

"Empirical 'Double Dummy Analyses' Exploring the Behavior of the 'Rule of 5' as a Guide for Bidding When Partner Gives You a 'Constructive Raise' When You Open 1 of a Major"

Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen¹

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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 **"Empirical 'Double Dummy Analyses' Exploring the Behavior of the 'Rule of 5' as a Guide for Bidding When Partner Gives You a 'Constructive Raise' When You Open 1 of a Major"**. 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! Well, Esther, before you

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¹ 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, Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen in fact is a hypothetical, and not a real person! So this article was really, really written by **Bruce Thompson**.

discuss your bridge research on the "**Rule of 5**" would you first briefly review what you mean by "Bridge Rules"?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. In most games there are "rules" that spell out what players can and can not do as well as the "penalties" for "rules" infractions. For example, in professional football each team must have exactly 11 players "on the field" when the football is hiked. If 1 team has 12 players "on the field" when the football is hiked than the referees will halt the play and the football will be relocated 5 yards in the direction that is unfavorable for the team violating this "rule".

Similarly, duplicate bridge has "rules" as well. The official "rules" of duplicate bridge are called "Laws" and these are available on the American Contract Bridge League (ACBL) website.²

Bruce: Well, Esther, I assume then that the "Bridge Rules" we are considering are not the same as the "ACBL Laws of Duplicate Bridge". Is that correct?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will try to help you. Yes, you are indeed exactly correct. The "Bridge Rules" unlike the "ACBL Laws of Duplicate Bridge" do not specify "correct" behavior during play of duplicate bridge nor "corrective actions" when the Laws are violated.

Instead, the "Bridge Rules" are "General Guidelines" about bridge bidding or play that some players use to help make bidding or play decisions at the bridge table. There are 40 or so such "Bridge Rules" and these are covered in "Esther Bridge Dialogue Lesson #25: "**Some of the 40 or So Bridge Bidding/Play 'Rules'**":

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

Bruce: Well, Esther, I know that you consider many of these "Bridge Rules" to be very helpful even though you should only use them as general guidelines. It seems like some of the "Bridge Rules" you especially like are the "**Rule of 11**", the "**Rule of 7**", and doubly especially the "**Rule of 20**". But you seem somewhat cautious about using the "**Rule**

² <https://web2.acbl.org/documentlibrary/play/Laws-of-Duplicate-Bridge.pdf>

of 17" when Partner opens with a "weak" 2-level pre-empt bid.³

Esther: Well, Bruce, all true. But let's focus today on just the bridge "**Rule of 5**". This "rule" applies when you open 1H or 1S and Partner as Responder bids a "constructive raise" of your Major showing (1) **3+** cards in your Major and (2) **7-11** HCPS. Now as Opener you have to decide whether to play for a 2H or a 2S part-score contract or bid onward.

Bruce: Well, Esther, what guidance does the "**Rule of 5**" provide in this scenario?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I have previously covered the "**Rule of 5**" in my "Esther Bridge Dialogue Lesson #5: The 'Rule of 5'": https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/rule_5.pdf

Yoda⁴ taught me this Rule. The "**Rule of 5**" guides whether you, as Opener bidding a Major, should, *or should not*, bid game, once Partner gives you a "constructive" raise at the 2 level of your bid Major. This "Rule" assumes that *Responder's bid at the 2 level shows (1) 3 card support, and (2) 8 to 10 HCPs.* This Rule is especially useful in a "competitive auction" (i.e., both sides are bidding). The "**Rule of 5**" says, when you open a Major and Partner supports you at the 2 level with a "constructive raise," you can immediately bid game if you count the number of Aces, Kings, and Queens you are missing across ALL 4 SUITS, and iff (if, and only if) that number is 5 or less.

Bruce: Well, what if I as Opener have a side suit that is only a singleton low card, for example, because I can eventually trump that suit? Should I still add 3 (missing A,K,Q in that suit) to my total?

Esther: This is *exactly* where you have to use the "**Rule of 5**" with some flexibility, and JUDGMENT/DISCRETION. I would count missing Aces, Kings, and Queens across "side" non-

³ Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons" see: "**Beware of the 'Rule of 17' When Responding to Partner's 'Weak 2' Preemptive Opening Bid**":

https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/Rule_17.pdf

⁴ "Yoda" is what some members of the Savannah Bridge Club call a *very, very accomplished* LifeMaster, **Marla Chalkin**, who plays *frequently* in the club and has taught Bruce a number of bridge lessons.

