

**Esther Discusses, When You are Declarer
In a NT Contract, and BOTH Sides Have Long
Suits, TRY NOT LOSE THE "RACE" TO TAKE YOUR
LONG SUIT WINNERS!!!**

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 discuss **when you are Declarer in a NT Ccontract, and BOTH sides have long suits, TRY NOT LOSE THE "RACE" TO TAKE YOUR LONG SUIT WINNERS!!!** 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 is the Board that I wanted you to discuss, for now showing only the E/W hands:

Board #16

Knoxville 299er

Dealer: WEST

WEST (11)		EAST (15)
S: J 9 5		S: A Q 8 6
H: J 8		H: K T 7
D: A 6 5		D: Q J
C: A J T 8 4		C: K 7 6 5

Bidding

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

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, first, do you agree that EAST should overcall NORTH's 1H opening bid by bidding 1NT?

Esther: Well, my Bobble-headed Bupkus, yes, I do. EAST holds (1) 15 HCPs, (2) no void or singleton, and (3) no more than 1 doubleton. Now, because EAST is Overcalling a 1H opening, EAST absolutely, positively, absolutely is promising WEST a holding of a "protected" Heart stopper, when making this 1NT Overcall bid. But, indeed, EAST does hold a 1 second-level "control" card in Hearts. This 1NT bid is a bit dicey, knowing that NORTH holds at least 5 Hearts, and EAST holds only 3 Hearts (K,T,7). But it is the "correct" bid. And it is the bid that EAST should make, even if NORTH had PASSED.

Bruce: Err, ok. Well, SOUTH then PASSED. WEST, holding 11 HCPs, assumes that the Partnership holds 26+ HCPs, and at least 1 Heart stopper, and bids 3NT. That seems a bit scary, but reasonable. A *less risky* alternative would be for WEST to respond 2NT, which says to Partner, "Partner, we *may* make 3NT. If, and only if, you are 'at the top of your bid,' then bid 3NT." In any case, on this Board WEST bid 3NT. Of course, SOUTH then led a low Heart (the 5), because NORTH bid Hearts. And now the Dummy comes down. What is Declarer EAST's **FIRST TASK**?

Esther: Well, my Simpering Simpleton, the **FIRST TASK** as Declarer playing a NT contract is to **count your "winners"**. EAST can see likely 5 Club Tricks, 1 sure Spade Trick (the Ace), and 1 sure Diamond Trick (the Ace), which equals 7 out of the needed 9 Tricks! And once NORTH plays the Ace of Hearts on Trick #1, EAST also then sees 1 sure Heart winner (the King) following the Ace of Hearts being played, 1 additional Spade winner (either the Queen or the Jack), and 1 additional Diamond winner (either the Queen or the Jack), so a total of 3 additional Tricks, for a Grand Total of 10 Tricks, assuming all goes well.

Bruce: Well, OK, what is Declarer EAST's **SECOND TASK**?

Esther: Well, my Malodorous Misanthrope, EAST's **SECOND TASK** is to **count the number of cards the partnership holds**

in every suit. Here, E/W hold **9** of 13 Clubs (Yea!), **7** Spades, **5** Diamonds, and **5** Hearts.

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, does EAST have a **THIRD TASK?**

Esther: Well, yes, sorta. EAST knows once the Board comes down that N/S hold 8 of 13 Hearts, while E/W holds 9 or 13 Clubs. And once NORTH takes the Ace winner, EAST knows that N/S will then attack their longest suit relentlessly, just as E/W will, or should, immediately attack its long Club suit. Because EAST is confronting an obvious "**Danger Suit**" and "**Danger Player**" (NORTH), EAST needs to try to win the "race" to take "quick" tricks, and then position himself to later capture remaining needed winners. Once in the lead, WEST should play "low to high" in Clubs back and forth until taking all **5** Club winners. This will force N/S to "throw off" cards, and EAST hopes that some of these choices will "promote" other winners for E/W.

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, why is this so important?

Esther: Well, bridge is "a game of mistakes!" *Every* player makes mistakes. What you want, in order to win, is to **give your Opponents every opportunity to make more mistakes than your Partnership makes!** Taking your long suit winners early forces Opponents to "throw off" cards, and hopefully cards that in the long run will benefit your Partnership!

