

**Esther Discusses "The 'Mathe Convention' and the  
'C-RA-SH Convention' Overcalls of Opponent's  
'Precision 1C', 1NT, and/or 2C Opening Bids to  
'Show' a 2-Suited Hand"**

**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 "The 'Mathe Convention' and the 'C-RA-SH Convention' Overcalls of Opponent's 'Precision 1C', 1NT, and/or 2C Opening Bids". 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

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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**.

young girls can indeed be quite vicious to each other. Well, in any case, Esther, I know what a **1NT** opening bid "shows", and I know what a **2C** "strong and artificial" bid "shows". But I am not familiar with the "**Precision 1C**" opening bid. Would you begin by explaining what a "**Precision 1C**" bid "shows"?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. As you know, duplicate bridge players play a **1C** opening bid in many different ways. In some Partnerships a **1C** opening bid "shows" (1) **3+** Clubs and (2) **~13<sup>2</sup>** HCPs. In other Partnerships a **1C** opening bid "shows" (1) **2+** Clubs and (2) **~13** HCPs. In still other Partnerships a **1C** opening bid "shows" (1) as few as **1** Club and (2) **~13** HCPs.

But there are other Partnership choices and one of these is the "**Precision 1C**" opening bid. Like the **2C** opening bid which is both "artificial" and "strong", the "**Precision 1C**" opening bid "shows" nothing about Clubs, but shows approximately **16-21** HCPs. This means that all other 1-level opening bids are now "limited" as they now each "show" **11-15** HCPs.

Larry Cohen is a "big" fan of the "**Precision 1C**" opening bid. As you know, Larry Cohen is a very accomplished bridge expert.

#### **Larry Cohen**

By the age of 22, Larry had won his first two of **25** National Bridge Championships, the Blue Ribbon Pairs and the prestigious Spingold Teams. Between 1979 and 2008, Cohen won **57** first or second place finishes in national and world competitions. In 2002, the American Contract Bridge League (ACBL) named Cohen "Player of the Year". Cohen is also listed on the ACBL's "Top 10 Living Most Influential Bridge Personalities". In 2020, in his first year of eligibility, Cohen was elected to the ACBL Hall of Fame. Cohen has had long-term bridge partnership with players such as Marty Bergen and David Berkowitz.

Cohen's bridge writings have been massively influential. Cohen for many years has published a monthly column in the ACBL Bridge Bulletin. Cohen has authored numerous books including **6** books that have won the American Bridge Teachers' Association (ABTA) "Bridge Book of the Year Award".

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<sup>2</sup> "~" = "approximately".

With respect to the "**Precision 1C**" opening bid Cohen in his "Bridge with Larry Cohen" website posting, "Precision",<sup>3</sup> argues that this convention

"...is a wonderful (and in my opinion, easier than 'Standard') bidding system... The beauty of the system is two-fold: [1] You get to start your strong hands at the *lowest possible* starting point (1♣). [2] *All* the other 1-level openings *deny* good hands" so making *other* 1-level Suit bids [1♦, 1♥, or 1♠] conveys *more information* to Partner. [italics added]

**Bruce:** Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther, would you now explain the basic ideas underlying the "**Mathe Convention**" and the "**C-RA-SH Convention**" (sometimes "**CRASH**") Overcalls of Opponent's "**Precision 1C**", 1NT, and/or 2C opening bids?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, I will try to help you. Both the "**Mathe Convention**" and the "**C-RA-SH Convention**" allow you as Overcaller to "show" that you hold a 2-Suited Hand with both Suits having good "Suit Quality".

#### Overcalling Against Opponent's "Strong" Hands

**Bruce:** Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther, when you Overcall Opponent's "**Precision 1C**", 1NT, and/or 2C opening bids, in each case, and especially when an Opponent opened 2C showing **22-24** HCPs, you are Overcalling against "strong" Hands. How often will you want to do this?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, you are certainly correct that this may be a dicey Overcall. But you also must remember that when you make a "**Mathe Convention**" or a "**C-RA-SH Convention**" Overcall you are exploring setting a Suit contract.

1. As Cohen in his 1992 award-winning bridge book, To Bid or Not to Bid: The LAW of Total Tricks, and his equally-accomplished sometimes Partner Marty Bergen in his 1996 award-winning bridge book, Points Schmoints!, made clear, Suit contracts are not primarily about HCPs!

This reality was exemplified in the ACBL bridge documentary film, "Moonraker", in which ACBL LifeMaster James Bond, 007, "makes" a 7C DOUBLED

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<sup>3</sup> See: <https://www.larryco.com/bridge-articles/precision>

REDOUBLED contract when he and his Partner together held only **8** HCPs!

<https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/moonraker.pdf>

These principles are also exemplified in the bridge Board presented in the "Esther Bridge Dialogue Lesson #159", "**Playing Bridge Contracts as Declarer When You and Dummy Hold 'Mirrored Hands'**". The Board presented in that "Esther Bridge Dialogue Lesson" is quite unusual in that *any* of the 4 players can "make" (1) either **5C** and **5H** contracts or **5D** and **5S** contracts and (2) a **3NT** contract even though every player holds only **10** HCPs!

