

"Why Run the 'Avoidance Play' When You Are the Bridge Declarer?"

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<https://esther-bridge.com/index.html>

Editor's Note. Elie "Ely" Culbertson (1891-1955) "was an American [contract bridge](#) entrepreneur and personality dominant during the 1930s. He played a major role in the popularization of the new game and was widely regarded as 'the man who made contract bridge'. He was a great showman who became rich, was highly extravagant, and lost and gained fortunes several times over... Culbertson founded and edited The Bridge World magazine, which is still published today, and wrote many newspaper articles and books on bridge. "²

One of Culbertson's books was Culbertson's Own Contract Bridge Self-Teacher: 1933 Culbertson System.³ The "avoidance play" example Esther presents here is based on a Board presented as one example in Culbertson's 1933 book.

As explained by Fernando Lema in his 2018 web article, "The Avoidance Play":⁴

"In contract bridge, avoidance play is a play technique whereby [D]eclarer prevents a particular [D]efender from winning the trick, so as to eschew a dangerous lead from that hand. The dangerous hand is usually the one who is able (1) to finesse through declarer's honors, (2) to give

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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.

² Wikipedia entry for Ely Culbertson: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ely_Culbertson

³ See: <https://archive.org/details/culbertsonsownco00culb>

⁴ See: <http://youth.worldbridge.org/thinking-bridge-the-avoidance-play-by-eddie-kantar/>

a ruff to the partner or (3) to cash one or more established winners." (enumeration added)

The player who presents one or more of these 3 dangers to you as Declarer holds the "Danger Hand" and is the "Danger Player".

As explained by Jeff Tang in his web article, "Avoidance Play,"⁵ there are 2 methods to keep the "Danger Player" from securing the lead. **First**, you can "duck" on a Trick that you expect will thus be won by the "Danger Player's" Partner, so that the "Danger Player" does not gain the lead. **Second**, if you must finesse in order to make your contract, do not finesse against the "Danger Player," because there is always a 50% probability that the finesse will fail, and the "Danger Player" will gain the lead.

Example of "Avoidance Play"

	NORTH (13)	
	S: Q 6 5	
	H: A Q 8	
	D: A J T 9	
	C: T 4 3	
WEST (11)		EAST (10)
S: J 7 2		S: K T 9 3
H: T 9 4 3 2		H: 6 5
D: Q 8 4 2		D: 7 6
C: 8		C: A Q J 9 7
	SOUTH (14)	
	S: A 8 4	
	H: K J 7	
	D: K 5 3	
	C: K 6 5 2	

Bidding

NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	WEST
1D	2C	2NT	PASS
3NT	PASS	PASS	PASS

1. WEST leads his Club 8 singleton toward EAST's bid Suit.
2. The NORTH Dummy comes down. Declarer SOUTH then must first count his "winners" and then formulate his initial "Line of Play". SOUTH sees the following *sure* "winners": 1 Spade, 3

⁵ See: https://bridgebum.com/avoidance_play.php

Hearts, 2 Diamonds = 1 + 3 + 2 = **6**. He sees the possibility of playing toward the NORTH Dummy Spade Queen for a finesse, and of "promoting" at least 2 of Dummy's low Diamonds into "winners".

3. Declarer "ducks" with the Dummy Club 3. EAST then plays the Club Jack. Declarer SOUTH sums the number of Clubs in the NORTH Dummy (3) and the number Clubs he holds (4) and because $3 + 4 = 7$ invoking the "**Rule of 7**"⁶ Declarer knows that he can win Trick **#1** if he elects to do so, but SOUTH decides to "duck" since his Club King is amply "protected".
4. On Trick **#2** EAST leads his Club Ace, which wins. EAST then sees that WEST is now void in Clubs, and SOUTH now knows that EAST holds the "**Danger Hand**".
5. Declarer SOUTH will now not want to lead toward the NORTH Dummy's Spade Queen for a finesse because (1) EAST is the "**Danger Hand**" and (2) the "**Danger Hand**" having bid, while WEST has not, is more likely to hold the Spade King, and thus is likely to overtake the Dummy's Spade Queen and then rein down terror with his remaining Clubs.
6. On the other Hand, Declarer SOUTH now knows not only where the "**Danger Hand**" lies, but also knows that WEST is *relatively toothless*, especially because WEST once on lead does not hold a Club to lead toward EAST. Therefore, Declarer SOUTH can go to the Dummy, and then lead the Diamond 9 to "promote" the excellent N/S Diamonds, and "duck" in Declarer SOUTH's Hand. Even if WEST holds the Diamond Queen and takes the Trick, there is not much further damage that WEST can do after that.

⁶ Within the "**Esther Bridge Lessons**", see Lesson **#25**: "Some of the 40 or so Bridge Bidding/Play 'Rules'":

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



Esthers says:

I also *highly commend* to you my related “Esther Bridge ‘Pop’ Quiz” #174: **“Playing NT Contracts as Declarer: Running an ‘Avoidance Play’ Against the ‘Dangerous Opponent’ and ‘Promoting’ ‘Winners’”:**

https://esther-bridge.com/quiz/q0174_q.pdf