

Esther Discusses

"3 of Ron Klinger's 'Tips' for Bidding from His Book, '100 WINNING BRIDGE TIPS for the Improving Player'"

Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen¹

To return to the "Esther Bridge Lessons," CLICK:

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

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 "**3 of Ron Klinger's 'Tips' for Bidding from His Book, '100 WINNING BRIDGE TIPS for the Improving Player'**". 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 such a "warm and caring" person!

Bruce: Errr, well, sorry again about that, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther. Well, in any case, is there anything you wish to say initially about **Ron Klinger** before you delve into the heart of today's "Esther Bridge Lesson"?

Esther: Well, my *gracious giver*, I will certainly try to help you! I am happy to say a little about my personal friend, **Ron Klinger**, an Australian bridge expert.

Ron Klinger

Ron Klinger (1941-) has written more than **70** bridge books including his 1990 book, Guide to Better Card Play, which won the "American Bridge Teachers' Association (ABTA) Bridge Book of the Year Award." He was Editor of Australian Bridge for 13 years (1972-

© Copyright, Bruce Thompson, 2025. All rights reserved.

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.

1985). For many years he has written, and still currently writes, a weekly bridge column for both the Sydney Morning Herald and The Sun-Herald.

Klinger also originated the Ron Klinger "**Suit Quality Test ('SQT') Score**".² The "**SQT Score**" is computed by adding together (1) the number of cards held in the Suit and (2) the number of Honors held in the Suit (including the Ten if a higher Honor is also held). Suit contracts set at a level of "**SQT Score**" - 6 are generally relatively safe. In Keeping with the "**Law of Total Tricks**" the "**SQT Score**" recognizes the fact that card counts and distributions may be more important than HCPs when setting Suit contracts.

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: Errr, well, in any case, Esther, would you go ahead and present the 1st of the 3 Klinger bridge bidding "Tips" that you are going to cover in today's "Esther Bridge Lesson".

Esther: Well, my *handsome hombre*, I will certainly try to help you. The first Ron Klinger "Tip" involves *if* at all possible not letting Opponents having found an 8-card "fit" play a 2-level contract especially in a Major. When the Opponents hold an 8-card "fit" the "**Law of Total Tricks**" says that the Opponents are *extremely* likely to make a 2**H** or 2**S** contract and thus earn a "positive" Bridge Score because $8 - 6 = 2!$ ³

² Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons" see "Esther Bridge 'Pop' Quiz #100: 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

³ Esther has quite heatedly discussed this viewpoint in her "Esther Bridge Dialog Lesson #39: '**Esther Goes Berserk!!!: When You Are in the 'Balancing' Position, and Opponents Bid a 'Constructive Raise' to Either 2H or 2S, Do NOT Let Opponents Play This Contract!!!**':

https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/2H2S_bal.pdf

Also see "Partscore Competitive Bidding by Ron Klinger":

<https://csbnews.org/partscore-competitive-bidding-by-ron-klinger/>

Ron Klinger Tip #25

“If the [O]pponents bid and raise a [S]uit to the 2-level and then pass, be anxious to re-open the bidding in the pass-out seat with a delayed overcall, a delayed double or a delayed 2NT.” (p. 41)

Bruce: Ummm. Hmmmmm. Well, Esther, would you give us an example of the kind of auctions you are talking about so that this discussion is more concrete?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. Here are 2 auctions that Klinger uses as examples:

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

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

*Esther has changed this example from Hearts to Spades.

Klinger observes that:

“It is usually wrong to pass the bidding out. The opponents have found a trump fit but not tried for game. They do not have 25-26 points and probably not even 23-24 (one of them would have made a game try). Each side will have about half the points and if they have a trump fit, you probably have one, too.” (p. 41)

Indeed, both Pairs holding **8+** card “fits” is called “**reciprocal fit**”. It is not only possible, but indeed very *likely* that if one Pair holds an **8+** card “fit”, the other Pair *also* holds an **8+** card “fit”. Indeed, one Pair can hold **2** 8+ card fits, and if so, the other Pair *100% certainly* also holds **2** 8+ card “fits” in the other 2 Suits!⁴

⁴ Within the “Esther Bridge Lessons” see “**A Comprehensive List of 8 Different Categories of Bridge Probabilities, and How These May Help Guide Your Bidding and Play**”:

https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/8_probs.pdf

Bruce: Ummm. Hmmmmm. Well, OK, Esther, what does the next Ron Klinger bidding "Tip" involve?

Ron Klinger Tip #33

"Do not double an artificial cue-bid or an artificial bid in a relay system sequence without a very good reason." (p. 53)

Esther: Well, Bruce, the next Ron Klinger bidding "Tip" involves 1 of the 7 "Not-for-Penalty DOUBLES"⁵ called the "Lead-Directing DOUBLE". A "Lead-Directing DOUBLE" says, "Partner, I have a very good Suit in the artificially-bid Suit that my RHO just bid. If you get the lead, lead me this Suit, please, please." Here are some examples each involving WEST making a "Lead-Directing DOUBLE" of his RHO's "artificial" bid.

NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	WEST
1NT	PASS	2C	DBL

NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	WEST
1NT	PASS	2D	DBL

NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	WEST
1S	PASS	3S	PASS
4NT	PASS	5D	DBL

The theory underlying the "Lead-Directing DOUBLE" is that the Opponents will *almost certainly* bid after your DOUBLE and will not leave your DOUBLE "in" because the Opponents hold (1) *numerous* HCPs and can likely make a Game or Slam contract and (2) likely not many cards in the Suit that (a) you hold and are Doubling and (b) the Opponents are likely not long in this Suit.

Bruce: Well, OK, Esther, that all makes sense. Sounds neat. Does Klinger like these "Lead-Directing DOUBLES"?

Esther: Well, my *studly salamander*, no, siree, Klinger indeed does not like "Lead-Directing DOUBLES"!!! The reasons for his dislike include:

⁵ Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons" see: "Esther Convention Lesson #14: 7 'Not-for-Penalty' DOUBLES":

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

1. If the Opponents are exploring a slam contract your **"Lead-Directing DOUBLE"** may inhibit your Opponents from bidding a *failing* slam.
2. "By revealing where your strength lies, you allow the [O]pponents to upgrade the value of a singleton holding in that [S]uit and thus reach a slam they might have otherwise avoided." (p. 53)
3. If your Opponents are making "artificial" bids in the Blackwood convention or the **"Roman Key Card 1430"** convention your **"Lead-Directing DOUBLE"** actually *adds* to your Opponents' "bidding space" because they can now communicate by making a RE-DOUBLE or a PASS. As Klinger notes, "modern relay systems function best with plenty of bidding space. A double in a relay auction gives them more space." (p. 53)

Ron Klinger Tip #30

"To maximize your competitive advantage after partner overcalls, it is sensible to play jump-raises of overcalls as pre-emptive." (p. 46)

Esther: Well, my *curious carnivore*, let me begin covering Klinger Tip #30 by quoting Klinger:

"Just as it is sound strategy to jump to game [quickly] when you have a 10-card fit [and the **"Law of Total Tricks"** suggests a 4-level Game contract in a Major will 'make'] so you should be prepared to compete for nine tricks [i.e., a 3-level contract] when you know you [and Partner together] have a 9-card fit. The weaker your [H]and, the quicker you should bid to the appropriate level." (p. 46)

Bruce: Well, Esther, can you give us some concrete examples of bidding in this manner?

Esther: Well, I will try to help you. Each of these examples involve you sitting SOUTH each time in the following auction:

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

Bruce, what Hands held by SOUTH would you like to ask about?

Bruce: Well, Esther, how about this Hand?

YOU (6)
SOUTH
S: Q 8 7 3
H: 9 8 6 3
D: J
C: Q J 6 3

Esther: Well, Bruce, WEST has shown ~13 HCPs or or least meets the requirements of Marty Bergen's "Rule of 20".⁶ Partner NORTH has shown sufficient HCPs to Overcall 1S. Because WEST and NORTH have together shown something approaching 26 HCPs SOUTH is unlikely to hold the ~13 HCPs that would be required to set a 4S contract, some Partnerships would play a 3S bid by Responder SOUTH as a "weak" preemptive bid but 4 Trump Spade cards. With N/S holding 5 + 4 = 9 Trump Spades the "Law of Total Tricks" says that a 3S contract is likely to "make", This 3S bid also has the effect of likely shutting E/W out of the competitive auction. Klinger suggests that, "Partner [NORTH] should almost always pass this weak raise." If WEST instead had initially PASSEd rather than bid then a 3S bid by Responder SOUTH would be "invitational."

Bruce: Well, Esther, how about this Hand?

YOU (6)
SOUTH
S: Q 8 7 4 3
H: 9
D: T 6 4 3 2
C: K J

⁶ Under the "Rule of 20" NORTH can bid 1S if the sum of (1) the number of his Trump Spade cards and (2) the numb of Trump Spade Honors he holds (including the Ten if he holds a higher Spade Honor) equals 20 or more.

Esther: Well, Bruce, Responder SOUTH knows that N/S together holds $5 + 5 = 10$ Trump Spade cards. The "**Law of Total Tricks**" says that N/S can "make" a Spade contract set no higher than the $10 - 6 = 4$ level. So, Responder SOUTH should promptly bid **4S**.

Bruce: Well, Esther, how about this Hand?

YOU (**16**)

SOUTH

S: Q 8 7 4 3

H: A K 5

D: T 6

C: A Q J

Esther: Well, Bruce, Responder SOUTH at his 1st turn to be within the auction should show (1) **4+** Trump Spades and (2) a "big" Hand by making a "**Support Cuebid**".⁷ At his next turn within the auction SOUTH should then bid **4S**.

⁷ Within the "**Esther Bridge Lessons**" see: "Esther Convention Lesson #20: Support Cuebids": https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/cue_supp.pdf