

## **Esther Discusses "The Woolsey Convention to Interfere With Opponents' 1NT Opening Bid"**

**Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen<sup>1</sup>**

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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 "**The Woolsey Convention to Interfere With Opponents' 1NT Opening Bid**" 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! Before we discuss the "Woolsey Convention" would you briefly remind us about what are the other popular conventions with which to interfere with Opponents' **1NT** opening bids?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. First, many players like the convention that Marty Bergen (1948 -)

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<sup>1</sup> 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](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**.

invented: "**Disturbing Opponent's No Trump**" ("DONT").<sup>2</sup> This is 1 of the 20+ conventions invented by Bergen who also invented "**Bergen Limit Raises**", and the "**Rule of 20**". Bergen is a ten-time national bridge champion, has been ranked as the 22<sup>nd</sup> most influential person in the history of bridge, and since 1976 has had regular columns in the ACBL Bridge Bulletin! He is also of the very important 1996 bridge book, Points Schmoints!, as well as the fabulous, wonderful little "pocket book" (so-called because this 121-page book is small enough fit in your pants or shirt pockets) pocket posh tips for bridge players. This pocket book is replete with bridge wisdom. You can read an extraordinary sample from this extraordinary little book if you go to the "Hand Evaluation" chapter available at: <https://csbnews.org/correctly-evaluating-your-hand-by-marty-bergen/> Second, some bridge players also like the "**Cappelletti Convention**",<sup>3</sup> which was invented by Armand Michael "Mike" Cappelletti (1938 - 2013), an American lawyer widely known in both bridge and poker circles, in addition to legal circles.

**Bruce:** OK, thanks. Before we discuss his convention, would you tell us also a little bit about the inventor of the "Woolsey Convention"?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, sure. Christopher Robin "Kit" Woolsey (1943 -) won the 1986 Rosenbaum World Cup Team Championship, was runner-up in the 1982 Rosenbaum Cup, and won the Senior Teams competition at the 2000 World Team Olympiad. He also has won more than a dozen American Contract Bridge (ACBL) North American Bridge Championships.

**Bruce:** WOW! OK. Are there any *general* comments you can make about "DONT" versus "Cappelletti" versus "Woolsey"?

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<sup>2</sup> Within the "**Esther Bridge Lessons**", see: "**Esther Convention #17: Disturbing Opponent's No Trump ('DON'T')**": <https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/dont.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Within the "**Esther Bridge Lessons**", see: "**Esther Convention #19: Cappelletti Convention to Interfere With Opponents' 1NT Opening Bid**": <https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/cappellet.pdf>

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, as Robert S. Todd noted in his October, 2024 article in the ACBL Bridge Bulletin, "Interfering Over Opponent's 1NT",

**...DONT keeps the auction low, while Cappalletti... often pushes the auction to the three level. The Woolsey system... is slightly more complex... [but] but allows us to be more specific about our length in the major [S]uits." (p. 50)**

**Bruce:** Well, would you "unpack" that a bit for us, Esther?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, of course. First, let me emphasize why it may be important to keep the bidding low in a competitive auction when you are Overcalling a 1NT bid. One Opponent has shown **15-17** or **18** HCPs out of the total of 40 HCPs. This means that you and Partner are likely competing to set a contract for a Part Score, and not a Game score. So you will prefer to set the final contract at a "safer" or "lower" level to insure that you "make" you contract and obtain a "positive" and not a "negative" Bridge Score.

**Bruce:** OK. What else?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, the second feature of the "**Woolsey Convention**" is very, very, VERY important. When you invoke the "**Woolsey Convention**" you are competing to set a Suit contract! And what *matters most* in Suit contracts is Trump card counts and not HCPs! That is what Points Schmoints! means! As noted in the "**Esther Bridge Lesson**", "**Lagniappe: Esther Discusses (1) Does the 'Law of Total Tricks' ('LOTT') Really Work, and (2) Is the 'LOTT' Magic?**"<sup>4</sup>

**...[W]ithin *\*\*ALL\*\**... bridge books, perhaps the most important book of all time is Larry Cohen's 1992 ABTA award-winning book, To Bid or Not to Bid: The LAW of Total Tricks... Because the "Law of Total Tricks" turns on bidders counting *exactly* the number of Trump cards held within the Partnership, the "LOTT" in turn naturally leads to some players preferring to use bidding conventions that communicate to Partner exact Trump Suit card counts...**

And the "**Woolsey Convention**" does indeed communicate *exact* Trump card counts! The downside of the convention, however,

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<sup>4</sup> See: [https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/LOTT\\_bad.pdf](https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/LOTT_bad.pdf)

is that the "Woolsey Convention" is *more complex* than the "DONT Convention" and the "Cappelletti Convention".

**Bruce:** OK. Let's start. What do we need to know?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, many of the bids within the "Woolsey Convention" are "artificial", meaning some bids do not show holdings in the Suits being bid. That is what makes the convention more complex. Also, we need to separate the Woolsey Overcaller bids from the Responder/Advancer's bids. Let's start with the **Woolsey Overcaller's** bids.

