

Esther Discusses "Correctly Bidding Stayman, and Leading When Opponents *Fail* to Find a 4-4 Fit in a Major and Then Set a NT Contract"

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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 "**Correctly Bidding Stayman, and Leading When Opponents *Fail* to Find a 4-4 Fit in a Major and Then Set a NT Contract**". 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. Let's start by talking, first, about **correctly bidding Stayman**. Please consider the following Board on which NORTH sits as Dealer:

Bruce: OK. Well, EAST and WEST continued to PASS throughout the auction. NORTH responds to the Stayman 2C bid by bidding 2D. SOUTH then shows the holding of 4 Hearts by bidding 2H, in case this information helps NORTH decide about going to a 3NT game contract. NORTH now knows that N/S hold $4+3 = 7$ Hearts, and NORTH is at the "top" of the 1NT opening bid, and so bids 3NT. That seems straightforward. So, EAST is on lead. Would you **talk us through how EAST should think about the choice of the lead?**

Esther: Well, certainly, my *Simpering Simpleton*, of course! EAST needs to think about what E/W's long suits are, and what N/S hold in these suits. SOUTH has shown at least 1 4-card Major: Hearts. N/S hold at least $4+2 = 6$ Hearts, at a bare minimum, or NORTH should not have opened 1NT. And NORTH has denied any 4-card Major holding. There are exactly **3** possibilities with respect to Declarer NORTH's Major holdings:

1. NORTH holds **3** Hearts and **3** Spades (3-3), or
2. NORTH holds **3** Spades and **2** Hearts (3-2), or
3. NORTH holds **2** Spades and **3** Hearts (2-3).

In **NT** contracts, knowing NORTH's **point count** is important, but knowing NORTH's **card count** is also very important, because uniquely to **NT** low cards can be "promoted" into winning Tricks without worries about Opponents ruffing these low cards!

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, clearly, the bottom-line point is that when Opponents show no 4-4 fit in a Major, that **you then almost certainly want to attack in the Majors?** On this Board, what should EAST lead?

Esther: Well, Bruce. EAST holds A,Q,x,x of Spades, and EAST expects NORTH to hold the missing King of Spades. And EAST leading the 6 of Spades will show Spades as being EAST's longest suit, and once the Board comes down WEST can use the "Rule of 11" to determine that 11 minus $6 = 5$, minus Dummy's 3 cards higher than the 6 = $5 - 3 = 2$, minus WEST's 1 card higher than the 6 = $2 - 1 = 1$, means that Declarer NORTH holds exactly **1 Spade card higher than the 6!!!**

Bruce: Well, OK. But Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, what about EAST instead leading a Heart, in the hopes that WEST will sooner or later win a Heart, and lead back a Spade through NORTH's short Spade holdings? Once the Dummy has come down, and WEST sees 3 Spades in the SOUTH Dummy, with WEST holding 3 Spades,

WEST will probably expect NORTH and EAST's remaining 7 Spades to split NORTH holds 3, since NORTH denied holding 4, and so WEST knows that EAST holds 4 Spades.

Esther: Well, if EAST leads a Heart, WEST must suspect that this is not a 4 card holding, given that WEST holds 4 Hearts! However, EAST could lead the 6 of Hearts as an extra clue to WEST that this lead is not the 4th from the top of EAST's "longest and strongest" suit. $11 - 6 = 5$, and 5 minus SOUTH's 2 cards higher than the 6 = $5 - 2 = 3$, and 3 - WEST's 3 cards higher than the 6 = $3 - 3 = 0!!!!$ And NORTH holding 0 Spades higher than the 6 and opening **1NT** and later bidding **3NT** doesn't seem plausible!!!

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, is the bottom-line point that when Opponents show no 4-4 fit in a Major, that **you then almost certainly want to attack in the Majors?**

Esther: Well, BINGO, Bruce. You got it!

Bruce: Well, my goodness, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, this is a lot of (1) thinking and (2) math and (3) thinking!!!

Esther: Well, yes, Bruce. Defense is indeed quite difficult!!!