

Esther Discusses "Drawing Missing Cards *Low to High*, and Identifying the 'Danger Suit' and the 'Dangerous Opponent' by (Really) '*Listening to the Auction*'"!

Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen¹

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

Esther: Today, we are honored to have with us *moi*, Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, Quintuple Gold Emerald Life Master (20 Million+ ACBL MasterPoints), who will discuss "Drawing Missing Cards *Low to High*, and Identifying the 'Danger Suit' and the 'Dangerous Opponent' by (Really) '*Listening to the Auction*'"!

Bruce: 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, very sorry about that, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, why don't you first talk a bit about the fact that unlikely, or even extremely unlikely, things can happen at the bridge table?

Esther: Well, of course, my *Malodorous Misanthrope*. On this point, I very much like to quote my fellow Quintuple Gold Emerald Life Master (20 Million+ ACBL MasterPoints), Walt Disney, who was always very fond of saying with respect to bridge:

"Miracles happen every day!"

Bruce: Oh, my goodness, Est... I mean, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen. Can you give us an example?

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¹ Esther is actually a fictitious, not real person. This "Esther Bridge Lesson" was actually written by Bruce Thompson.

Esther: Well, certainly bridge miracles can happen, my *Simpering Simpleton!* For example, statistically, if you play twice a week in competitions involving 26 Boards each session, you will be dealt a one-suited hand on average once every **60,000 years!**² But because this event in "on the average", you could be dealt this hand tomorrow!!! Or even twice in one week!!! Or, instead in 120,000 years!!!

Bruce: Well, OK. Any examples of bridge miracles from the bridge world that *actually happened* recently?

Esther: Well, my *Bodacious Bupkus*, how about the following Hand held by NORTH in a recent game?

Board #3 Knoxville BBO

499er Game 9/28/23

NORTH (10)

S: A Q J T 9 7 6 4 2

H: --

D: Q 4

C: J 4

This Hand contained **9** cards in a single Suit, Spades, and 5 of the Top 6 Spades!!! Such a Hand is **quite rare!** As noted in the "Esther Bridge Lessons" **Lesson #19:** "8 Different Categories of Bridge Probabilities, and How These May Help Guide Your Bidding and Play", a **9-card Suit will occur in about 0.00037 or 0.037% of the Hands**³ that you are dealt. If you play 24 Boards twice a week in competition, you will play 24 Boards x 2 Times/Week x 0.00037 x 57 weeks = 1.01, which means you will be dealt a Hand holding 9 cards in a single Suit, *on average*, about **once every 57 weeks, or roughly once every 1.1 years!!**

So, a Hand holding a 9-card Suit is *quite rare*, but indeed *does happen* in the real world, just as it did on Thursday, September 28, 2023! And if you are going to play bridge in the real world, you must be prepared to deal with every possible contingency, and not only the likely contingencies! In short:

² See "Relevant Probabilities for Bridge Players":

<https://www.bridgewebs.com/taverham/Probabilities.pdf>

³ This probability is only the probability of holding any 9 cards in a single Suit, and does not take into account the *added rarity* of also holding 5 of the 6 Top cards!

1. You must plan for the most likely, and thus expected things to happen in bridge, but...
2. You must *also be ever ready to (1) promptly detect and (2) adapt when unlikely, unexpected events nevertheless occur!*

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, perhaps we can discuss these 2 very important principles with respect to the following *actual recent* Board, which instead of involving unusually-long card counts, involved a **very unlikely Trump "split"**. I would specifically like you to talk about how to play as Declarer in such a way that you can (1) promptly detect unlikely, but nevertheless possible events, such as an **extremely unlikely Trump "split"**, and even more importantly, (2) how you as Declarer can effectively deal with an extremely unlikely Trump "split". Before you talk about detecting unlikely Trump "splits" early, before things get out of control, and then subsequently dealing with the unlikely Trump "split", would you first comment on the bidding on this Board?

Board #10
Knoxville 499er 9/28/23

Vul: **BOTH**
 Dealer: **EAST**

	NORTH (13)
	S: K J T 7 5
	H: K T 4
	D: J T
	C: A J 8
WEST (6)	EAST (7)
S: A 9 8 6 4	S: --
H: Q 6 2	H: J 9 8 5 3
D: 9 5	D: A Q 6 4 3
C: T 3 2	C: 7 6 5
	SOUTH (14)
	S: Q 3 2
	H: A 7
	D: K 8 7 2
	C: K Q 9 4

Bidding

EAST	SOUTH	WEST	NORTH
PASS	1C	PASS	1S
2D	2S	PASS	4S
DBL	PASS	PASS	PASS

Esther: Well, Bruce, I agree with EAST's PASS with 7 HCPs. And EAST cannot invoke Marty Bergen's "Rule of 20" to justify a bid with so few HCPs, since 7 + 10 cards in his longest 2 Suits only equals 17. I also agree with SOUTH's bid. SOUTH does not hold enough HCPs to bid 1NT, at least the way Partner and I play, which is 15-18. But an opening bid by SOUTH holding 14 HCPs is *certainly* in order. And given that SOUTH's Clubs and Diamonds have very similar Suit Quality, I prefer to bid the lower-ranking Suit to (1) eat up less Bidding Space, and afford Partner the opportunity to show Diamonds at the 1 level, if that is his best Suit, and he wants to bid a Suit.