**Bruce:** OK.

### Woolsey Overcaller's Bids

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, as Jeff Tang noted in his article, "Multi-Landy (Woolsey)",<sup>5</sup> on his excellent BridgeBum website, within the "Woolsey Convention" "The 2-level [O]vercalls are the same as Cappelletti, except that the meanings of the 2♣ and 2♦ bids are reversed." There are numerous variations, but here are the most common versions of Woolsey:

- DBL**<sup>6</sup> "Partner, I hold a 2-Suited Hand with some **4+** card Major and some **5+** card Minor."
- 2♣ "Partner, I hold at least **5-4** or **4-5** in the Majors."
- 2♦ "Partner, I hold **6** Hearts and no 'long' side-Suit."
- 2♥ "Partner, I hold **5** Hearts and **4+** cards in some Minor."
- 2♠ "Partner, I **5+** Spades and **4+** cards in some Minor."
- 2NT** "Partner, I hold at least **5** cards in both Minors."
- 3♣ "Partner, I hold **5+** Clubs with a Ron Klinger "Suit Quality Test ('SQT') Score"<sup>7</sup> of at least **8** or **9**."
- 3♦ "Partner, I hold **5+** Diamonds with a Ron Klinger "Suit Quality Test ('SQT') Score"<sup>8</sup> of at least **8** or **9**."

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<sup>5</sup> See: [https://www.bridgebum.com/multi\\_landy.php](https://www.bridgebum.com/multi_landy.php)

<sup>6</sup> There is **considerable** variation in how Partners bid **DOUBLE** in this system, and this must be settled by Partnership Agreement.

<sup>7</sup> Computed by adding (1) the number of cards plus (2) the number of Honors (including the Ten).

<sup>8</sup> Computed by adding (1) the number of cards plus (2) the number of Honors (including the Ten).

## Woolsey Advancer's Bids

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, here is where things get a bit more complicated.

### Advancer's Responses to Overcaller's DBL

- 2♣ Asks Partner to PASS or "correct" to Diamonds.
- 2♦ "Partner, I am at least **3-3** in the Majors. Please bid your 'long' Major."
- 2♥ "Partner, I hold **6+** Hearts."
- 2♠ "Partner, I hold **6+** Spades."
- 2NT Forcing. "Partner, I am **4-4** in the Majors."
- 3♣ "Partner, I hold **6+** good Clubs."
- 3♦ "Partner, I hold **6+** good Diamonds."

### Advancer's Responses to Overcaller's 2♣

- 2♣ "Partner, I hold **6+** Clubs."
- 2♦ "Partner, I hold equal length in the Majors. Please 'correct' to your best Major."
- 2♥ "Partner, I prefer to play in Hearts."
- 2♠ "Partner, I prefer to play in Spades."
- 2NT Forcing. "Partner, I hold a 'balanced' Hand and **12-14** HCPs."
- 3♣ "Partner, I hold **6+** good Clubs."
- 3♦ "Partner, I hold **6+** good Diamonds."

### Advancer's Responses to Overcaller's 2♦

- 2♥ "Partner, I prefer to play in Hearts."
- 2♠ "Partner, I prefer to play in Spades."
- 2NT Forcing. "Partner, please further clarify your Hand.  
Bid:
  - 3♣ "Partner, I hold **5+** Hearts and **maximum** strength."
  - 3♦ "Partner, I hold **5+** Spades and **maximum** strength."
  - 3♥ "Partner, I hold **5+** Hearts and **minimum** strength."
  - 3♠ "Partner, I hold **5+** Spades and **minimum** strength."

### Advancer's Responses to Overcaller's 2♥

- 2♠ "Partner, I cannot support Hearts. I hold 6+ good Spades."
- 2NT "Partner, I cannot support Hearts. Please bid your Minor."
- 3♣ "Partner, I cannot support Hearts. I hold **6+** good Clubs."
- 3♦ "Partner, I cannot support Hearts. I hold **6+** good Diamonds."
- 3♥ "Partner, I hold **3+** Hearts."

- 3♠ "Partner, I cannot support Hearts. I hold **6+** good Spades."
- 3NT "Partner, let's play this!"
- 4♥ "Partner, let's play this!"
- 4♠ "Partner, let's play this!"

Advancer's Responses to Overcaller's 2♠

- PASS** "Partner, let's play 2♠."
- 2NT "Partner, I cannot support Spades. Please bid your Minor."
- 3♣ "Partner, I cannot support Spades. I hold **6+** good Clubs."
- 3♦ "Partner, I cannot support Spades. I hold **6+** good Diamonds."
- 3♥ "Partner, I cannot support Spades. I hold **6+** good Hearts."
- 3♠ "Partner, I hold **3+** Spades."

Advancer's Responses to Overcaller's 2NT

- 3♣ "Partner, let's play Clubs."
- 3♦ "Partner, let's play Diamonds."
- 3♥ "Partner, let's play Hearts."
- 3♠ "Partner, I cannot support either Minor. Let's play Spades."
- 3NT "Partner, let's play 3NT."