

Esther Discusses "On Lead Against Opponents' Suit Contract, When Should You Lead Trump?"¹

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 talk us through "**On Lead Against Opponents' Suit Contract, When Should You Lead Trump?**" 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!

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 young girls can indeed be quite vicious to each other. Well, in any case, Esther, I recently encountered what I found to be an unusual bidding sequence, and I wonder if you would be so kind as to explain the bidding to me and our intrepid readers! Here is WEST's Hand and the bidding:

♠ K Q T 6 3 ♥ A 5 ♦ T 4 2 ♣ A 8 4 (13)

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¹ Many of the ideas presented in the present "**Esther Bridge Lesson**" were drawn from Ron Klingler's 2003 book, 100 WINNING BRIDGE TIPS for the Improving Player.

Vul: **EAST/WEST**

Bidding

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1 S	2 NT!	4 S	5 C
DOUBLE	PASS	PASS	PASS

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. WEST's opening bid as Dealer of 1**S** is quite straightforward! WEST holds ~13 HCPs and 5 Spades. NORTH's Overcall of 2**NT!** is unusual, and actually is named "Unusual 2**NT!**"² This is an "artificial" bid that must be Alerted!, and says, "Partner, I am 2-Suited in the Minors with a good Ron Klinger 'Suit Quality Test' ('SQT') Score"³ in both Minor Suits. Unless the Opponents interfere, I **demand** that you now bid your 'longest and strongest' Minor."

Bruce: OK, fair enough. WEST DOUBLED the 5**C** E/W contract. Do you agree with this DOUBLE?

Esther: Well, Bruce, yes, I do. WEST holds the Opponents' Club Trump Ace, the Heart Ace within a doubleton along with a matching 3 Club Trump cards, and expects that E/W likely will take at least 1 Spade Trick. Opponents N/S expected E/W to make their 4**S** Game contract bid, and thought that the 5**C*** bid, though unlikely to make, would nevertheless be superior to letting E/W play the 4**S** contract. Because E/W were **Vulnerable**, an E/W 4**S** contract making exactly would yield an E/W Bridge Score of **+620**, while N/S's 5**C** DOUBLED bid, **Not Vulnerable** will yield a E/W Bridge Score of **+300** if N/S go down 2, and **+500** if N/S go down 3. So, E/W will *only come out better* than making their 4**S** contract if, and only if, N/S go down **4+** Tricks, and E/W then earn a Bridge Score of **+800** or more. But the alternative of E/W Overcalling 5**S** over the N/S 5**C** bid is *very dicey*. As Ron Klinger says in his:

² Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons", see: "Convention #8: Unusual 2**NT!**". Some Partners play this as requiring a 5-5 distribution, others as 5-4 or 4-5, and some Partners play this as 5-5 Vulnerable, but possibly 5-4 Not Vulnerable.

³ The Ron Klinger "Suit Quality Test" ("SQT") Score equals (1) the number of Trump cards held by a player plus (2) the number of Honors held, including the Ten. It is usually safe to bid to a level equalling the "SQT" Score minus 6.

Tip #5: When the bidding has reached the 5-level in a competitive auction, it is usually better to defend than to bid on. (p. 14)

Bruce: OK, fair enough. WEST is now on lead. WEST knows that N/S are making a "sacrifice" bid that is likely going down, as reflected in WEST's DOUBLE. But what does WEST know about the 4 Hands before Dummy in the NORTH comes down?

Esther: Well, Bruce, here are some things that WEST knows even before the Dummy comes down:

1. NORTH holds either 9 or 10 Minor Suit Trump cards, and thus is very likely short in Spades, and NORTH may even hold a Void! Therefore, it is unlikely that E/W will take more than 1 Spade Trick.
2. N/S together likely hold 8 or 9 Clubs, and because WEST holds 3 Clubs (including the Ace), EAST likely holds a *singleton* or a *doubleton* in Clubs.
3. EAST likely holds the Spade Ace, and probably 3 or 4 Spades.
4. WEST and EAST both know that **E/W hold substantially more HCPs than N/S**, even though N/S hold a boatload of Club Trump cards.