Trump Suits *only* up to the number of cards I held in these Suits. For example, if Partner and I have found a "fit" in Spades, and I held:

S A K T 9 8 5
H 4
D A Q 6
C K Q 8

I would count this as **1** Spade + **1** Heart + **1** Diamond + **1** Club = **4**, and because **4** is 5 or less I would bid **4S**.

Bruce: Well, Esther, is this "**Rule of 5**" really helpful in deciding whether to play at the 2 level or higher?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. Yes, I find this bridge "rule" helpful. If the number of missing A,K,Q's is 6 you are "on the margin" for making or not making a Game contract in your bid Major. Here is an example Board we can discuss regarding these matters.

Dealer: **SOUTH**

	NORTH (8)		
	S: J 7 4		
	H: J 5 3		
	D: J 9 5 4		
	C: K Q T		
WEST (5)		EAST (9)	
S: 9 3 2		S: Q 5	
H: 9 4		H: T 8 7 6 2	
D: A 3		D: K 8 7	
C: J 7 6 5 3 2	YOU	C: A 8 4	
	SOUTH (18)		
	S: A K T 8 6		
	H: A K Q		
	D: Q T 6 3		
	C: 9		

Bidding

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1 S	PASS	2 S	PASS
???			

First, sitting SOUTH you are "missing" **1** Spade Queen, **0** Heart A,K,Q's, **2** Diamonds, the A,K, and **1** Club Ace, so your "**Rule of 5**" "score" is 1 + 0 + 2 + 1 = **4**. This suggests a second bid by SOUTH of **4S**.

Second, I also find it useful to consider the Ron Klinger "**Suit Quality Test ('SQT') Score**".⁵ This computed by summing (1) the number of cards you hold in the Suit plus (2) the number of Honors you hold in the Suit (including the Ten if you also hold at least 1 Honor higher than the Ten). Here SOUTH holds (1) **6** cards plus (2) **3** Honors, so $6 + 3 = 9$. An "**SQT Score**" will generally support a Suit contract bid no higher than the "**SQT Score**" - 6.

Third, I also think it is important to consider your Partnerships' HCPs. Here you hold **18** HCPs, Partner NORTH holds between **6** and **11** HCPs, so your Partnership holds **24-29** HCPs. Of course, it is also important that HCPs are not the be all and end all of bridge. For example, ACBL LifeMaster **James Bond 007** made a **7C DOUBLED REDOUBLED** contract when his Partnership together held only **8** HCPs!⁶ Similarly, I have previously presented⁷ a Board on which (1) either EAST or WEST can "make" **5C** and **5H** contracts, (2) either NORTH or SOUTH can "make" **5D** and **5S** contracts and (3) all 4 players can "make" a **3NT** contract even though every player holds exactly **10** HCPs!

On this Board it appears that Declarer SOUTH will "lose" **2** Diamond Tricks and **1** Club Trick. So, apparently SOUTH will "make" his **4S** contract.

Bruce: Well, Esther, can you show us some "real deal, actual" Boards in which the Declarer applied the "**Rule of 5**"?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. Here are **3** Boards from recent BBO competitions. I have rotated the Hands in some of the Boards so that SOUTH is always making the opening bid of a Major and the Responder NORTH always makes a "constructive raise".

On each Board I provide (1) the "**Rule of 5 Score**", the Ron Klinger "**Suit Quality Test ('SQT') Score**", and (3) the Partnerships' combined HCPs. However, it is important to emphasize that the "**SQT Score**" is primarily used to determine when to open or Overcall with a Suit bid and not to make final contract decision.

