

Esther Discusses "As Declarer, Dealing with a Nightmarish 'Trump Split', Partly by 'Drawing' Trump with Non-Trump Side Suits"

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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 "As Declarer, Dealing with a Nightmarish 'Trump Split'". 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. Well, in any case, I thought it might be interesting to discuss the bidding and the play of the following Board:

499er 2/21/24 Dealer: **NORTH** Vul: **E/W**

NORTH (12)		
S:	J 4	
H:	9 3 2	
D:	K J 8 7 6	
C:	A K 9	
WEST (11)		EAST (5)
S:	A Q 6 2	S: K 9 8 7 5 3
H:	Q T 8 7 4	H: --
D:	Q	D: T 9 5 3
C:	J T 3	C: Q 5 2
SOUTH (12)		
S:	T	
H:	A K J 6 5	
D:	A 4 2	
C:	8 7 6 4	

Bidding

NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	WEST
1D	2S	3H	3S
4H	PASS	PASS	PASS

Bruce: OK, Esther. NORTH holds **12** HCPs, and also meets the requirements to open specified in Marty Bergen's "**Rule of 20**", because $12 + 8$ cards in his longest 2 Suits = **20**. So NORTH's 1D opening bid seems straightforward. What do you think of EAST's Overcall bid of 2S given that EAST holds (1) only **5** HCPs, (2) a Ron Klinger "**Suit Quality Test ('SQT') Score**" of only $6 + 1$ Honor card = **7**, which will not support a bid at the 2 level because $7 < 8$, but (3) does hold a Heart void?

Esther: Well, my *gracious giver*, frankly, I would not make this Overcall, especially sitting Vulnerable!

Bruce: Errr, well, Esther... Are you actually being nice to me?

Esther: Well, my *inquisitive interlocutor*, of course I am being "nice" to you! Why wouldn't I be "nice" to you?

Bruce: Well, OK, Ms. Klink..., errr, I mean, Esther. The bidding continues, and SOUTH bids 3H. Do you agree then with SOUTH's response bid?

Esther: Well, Bruce, yes, I do. SOUTH *knows* that EAST's jump Spade bid is at least "weak", and may also simply be "crazy", because Partner NORTH opened, and SOUTH holds 12 HCPs, plus a singleton in EAST's long Spade Suit.

Bruce: OK. Well, WEST then bid 3S. Do you agree with this bid?

Esther: Well, my *handsome hombre*, WEST assumes that EAST is showing 6 Spades, with at least 1 Spade Honor. Because WEST holds the Spade A,Q, EAST must hold the Spade King. And WEST holds 4 Spades. WEST knows that E/W hold (1) the top **3** Spade Honors, and (2) **10** Spade Trump cards. According to the "**Law of Total Tricks**", this Trump Spade holding is *likely* to make up to a $10 - 6 = 4$ -level contract! By the way, a truly excellent exploration of the "**Law of Total Tricks**" is *moi's* recent 2024 "**Esther Bridge Lesson**", "Lagniappe: Esther Discusses (1) Does the 'Law of Total

Tricks' Really Work, and (2) Is the 'LOTT' Magic?", which is available at:

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

Bruce: OK, Esther. NORTH knows that N/S hold **8** Hearts, and hefty HCPs, and sets the final contract at **4H**. WEST leads the Diamond Queen. *Diamonds was NORTH's opening bid!!!!* Do you agree with WEST's lead? As Declarer SOUTH, once Dummy comes down showing K,J,x,x,x as NORTH's **5** Diamonds, how would you *interpret* WEST's Diamond Queen lead?

Esther: Well, my *beaudacious beau*, I think this must be interpreted as being a Diamond singleton. And WEST holding a Diamond singleton, given EAST's long 6-card Spade Suit, is a strong **danger signal!** EAST is long in Spades, which means that EAST is *less* likely to hold a boatload of Trump Hearts. And WEST is very short in Diamonds, so together these **2** facts suggest the horrific possibility that WEST holds a Heart Trump "stack". This suggests therefore that WEST may indeed be the "**Danger Hand**"!!!

Bruce: OK, Esther. Once Dummy comes down Declarer can see that N/S together hold $5 + 3 = 8$ Heart Trump cards, and that therefore E/W together hold $13 - 8 = 5$ Heart Trump cards. How should this factor into Declarer SOUTH's thinking about his "Line of Play"?