<https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/Mirror H.pdf>

2. You also may be making these Overcall bids in order to explore making a "sacrifice" bid in which you expect you may go "down" but your Bridge Score will nevertheless be more favorable than letting your Opponents "make" a "big" contract. Of course, this situation is more likely when (1) your Opponents are Vulnerable and (2) you and Partner are not Vulnerable!

**Bruce:** Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther, well, couldn't you and Partner by Partnership Agreement agree to *only* bid either the "**Mathe Convention**" or the "**C-RA-SH Convention**". And Partners could also agree to *only* bid **1** of these 2 Overcall conventions only over **1** or **2** of the Opponent's "**Precision 1C**", **1NT**, and/or **2C** opening bids. For example, Partners might agree to (1) *only* play the "**Mathe Convention**" and (2) *only* over a **1NT** opening bid by Opponents.

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, certainly. Absolutely! Positively! That is a *very good* point!

### The "**Mathe Convention**"

**Bruce:** Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther, would you now tell us a little bit about the "**Mathe Convention**"?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, yes indeed. The "**Mathe Convention**" was invented by Lew Mathe (1915 - 1986). Mathe was a World Champion bridge player. He was inducted into the ACBL Hall of Fame in 1997. Both the "**Mathe Convention**" and the "**C-RA-SH Convention**" "show" Hands that are 2-Suited.

**Bruce:** Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, why is it *important* to “show” Partner your 2-Suited Hand?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, because **when you hold a 2-Suited Hand the odds of you finding a 5+ card “fit” with Partner go up massively!** For example, the probability of finding an 8+ card “fit” with Partner in 1 Suit if your 2 Suits are 4-3 is **49%**, if you are 4-4 is **60%**, if you are 5-3 is **66%**, if you are 5-4 is **74%**, and if you are 5-5 is **84%**!<sup>4</sup>

**Bruce:** Errr, well, Esther, are there any advantages to the “**Mathe Convention**” as against the “**C-RA-SH Convention**”?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, yes indeed. In the words of Karen Walker, who curates the excellent “Karen’s Bridge Library” website: <https://kwbridge.com>

says in her January, 2026 ACBL Bridge Bulletin article, “Relearning Basic Bridge—Part 71” (p. 58):

“**Mathe** isn’t the most robust defense, but it shows two types of two-suited hands and it’s easy to remember... **CRASH** shows more types of two-suited hands... Because it doesn’t immediately identify which suits you have, it can be more difficult for the opponents—and sometimes your partner—to handle.” (p. 56, emphasis in original)

**Bruce:** Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther, what then is the “**Mathe Convention**”?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce:

1. All Suit Overcall bids are “natural”.
2. **DOUBLE!** says, “Partner I hold both Majors.”
3. **NT!** says, “Partner, I hold both Minors.”

“!” = “Alert!”

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<sup>4</sup> 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](https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/8_probs.pdf)

### Example

NORTH (10)

S: K Q T 9 7

H: K Q 9 4 3

D: 9

C: 7 6

SOUTH (11)

S: J 8 6 3

H: A 5

D: K Q J 6 3

C: T 9

### Bidding

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1C!*	DBL!**	PASS	1S

"!" = "Alert!"

\*"Precision 1C"

\*\*"Both Majors"

### The "C-RA-SH Convention"

**Bruce:** Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, would you now explain the "C-RA-SH Convention"?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. The "C-RA-SH Convention" first appeared in **Kit Woolsey's** 1976 article in The Bridge World.<sup>5</sup> Since 1976 numerous variations on the "C-RA-SH Convention" have been proposed such as one proposed by Amanda Kearse in one of her bridge books. Here *only* the *original* "C-RA-SH Convention" is covered. Here are the bids one can make when bidding the original "C-RA-SH Convention":

1. **DOUBLE!** = **C**olor. "Partner, I hold 2 Suits at least 5-4 or 4-5 in Suits of the same **C**olor (i.e., either red or black)."
2. **Diamonds!** = **R**ank. "Partner, I hold 2 Suits at least 5-4 or 4-5 in Suits of the same **R**ank (i.e., either both Majors or both Minors)."
3. **NT!** - **S**Hape. "Partner, I hold 2 Suits at least 5-4 or 4-5 in Suits of the same **S**Hape (i.e., either both

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<sup>5</sup> The Bridge World is the oldest continuously-published bridge magazine in the world and was founded by Ely Culbertson in 1929.

"rounded", Hearts + Clubs, or both "pointed", Spades + Diamonds)."

"!" = "Alert!"

### Final Thoughts

**Bruce:** Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, couldn't you play the "Mathe Convention" and/or the "C-RA-SH Convention" over Opponents opening a 1C "could be short" bid?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, in bridge you can pretty much do *anything* that you and Partner have a Partnership Agreement about! But you **must** Alert! every bid that is "artificial" rather than "natural"!