Bruce: OK, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, NORTH took Trick #1 with the Ace of Hearts. On the second Trick, NORTH did, indeed, attack Hearts, by leading the 3 of Hearts. NORTH "hoped against hope," given EAST's 1NT bid, that nevertheless SOUTH held the King of Hearts, which SOUTH would win, and then return another Heart to NORTH's Queen.¹ Should EAST play his winning King of Hearts now?

¹ NORTH's hope that SOUTH holds the King of Hearts is particularly forlorn, because if SOUTH held the Heart King, SOUTH should have led the Heart King as "top of Partner's bid suit." Once EAST does not overtake, SOUTH then knows that NORTH holds the Ace of Hearts.

Esther: Well, my Simpering Simpleton, **NO!!!** Holding the winning King of Hearts, EAST should apply the "Rule of 7", which says that you should "duck" playing your "winner" for $7 - [\text{the number of cards you hold in the suit}]$, or $7 - 5 = 2$ **Rounds**, before you playing your winner.²

Bruce: OK, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, once E/W takes Trick #2 with Dummy's Jack of Hearts, and then 5 Club "winners", for a total of **6** of the needed 9 Tricks, should EAST then play the Jack of Spades from Dummy, and "duck" in EAST's Declarer's hand if NORTH does not play the King of Spades, thus finessing NORTH?

Esther: Well, my Dandruff-ridden Dufus, you actually have said something *smart*, perhaps randomly!!! Because only NORTH bid, EAST does indeed want to run all finesses through North, unless further information emerges that this strategy is improvident. However, this strategy would be *more likely to work* if Declarer held several high Hearts, and then finessing Hearts through NORTH would then be *very, very likely* to work. But assuming, here, that NORTH holds the King of Spades, and either will or will not play it, both to good effect, if true, is somewhat risky. Declarer EAST knows that NORTH holds Heart honors, and HCPs, but EAST is *less sure* that this means NORTH holds that troublesome Spade King, and SOUTH pretty much has to have some of the $40 - 26 = 14$ HCPs held by N/S, even though *only* SOUTH did not bid during the auction!

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, does that mean you agree that Declarer EAST should try a finesse at this point?

Esther: Well, Bruce, once again, not "No", but "Hell No"!!! EAST has taken **1** Heart Trick, and next **5** Club winners, and can then count the "winning" **1** King of Hearts, the "winning" **1** Ace of Diamonds, and the **1** "winning" Ace of Spades, and $1 + 5 + 1 + 1 + 1 = 9$!!! When you see a way to immediately make your contract, *when there is a*

² On Trick #2, on this Board, had EAST "ducked", E/W actually would have won Trick #2 with the Dummy's Jack of Hearts, thus generating a very helpful "extra" Trick. This result is not unexpected, since NORTH bid Hearts, and EAST knows that E/W hold 3 of the top 5 Heart honors, and Dummy is therefore unlikely to hold any.

"danger suit" and a "danger player" lurking around,
 MAKE YOUR CONTRACT **IMMEDIATELY!** And say a "Prayer of
 Thanks" to the Bridge Gods! Do NOT in these situations
 try to make extra Tricks!!!

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Knoxville 299er

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	NORTH (11)	
	S: T 7	
	H: A Q 6 4 3	
	D: K T 4 3 2	
	C: Q	
WEST (11)		EAST (15)
S: J 9 5		S: A Q 8 6
H: J 8		H: K T 7
D: A 6 5		D: Q J
C: A J T 8 4		C: K 7 6 5
	SOUTH (3)	
	S: K 4 3 2	
	H: 9 5 2	
	D: 9 8 7	
	C: 9 3 2	

Bruce: Esther, *should* NORTH have opened 1**H** with only 11 HCPs?

Esther: Well, Bruce, (1) NORTH holds 5 Hearts. (2) NORTH meets the requirements of Marty Bergen's "Rule of 20"³, since 11 HCPs + 10 cards in NORTH's longest 2 suits = **21**. And (3) And NORTH meets the requirements of Ron Klinger's "SQT" ("Suit Quality Test"), or "Rule of 8", since 5 cards + 2 = **7**. An "SQT" of 7, says Klinger, is good enough for a 1-level bid, and an "SQT" of 8 would be good enough for a 2-level bid.

³ One place in which Bergen's "Rule of 20" is discussed is **Lesson #20: "Points Schmoints!"**, on the [Esther Bridge Lessons website](#). The "Rule of 20" honors the fact that 2-suited hands *play better* in **suit** contracts, just as "flat" or "square" hands often play better in **NT** contracts.