Esther: Well, my *rambunctious rascal*, what is significant is that there is an "odd" **number¹** of Trump cards out. When there are **5** cards out, as in the case on this Board, the probability of a 3-2 "split" (**67.8%**) is greater than the probability of a 4-1 "split" (**28.4%**). So, a 3-2 "split" is $67.8\% / 28.4\% = 2.4$ **times more likely** than a 4-1 "split". Of course, it must also be remembered that 28.4% is less than 67.8%, but 28.4% is **certainly not 0%**!

For comparison, if there were **4** Trump cards "out", the probability of an *unequal* 3-1 "split" would be **49.7%**, while the probability of an *equal* 2-2 "split" would be **40.7%**. And if there were **6** Trump cards "out", the probability of an *unequal* 4-2 "split" would be **48.4%**, while the probability of an *equal* 3-3 "split" would be **35.5%**.

¹ Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons", see the "Very Important Bridge Probabilities" Section.

Now the probability of a 5-0 Trump card "split" is only **3.9%**! **3.9%** is quite a *small* probability, but SOUTH had best remember that **3.9%** absolutely does not equal **0.0%**. And the lead of what looks a Diamond Queen singleton appears to show that the very unlikely has indeed actually occurred on this Board!

Once the NORTH Dummy is down, Declarer SOUTH ought to determine immediately *specifically* which Heart Trump cards N/S are missing. SOUTH sees that N/S are missing the Heart Q,T,8,7,4. The NORTH Dummy also includes the 2 *lowest* Hearts, the 2,3, along with the Heart 9. Not much Trump help in Dummy!

Bruce: OK. Well, Esther, Declarer SOUTH can take Trick #1 either in NORTH's Hand with the Diamond King, or Declarer SOUTH's Hand with the Diamond Ace. Where would you take this Trick? And what would be your initial "Line of Play"?

Esther: Well, I would take Trick #1 in the Dummy in order to be able to lead "**low to high**" to at least allow your Opponents to play "intermediate" Trump cards that ultimately lose on a given Trick, but thus potentially "promote" some of your own "intermediate" cards into "winners".²

Bruce: Very well, Esther. Here Declarer leads the Heart 2 from the NORTH Dummy, and immediately confirms that *bad* news that EAST, with long Spades, also holds the unlikely but possible Heart void, and sees that the Trump "split" is indeed **5-0**, and WEST is the "**Danger Hand**"! *Unhappily*, the WEST Trump "stack" sits "*behind*" Declarer SOUTH's 5-card Heart Trump holding of A,K,J,6,5. After Declarer SOUTH takes Trick #2 with his Heart Ace, what would your initial "Line of Play" plan then be?

Esther: Well, Bruce, on Trick #3 I would lead the Diamond 2 from Declarer SOUTH's Hand, if WEST ruffs, that then "shortens" WEST's Trump holding by 1 card. That is what WEST is most likely to do. At this point N/S has all 3 Suits "stopped" and will only lose 1 Spade. Once N/S again secures the lead, I would again play a small Diamond, to knock out

² Within the "**Esther Bridge Lessons**", see: "**Lesson #72: 'The Art' of (Correctly) Drawing Trump**".

another of WEST's Heart Trump cards, and put WEST down to only 3 remaining Trump Hearts.

Bruce: Very well, Esther. How will this *traumatic* Board play out for SOUTH?

Esther: Well, Bruce, N/S will surely lose 1 Spade, 1 Club, 2 Diamonds to ruffing. If SOUTH gets back on lead, after taking 2 Club Tricks with Dummy's Club A,K, Declarer could then lead the NORTH Dummy Club 9 to lose a Club Trick, and then in subsequent play, assuming the Clubs "split" 3-3, later lead from Declarer SOUTH's Hand his remaining and last 4th Club card, thus forcing WEST to either ruff or lose this Trick. Always remember:

Non-Trump "side" Suits can sometimes *also* be used to "drop" Opponents' Trump cards, and to do so without spending any of your Partnerships' own Trump cards!

Bruce: Well, Esther. The N/S contract is going down!

Esther: Well, yes, Bruce. This is not an entirely surprising result, given the minimal N/S Heart Trump card holding, and the *disastrous* 5-card Trump "stack" sitting "behind" Declarer SOUTH. Remembering that all Pairs sitting N/S on this Board are likely to set the same 4^H contract and also go "down", the question is, can your Partnership go down less than other N/S Pairs go "down"?