hidden. **Pay attention** to the bidding and your discarding problems may be simplified." (p. 131, emphasis added)

Bruce: Well, Esther, would you talk us through some examples?

Esther: Well, Bruce, of course:

Example #1

Bidding

SOUTH	NORTH
1NT	2C
2H	3NT
4S	

Here Declarer SOUTH has shown both **4** Hearts and **4** Spades. On defense Defenders should be very reticent to part with Spades, because Spades are Trump, but also with Hearts.

Example #2

Bidding

SOUTH	NORTH
1NT	2C
2D	3NT

Here Declarer SOUTH has *denied* holding **4** cards in *either* Major. If once the NORTH Dummy comes down and during play it becomes clear that Declarer SOUTH holds only **2** or **3** cards in one Minor, Declarer SOUTH *must* hold **4** or **5** cards in the *other Minor*. On defense do not discard cards in that *other Minor*!

Example #3

Bidding

SOUTH	NORTH
1 D	1 S
2 H	4 H

Here Declarer SOUTH has shown **4** Hearts, *denied* holding **4** Spades, and therefore likely holds **5+** Diamonds. A Defender holding "long" Diamonds should *retain* those Diamonds!

Example #4

Bidding

SOUTH	NORTH
1 D	1 NT
3 NT	

Here Declarer SOUTH has *denied* holding **4** Hearts, **4** Spades, or **5+** Diamonds. A Defender holding **4+** Clubs should *retain* those Clubs!