Bruce: Well, OK, Ms. Klink..., errr, I mean, Esther. Shouldn't WEST lead his King of Spades to try to take 1 or 2 Spade Tricks "off the top"?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I would resist this temptation. This "sacrifice" bid situation is one of a number of situations in which on lead on Defense you **should lead Trump**, even if you hold a Trump singleton! As Ron Klinger says in his

Tip #49: Lead trump against sacrifice bids, even a singleton trump. (p. 77)

Bruce: OK. Well, would you expound on this **Tip #49** a bit more?

Esther: Well, of course!!! Let's talk through this Board a bit more. WEST, following **Tip #49**, leads his 4 of Clubs. He knows that EAST is likely very, very "short" in Clubs, but *possibly EAST holds the Club King singleton!!!* The Dummy in NORTH now comes down. Here is the rest of the Board:

Vul: **EAST/WEST**

Bidding

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1 S	2 NT!	4 S	5 C
DOUBLE	PASS	PASS	PASS

NORTH (11)

S: 4
H: Q 6
D: A K 8 6 3
C: Q T 9 7 2

WEST (13)

S: K Q T 6 3
H: A 5
D: T 4 2
C: A 8 4

EAST (12)

S: A J 9 5
H: K J 8 7
D: Q J 9 7
C: 6

SOUTH (4)

S: 8 7 2
H: T 9 4 3 2
D: 5
C: K J 5 3

Bruce: Well, OK, Ms. Klink..., errr, I mean, Esther. These Hands generally reflect the bidding by the Players, and are not too surprising. Now that we see the Board, please expound further of **why** WEST leading a small Club Trump card was important.

Esther: Well, Bruce, yes indeed! On this Board WEST knows that E/W hold more of the HCPs and therefore the only way N/S can take Tricks is by ruffing!!! In the words of Ron Klinger:

When your side clearly has the greater strength [in HCPs], how will declarer take tricks at a level higher than justified by the high card values? Only by ruffing. The best defense to maximize the penalty [DOUBLE] is to lead trumps at every opportunity [in order to undermine Declarer's ability to ruff, remembering that based on this auction Declarer SOUTH is likely to hold *fewer* Club Trump cards

than the Dummy]. (p. 77) [Bolding and underling added.]

There is also *another way to think* about situations in which as a Defender on lead you hold 3 strong non-Trump Suits with Honors. If you and Partner bid a Suit, and Opponents merrily still proceeded to a Game-level contract, Opponents are obviously short your Suit. Alternatively, if you and Partner did not show a Suit during the auction, then you on lead do not know much about your Partner's holdings. Your non-Trump Suit holdings will do *more damage* if Opponents or Partner lead toward you in these Suits. In this situation you may want to follow the admonitions of physician and Grand Lifemaster Hippocrates (c. 460BC - c. 370BC), who said as regards both medicine and duplicate bridge the Hippocratic Oath:

“[I will] Do no harm or injustice to them” [my patients and bridge Partners], and leading a low Trump in the situation described here, rather than away from non-Trump Suit “winners”, may be the action most likely to “fail to do harm”!

Bruce: Well, OK, Esther. How will this Board play out?

Esther: Well, Bruce, Declarer SOUTH will Trick #1 in his Hand with the Club Jack. He will then lead his Diamond singleton to Dummy's A,K, and take both, sloughing a small Heart on Dummy's King of Diamonds, and then lead a low Diamond to ruff in Declarer's Hand. Now Declarer SOUTH having played his Club Jack on Trick #1, and his Club 3 on Dummy's Diamond on Trick #4, has only a Club doubleton (K,5) left in his Hand. WEST knows that now he WEST cannot be prevented from gaining the lead, playing when Declarer later “draws” Trump first his WEST Club Ace and then his WEST Club 8, thus removing SOUTH's ability to ruff on any additional Tricks. This insures also that EAST can later take a Diamond winner, since SOUTH can no longer ruff Diamonds.

Bruce: Well, Esther, can you summarize some of the *various situations* in which players should **lead Trump** against Opponents' Suit contract, even when you hold a *singleton Trump card*?

