

**Esther Discusses**  
***Bidding the Law of Total Tricks***  
**Versus HCPs**

**Bruce Thompson**

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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 **bidding the "Law of Total Tricks" versus HCPs**. Esther, thanks for taking 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 Esther! Always, **ALWAYS, ALWAYS** instead call me, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen!

**Bruce:** Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, in any case, thank you for talking to us today. Here are the E/W holdings and the bidding that I would like to ask you about today:

**Board on 6/9/22**

Dealer: **WEST**

WEST (21)	EAST (0)
<b>S:</b> A 7	<b>S:</b> T 9 8 4 3 2
<b>H:</b> J 9 2	<b>H:</b> 7 6 5
<b>D:</b> A K 9 2	<b>D:</b> T 8 3
<b>C:</b> A K Q 6	<b>C:</b> 8

**Bidding**

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
2NT	PASS		

**Bruce:** Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, I'm sure we all agree that WEST's opening bid is correct. WEST holds

21 HCPs, a "flat" or "square" hand with no void, no singleton, and only 1 doubleton. That is pretty straight forward. But, assuming NORTH passes, as was the case on this Board, what then should EAST bid?

**Esther:** Well, my malodorous misanthrope, before I directly answer your questions, let me re-emphasize what I have repeatedly and emphatically told you over, and over, and over again. Here are the **5** most important principles of competent duplicate bridge play:

1. "Points are (only) for No Trump, and not for Suit contracts," says Yoda.
2. "Points Smoints!", and "More Points Smoints", said Marty Bergin, in the titles of 2 of his most popular duplicate bridge books.
3. In Suit contracts, instead the "**Law of Total Tricks**" is much more important than HCPs!
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**Bruce:** Ok. So remind me what the "Law of Total Tricks" says.

**Esther:** Well, my simpering simpleton, the "Law of Total Tricks" says, **in a suit contract, you will usually (about 85% of the time) make a suit contract if you do not bid at a level higher than the number of trump cards your partnership holds.**

**Bruce:** OK. So on this hand, once WEST bid **2NT**, WEST "limited" his hand, thus making EAST "The Captain" who will set the contract, and WEST cannot bid again unless EAST requires a bid. Should EAST pass WEST's **2NT** bid, and play a **NT** contract?

**Esther:** Well, my dim-witted dufus, please, please, please try to remember that "points are for No Trump." A **2NT** contract will be difficult to make with only 21 HCPs. And because EAST holds 6 Spades, WEST is likely to hold only 2 or 3 Spades, and in a **NT** contract WEST will thus lack entries to EAST's long Spade suit.

**Bruce:** OK. So, are you suggesting that EAST as "The Captain" should force a transfer to Spades, and set the contract at 3**S**?

**Esther:** Yes, my simpering simpleton, that is what I am saying. EAST knows that a 2**NT** contract likely has too few HCPs to make, while a Spade suit contract at the 3 level is likely to make given that E/W holds at least 9 trump cards, and  $9 \text{ minus } 6 = 3$ . It is not certain to make, but probably more likely to make than 2**NT**. When you are playing competitive bridge, you have to learn to play the odds!

**Bruce:** Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, on this Board actually E/W went down when bidding 2**NT**, but also when bidding 3**S**.

**Esther:** Well, I know that you are a "Results Player", who evaluates the correctness of bids based on the results on a single, given Board. And, as I have told you repeatedly, generalizing the results of a single Board to other future Boards is triple dumb. You see, you will never, ever, never see that Board ever again for the rest of your life. To win at duplicate bridge, you must play based on generic principles of bridge, and not based on generalizing the results from a single Board.

**Bruce:** Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, does this mean that HCPs only matter when bidding a **NT** contract?

**Esther:** Well, HCPs certainly do matter when opening a **NT** bid, or setting a **NT** contract. But HCPs must also be considered when bidding something other than PASS for the first time in an auction. Here are some general principles:

1. If the sum of your HCPs plus the number of cards in your longest 2 suits is 20 or more, you **must** bid a suit, even in first chair, especially if one or both your long suits involves a Major. This is Marty Bergin's "Rule of 20." The Rule favors bidding 2-suited hands in a suit contract bid.
2. If you are sitting 3<sup>rd</sup>, and the first 2 bids are PASS, you can (not must, but can) bid with 11 HCPs.

3. If you are sitting 4<sup>th</sup>, and the first 3 bids are PASS, you are in "the balancing" position. You can (can, but not must) bid something other than PASS if you hold 10 HCPs.