Bruce: OK, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, I am sure that you agree with WEST's PASS. What do you think of NORTH's 1S bid?

Esther: Well, if SOUTH had opened 1D, NORTH could bid "2 Over 1"⁴ 2C to show an opening Hand (even with only 3 Clubs). But over a 1C open, NORTH's 1S bid does show at least 4 Spades, and at least some HCPs. So, I think this is an appropriate bid.

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, EAST then bid 2D. What do you think of this bid?

Esther: Well, I agree with EAST's bid. EAST is a PASSED Hand. But EAST (1) holds a void in NORTH's bid Suit (yea!!!), (2) a 2-suited Hand, which plays well in a SUIT contract (but not in a NT contract!), and (3) EAST's Diamonds have a Ron Klinger "Suit Quality Test" ("SQS") Score of 5 + 2 = 7, which supports making a 7 - 6 = 1 level bid, and almost a 2-level bid. Also, importantly EAST's 2D bid is "lead directing" to WEST!

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, then do you agree with SOUTH's bid as Responder of 2S? Note that SOUTH only holds 3, not 4, Spades???

Esther: Well, yes. This is quite a quandary. If NORTH and SOUTH were more experienced, SOUTH might make a

⁴ Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons", see: "Lesson #1: '2 Over 1' (or '2/1')".

"Support DOUBLE"⁵ bid. Normally, a "Support DOUBLE" sequence would be something like: NORTH: 1**S**; EAST: 2**D**; SOUTH bids (1) DOUBLE to show a "support" raise involving (a) 8-10 HCPs and (b) 3 Spades, or (2) 2**S**, which in this bidding sequence is equivalent to a 3**S** bid in more typical sequences not involving an intervening bid, showing (a) >10 HCPs but also (2) 4+ Spades. But here NORTH and SOUTH are not playing this more sophisticated "Support DOUBLE" system.

Bruce: Well, OK. NORTH then bids 4**S**. That seems reasonable. But now EAST, **DOUBLES**@%!&^. What in the world does this DOUBLE mean???

Esther: Well, Bruce, "Doubles for Penalty" are likely to be more reasonable once the bidding reaches the 4 level! Penalty Doubles usually involve:

1. Against 3+ **NT** contracts, Penalty Doubles usually involve the player making the Double holding (1) numerous "control cards" or "stoppers" across several Suits, or (2) a long Suit with the person Doubling being "on lead". Such Penalty Doubles are dicey, because Opponents may be able to "run" to a Suit contract.
2. Against 4+ Suit contracts, "Doubles for Penalty" usually involve an Opponent on Defense holding a "Trump stack." Of course, a Double when Opponents are Vulnerable is *especially* helpful, if you indeed set the contract!

Bruce: But, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen. EAST Doubled, but EAST held **ZERO Spades!!!** Please explain!

Esther: Well, Bruce, EAST's Penalty Double was *very smart* indeed!!! EAST really "listened to the auction"! Neither N/S player made *any* bid showing special length in Spades, and EAST held ZERO Spades, so EAST quite logically figured that WEST probably held 5 Spades! And EAST thought, if I Double, rather than WEST Doubling, Declarer NORTH may suspect that I hold the "Trump stack", which may also be helpful, and confusing to Declarer!

⁵ Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons", see: "Convention #10: Support Doubles".

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, if NORTH is (really) "listening to the auction", how should NORTH *interpret* this Penalty Double?

Esther: Well, Bruce, assuming that NORTH is paying even only a modicum of attention to the auction, and hasn't completely fallen asleep on the job, when NORTH hears that Double, his skin should begin to crawl, and he should feel bolts of electricity in his eyes, and he should be *terrified*, and he should think (thinking is always helpful in bridge!), "Uh oh! Looks like either EAST or WEST is holding a 'Trump stack' in Spades!!! I will need to (1) early explore the possibility of an unlikely 'Trump split', and if there is a 'Trump stack', (2) figure out some way to deal with it and still make my contract! I *now* know the 'Danger Suit', Spades/Trump, although I do not yet know whether the 'Dangerous Opponent' is EAST or WEST." I need to find this out!

Bruce: OK, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, at this Table, EAST on lead led the Ace of Diamonds, which EAST won. What do you think of this lead?

