

Esther Discusses "Opening the Bidding Using the 'Rule of 22' versus the 'Rule of 20' in Any Position in the Auction, and Using the 'Rule of 15' When Sitting 4th in the 'Balancing' Position (PASS, PASS, PASS, You)"

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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 "Opening the Bidding Using the 'Rule of 22' versus the 'Rule of 20' in Any Position in the Auction, and Using the 'Rule of 15' When Sitting 4th in the 'Balancing' Position (PASS, PASS, PASS, You)". 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. To start, would you briefly review the "Rule of 20"?

Esther: Well, of course, my Malodorous Misanthrope! The "Rule of 20"¹ says "You should open with a **suit** bid, in any position, in any vulnerability, if the sum of (1) your HCPs plus (2) the number of cards in your 2 longest suits equals **20** or more." This "Rule", invented by World Champion Marty Bergen, and discussed

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¹ For discussion of the numerous bridge "Rules" within the "Esther Bridge Lessons" see: "Esther Bridge Dialogue Lesson #25: "40 or So Bridge Bidding/Play 'Rules'":
<https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/rules.pdf>

in his two Points Schmoints! books, honors the fact that *2-suited hands play better than "flat" hands in suit contracts!* Here are a couple of examples:

S: A, J, T, 9, 3

S: 8

H: T, 7

H: A, Q, 8, 7, 4

D: K, Q, T, 5, 2

D: K, T, 9, 5, 4, 2

C: 8

C: T

Bruce: OK. Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, isn't it true that some players instead invoke the related "Rule of 19", or even the "Rule of 18"?

Esther: Well, my Bodacious Bupkus, that is indeed quite true! Of course, when you meet the requirements of the "Rule of 19", or the "Rule of 18", in some cases I might still not open the bidding, notwithstanding meeting the Rule requirements, if my HCPs consist totally, or almost totally, of HCPs from "Quacks" (i.e., Queens and Jacks).

Bruce: OK. Well, I have heard that there is even a similar "Rule", called the "**Rule of 22**".² Would you please explain that "Rule"?

Esther: Well, certainly, my Simpering Simpleton, of course! There are basically 3 components in "hand evaluation"³ when you are deciding whether to open the bidding during the auction:

1. High Card Points (HCPs);⁴
2. Card Distributions;⁵ and

² See Pat Harrington, "Rule of 20 or 22?":

<https://www.barbaraseagram.com/pdf/rule-of-22-or-20.pdf>

³ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hand_evaluation. Also, a **GREAT** little pocket book to learn "hand evaluation" is Marty Bergen's Pocket Posh Tips for Bridge Players. See: <https://csbnews.org/correctly-evaluating-your-hand-by-marty-bergen/>

⁴ Although most players use an HCP counting method in which Ace=4, King=3, etc., Marty Bergen has suggested that such a system "undervalues" Aces, and "overvalues" Queens, Jacks, and Tens. Bergen suggests that an Ace should be worth 4.5, King = 3, Queen = 1.5, Jack = 0.75, and Ten = 0.25. See Bergen, Marty. (2002). Hand Evaluation: Points Schmoints! Palm Beach Gardens, FL: Bergen Books.

⁵ Some experts suggest **deducting 1 HCP** from your total for *every* singleton King, Queen, or Jack that you hold. See page 11 of: Goren, Charles. (1954). Point Count Bidding in Contract Bridge. New York: Simon and Schuster.

3. "Quick Tricks Count" (or "Control Cards"), or alternatively, "Losing Tricks Count".

Bruce: Well, OK. I think that most players understand HCPs and card distribution issues. But would you talk more about "Quick Tricks"?

Esther: Well, most players *informally* consider "Quick Trick" issues during the bidding. For example, most players will wisely elevate the evaluation of a hand holding Aces, or "touching" honors, such as K,Q,J,8,5. But some bidding systems actually quantify "Quick Tricks" as part of the hand evaluation process.

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, what is this counting system?

Esther: Well, basically it is a count of "sure tricks", as follows:

AK = 2.0

AQ = 1.5 (because in a finesse there is a 50% chance of the Queen winning)

A = 1.0

KQ = 1.0

Kx = 0.5

AKQ = 2.0 (because Opponents may ruff on the 3rd Round)

Bruce: OK, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, how is the "Quick Trick" calculation used in creating the "Rule of 22"?

Esther: Well, the "Rule of 22" says, "You should open with a **suit** bid, in any position, in any vulnerability, if the sum of (1) your HCPs plus (2) the number of cards in your 2 longest suits, plus (3) the number of your 'Quick Tricks' equals **22** or more."