⁵ Within the "**Esther Bridge 'Pop' Quizzes**" see: "**Several Bidding Conundrums and A Centennial-Quiz Tribute to Ron Klinger and His 'Suit Quality Test ('SQT') Score**": https://esther-bridge.com/quiz/q0100_q.pdf

⁶ See: <https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/moonraker.pdf>

⁷ Within the "**Esther Bridge Lessons**" see: https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/Mirror_H.pdf

I also report for each Board a Double Dummy Analysis (DDA) of the Boards showing all "makeable" bridge contracts on each Board. This DDA was performed using the "Bridge Solver" Double Dummy Analysis website:

https://dds.bridgewebs.com/bridgesolver/upload_from_chrome.htm

Southeast TN/Knoxville BBO 499er **12/17/25** Board **#9**

Dealer: **SOUTH**

Vul: **E/W**

	NORTH (10)	
	S: 7 5 2	
	H: K J 8	
	D: A Q T 9 7	
	C: 8 3	
WEST (4)		EAST (9)
S: J 6		S: A 9 3
H: Q 7 3 2		H: A 9 6 5 4
D: 6 5 3		D: J 8
C: J 7 4 2	YOU	C: T 6 5
	SOUTH (17)	
	S: K Q T 8 4	
	H: T	
	D: K 4 2	
	C: A K Q 9	

Bidding

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1S	PASS	2S	PASS
???			

SOUTH's "SQT Score": 8

SOUTH's "Rule of 5 Score": 4

SOUTH's HCPs: 17

DDA of All Possible "Makeable" Contracts

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	4	5	2	5	5
S	4	5	2	5	5
E	-	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-	-

So, SOUTH's "Rule of 5 Score" of 4 was 5 or less and thus suggested that SOUTH should bid 4S and indeed 4S was "makeable".

Southeast TN/Knoxville BBO 499er 11/19/25 Board #3

Dealer: **SOUTH**

Vul: **N/S**

NORTH (7)

S: Q 4
H: T 8 7 2
D: Q J 4
C: Q 6 3 2

WEST (7)

S: A 7 5 2
H: 9 5 3
D: K T 7
C: 7 5 4

EAST (7)

S: K 8 6 3
H: 4
D: 9 6 5 2
C: K J 9 8

YOU

SOUTH (19)

S: J T 9
H: A K Q J 6
D: A 8 3
C: A T

Bidding

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1 H	PASS	2 H	PASS
???			

SOUTH's "SQT Score": 9

SOUTH's "Rule of 5 Score": 6

SOUTH's HCPs: 19

DDA of All Possible "Makeable" Contracts

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	1	1	3	-	3
S	1	1	3	-	3
E	-	-	-	1	-
W	-	-	-	1	-

So, SOUTH's "Rule of 5 Score" of 6 was greater than 5 and thus suggested that SOUTH should not bid 4**H** and indeed 4**H** was not "makeable".

Southeast TN/Knoxville BBO 499er 11/19/25 Board #5

Dealer: **SOUTH**

Vul: **E/W**

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

Bidding

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

SOUTH's "SQT Score": 7

SOUTH's "Rule of 5 Score": 7

SOUTH's HCPs: 11

DDA of All Possible "Makeable" Contracts

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	-	1	3	-	-
S	-	1	3	-	-
E	3	-	-	2	1
W	3	-	-	2	1

So, SOUTH's "Rule of 5 Score" of 7 was greater than 5 and thus suggested that SOUTH should not bid 4**H** and indeed 4**H** was not "makeable".

Bruce: Well, Esther, that was very interesting and helped us understand the basic functioning of the bridge "Rule of 5" when you open 1**H** or 1**S** and Partner gives a "constructive raise". But isn't the only way to really empirically test the bridge "Rule of 5" is to do *bridge computer simulation research* involving generating *tens* or *hundreds* of thousands of Boards randomly-created with restrictions such as SOUTH must hold (1) a **5+** card Major and (2) **13-18** HCPs and NORTH must hold (1) **3** card support for SOUTH's bid Major and (2) **6-11** HCPs.

This is the kind of bridge research summarized in "Esther Bridge Lessons" such as "(1) Does the 'Law of Total Tricks' ('LOTT') Really Work, and (2) Is the 'LOTT' Magic?":

https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/LOTT_bad.pdf

and "What Does Research Say About Bidding 3NT vs 4H/4S When Opener Bids 1NT and Responder Can Support Both 4H/4S and 3NT Contracts?":

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

This is also the kind of empirical bridge research reported by Richard Pavlicek on his "Bridge Simulations" website:

<http://www.rpbridge.net/rpsi.htm>