Esther: Well, Bruce, frankly, I do not like it! Leading the Diamond Ace promises Partner the Diamond King, which EAST does not hold. And when you play the Ace without holding the King if Opponents hold the King you cannot later "kill" Opponents' King with your Ace!

Bruce: Well, OK, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen. After taking the first Trick, EAST then led his 5 of Clubs. What do you think of this lead?

Esther: Well, my *Malodorous Misanthrope*, it's OK. SOUTH opened 1C, but leading a Club might prompt SOUTH to play an Honor, which WEST might then overtake. But I would probably lead the 7 of Clubs rather than the 5, as "Top of Nothing, Bottom of Something!"

Bruce: OK, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, NORTH took this second Trick with Declarer's Club Jack. Declarer NORTH then started to "draw" Trump. NORTH led his King of Spades from Declarer's Hand. What do you think of NORTH's lead of his Trump King?

Esther: Well, Bruce, frankly, I find this lead "improvident"⁶.

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen. Why does NORTH leading his Trump King *upset you so much?*

Esther: Well, Bruce, a CARDINAL PRINCIPLE of bridge is "**LEAD LOW TO HIGH!!!**" There are 3 equally important reasons for doing this, at least if you hold fewer than 11 cards in the Suit you are trying to draw:

1. When you lead "low" from Dummy toward Declarer's Hand, or low from Declarer's Hand toward Dummy, you may "promote" your remaining intermediate Suit cards into "winners" by Opponents playing higher cards that you then overtake during the Trick! This can be very important (especially when drawing a long Suit in a **NT** contract!)
2. If you *allow* Opponents to play a missing Honor, such as an Ace, you can avoid "burning" one of your Honors along the way.
3. You can *early* detect a horrific "Trump split", such as the 5-0 "split" that occurred on this Board. Of course, this 5-0 "split" was HUGELY unlikely! If you look at the probabilities for "splits" on in the "**Probabilities Section**" of the "**Esther Bridge Lessons**" webpage, you will see that the "split" probabilities when Opponents hold exactly 5 Trump cards are:
3-2: **67.8%** 4-1: **28.3%** 5-0: **3.9%**

But, remember what my fellow Quintuple Gold Emerald Life Master (20 Million+ ACBL MasterPoints), Walt Disney, so frequently said about bridge:
"Miracles happen every day!"

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, is there any additional reason why you do not like Declarer leading his King of Spades, rather than towards Dummy's Queen of Spades?

Esther: Well, Bruce, Opponents can see Dummy's Q,3,2 once Declarer's Trump lead is made. But Opponents can not see Declarer's Hand, and do not know that Declarer holds K,J,T,7,5. *Why would Declarer want to*

⁶ In "bridge talk", "improvident" means "bone-headed", or something worse.

gratuitously give Opponents information about Declarer's Hand which they otherwise would not have? Here the Dummy's Queen can entice Opponents to drop their Ace just as well as Declarer's King!

Bruce: OK, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, how should NORTH instead have "drawn" Trump?

Esther: Well, Bruce, even if an Opponent had not Doubled, thus showing a "Trump stack", NORTH still should have "surveyed the field early on", so that appropriate "corrective" actions could be *promptly* taken! NORTH should have led Trump "Low to High", by leading Declarer's 5 toward Dummy's Queen. If EAST played the missing Spade Ace, Declarer would "duck" in Dummy. Otherwise, Declarer will play Dummy's Queen to try to "drop" the Ace. Once EAST shows a Trump void, NORTH will still play Dummy's Queen.

Bruce: But Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, how does this help NORTH make his contract?

Esther: Well, Bruce, WEST will "duck" the Dummy's Queen, because WEST wants NORTH to keep drawing Trump. So SOUTH will be on lead. And each time NORTH gets the lead, NORTH can get back on the Board **3 times**, by playing toward Dummy's K,Q Club winners, or the Heart Ace winner, and then lead another low Spade from Dummy through WEST, until *all or most* of the Trump have been drawn. Later NORTH can lead the Ten of Diamonds through EAST, who bid Diamonds, and "duck" in Dummy unless EAST plays the Diamond Queen!

Bruce: But Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, how can NORTH possibly make his contract with this 5-0 Trump "split", by playing *correctly*, leading "leading LOW TO HIGH"?

Esther: Well, Bruce, of all the N/S Pairs playing a Spade contract, only **2** went down!!! This contract is *perfectly makeable*, even against a 5-0 Trump "split"! And the **2** N/S Pair playing this Board incorrectly achieved a dismal Board Percentage result of 4.6%. That's about as close to ZERO as you can get! If you want to understand how such a poor result can affect your Overall standing in a given competition, take a

look at the "Esther Bridge Lessons", "**Lesson #54: How Badly Can a Single Board Affect Your Overall Bridge Result!**"