Bruce: OK, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen. Would you give us some examples of hands that do, or do not, meet the requirements of the "Rule of 20" and the "Rule of 22"?

Esther: OK. How about?

S: 7 4 Points = **10**

H: A Q 8 5 3 Longest 2 Suits = 5 + 5 = **10**

D: 4 "Rule of 20" = 10 + 10 = **20** = "YES"

C: K J 7 4 3 "Quick Tricks" = 1.5 + 0.5 = **2.0**

"Rule of 22" = 10 + 10 + 2.0 = **22** = **"YES"**

Bruce: OK, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, how about another example?

Esther: Sure. How about?

S: J 7 6 4 2 Points = **10**
H: K Q Longest 2 Suits = 5 + 5 = **10**
D: 9 "Rule of 20" = 10 + 10 = **20** = **"YES"**
C: K J 7 4 3 "Quick Tricks" = 1.0 + 0.5 = 1.5
 "Rule of 22" = 10 + 10 + 1.5 = **21.5** = **"NO"**

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, knowing you, I suspect that you suggest using the "Rule of 20" and the "Rule of 22" as guides, and not too strictly or rigidly. Am I correct?

Esther: Well, Bruce, yes, exactly. When using the "Rule of 20", for example, sometimes I open when my Total is 19, and sometimes I Pass when my Total is 20. *Not often.* But sometimes! For example, I am more likely to open when my suit is Spades, or at least a Major. And I am less likely to open when my HCPs consist of a lot of "Quacks" (Queens and Jacks)! But I do reflect *very carefully* about these Rules, because in general I find them to be very useful, usually!

Bruce: Well, thank you very much! But would you now move on to explain **"Using the 'Rule of 15' When Sitting 4th in the 'Balancing' Position (PASS, PASS, PASS, You)"**.

Esther: Of course. First, to review, whenever you are sitting in the auction such that if you Pass, the contract will be set, and one of the Opponents will be the Declarer, you are in what is called the "balancing" position. A special case of this is when you are sitting 4th in the auction, and everyone before you has Passed.

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, I guess that happens, for example, when all 4 Hands hold roughly the same amounts of HCPs. Can you give us any guidance about whether in this case you should bid, versus Pass?

Esther: Well, of course, my Malodorous Misanthrope, you should open if you hold an opening hand with the required card distributions for a given bid. And, of course, you should almost always open if your hand meets the requirements of the "Rule of 20", or the "Rule of 22." But you usually should also bid if your hand meets the requirements of the "**Rule of 15**".

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, what does the "Rule of 15" say?

Esther: Well, Bruce, the "Rule of 15" says that "sitting 4th in the auction, with 3 Passes to you, that you should bid if the sum of (1) your HCPs and (2) the number of Spades you hold is **15** or more." Of course, my Malodorous Misanthrope, you should open if you hold an opening hand with the required card distributions for a given bid. And, of course, you should also almost always open if your hand meets the requirements of the "Rule of 20", or the "Rule of 22."

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, what is the "logic" behind this "Rule of 15"?

Esther: Well, Bruce, the "Rule of 15" honors 2 important facts. **First**, if you open at the 1-level in a suit other than Spades, you are opening the door to Opponents Overcalling with a 1-level suit bid, which they cannot do when you bid Spades. **Second**, when you are bidding Spades, you and Partner can *control* the bidding, and secure a potentially makeable contract, at the 1, or higher level. Because Spades is the highest "ranking" suit, other opening bids do not afford this same control!

Bruce: Well, I guess if I am sitting 2nd, and Partner sitting 4th opens 1**S** after 3 Passes, I had very certainly better always here remember when I respond to Partner, if I decide to do so, that Partner may have opened by invoking the "Rule of 15". Partner might hold, for example, 6 Spades and **only 9 HCPs!!!**

Esther: Well, Bruce, as they say, "You, think, so???" Duh,⁶ yes, of course, you **MUST remember** this possibility in

⁶ Or, instead of "Duh!", if you are Australian, or English, "Der!"

this bidding sequence, just as when you are sitting 1st in the auction, and Partner opens the bidding sitting 3rd following 2 Passes, you **must** remember that sitting 3rd Partner may have opened with only 11 HCPs, even if you and Partner are not playing the "Rule of 20"!!! It's equally *vitaly important* to remember this when Partner sitting 4th opens 1**S** after 3 Passes!