Esther: Well, Ron Klinger is an Australian Grand Master who for many years wrote weekly columns about bridge in Australian newspapers, and has authored more than **70** books on bridge! Here are some of the situations in which, in his book 100 WINNING BRIDGE TIPS for the improving player, he recommends leading Trump:

1. Assuming that both (1) Partner did not bid a Suit during the auction, so you cannot "lead Partner's bid Suit", and (2) you do not hold a very short Suit, such that you expect to ruff later:

Tip #53: "If the Opponents have reached a 4-3 or 4-4 trump fit and you hold five rag trumps, lead a trump." (p. 82)

When the Opponents together hold **7-8** Trump cards, and you hold 5 very *low* Trump cards, Partner holds a Trump void or singleton. You are going to lose all these Trump cards when Opponents "draw" Trump, but you can force Opponents to spend **2** Trump cards to kill every **1** of your Trump cards.

And if Opponents have bid correctly, the Opponents' Hands are both not "flat", and they want to either (1) *Trump in Dummy*⁴ in a short Suit in Dummy's un-flat Hand, or (2) cross-ruff between the Dummy's un-flat Hand and Declarer's un-flat Hand. Forcing Opponents to spend Trump cards 2-for-1 will compromise Declarer's ability later to ruff in Dummy or cross-ruff! In the words of Ron Klinger (2003):

"The strength of the 4-4 fit is declarer's ability to ruff in either hand and retain trump length in the other. In both cases, you can minimize declarer's ruffing capacity by repeated trump leads." (p. 82)

2. Lead Trump against Opponents' Suit contract whenever you believe that **you hold more HCPs than Opponents, or when Opponents are making a "sacrifice" bid against you:**

⁴ Trumping in Declarer's Hand may be useful to serve transportation purposes, but trumping in Declarer's Hand will not create any "new" Tricks, unless the contract is "wrong-sided" (e.g., following a Jacoby Transfer over a 1NT bid, or when the contract is set in Clubs following Partner's "Unusual 2NT" bid), and Dummy rather than Declarer holds the majority of the Trump cards. If the Declarer holds the trump "strength and length", and the Partnership holds 8+ trump cards, the Declarer's Trump cards will inevitably all be "winners".

Tip #52: “Lead trumps when your side is known to be strong in the three suits outside trumps”, so that you compromise Declarer’s ability to later ruff your outside Suit winners. (pp. 80-81)

3. **If Opponents bid a Suit, and you execute a “Takeout/ ‘Demand’ Double”⁵, and Partner leaves the Double “on” notwithstanding your “Demand” Double, you then know that Partner holds both Suit Quality and a long “Trump stack”, so you should again lead Trump at every opportunity.** (p. 76)
4. **Tip #54: “A trump lead is often best when the opponents are playing in their third-bid suit or their fourth-bid suit...** When the opponents bid two suits and end up in a third-bid suit, it often indicates a cross-ruff is likely. Each opponent may be short in the first suit bid by [the other] partner. The best defense to a cross-ruff is a trump lead and more trumps at every opportunity.” (p. 83) [emphasis added]
5. **Tip #50: “Lead trumps if declarer has shown a two-suiter and you are strong in declarer’s second suit...”** (p. 78). Declarer will plan to ruff in Dummy in the second suit in which both you and Declarer hold a strong Suit, and you can minimize Opponents’ “winners” from ruffing in Dummy by leading Trump at every possible opportunity.

Bruce: Errr, well, my godness, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther! That is an awful lot to remember!

Esther: Well, Bruce, yes it is! Perhaps you should try to formulate some kind of acronym as a memory aid to recall these situations. Good luck with that!

Bruce: Well, how about this, Esther? I have listed the 5 situations **alphabetically**:

1. **F**ive “rag” Trump.
2. **S**trong HCPs/Opps “**S**acrifice”.
3. **T**akeout Double Ignored by Partner.
4. **T**hird/Fourth Suit Bid by Opps.

⁵ Within the “Esther Bridge Lessons”, see: “Convention #14: 6 ‘Not-for-Penalty’ Doubles”.

5. **Two**-Suited Declarer.

Esther: Well, Hrmph... Hrmph... Well, not great as a *mnemonic*. But better than nothing!