

Esther Discusses "Are the 'Rule of 20' and the 'Law of Total Tricks' Both Broken"?

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 discuss "**Are the 'Rule of 20' and the 'Law of Total Tricks' Both Broken**"? Esther, thanks for taking 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 Esther! Always, **ALWAYS, ALWAYS** instead call me, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen!

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, in any case, thank you for talking to us today. To start, would you briefly review both the "Rule of 20" and the "Law of Total Tricks"?

Esther: Well, of course, my Malodorous Misanthrope!

1. The "**Rule of 20**" says you should open with a **suit** bid, in any position, in any vulnerability, if the sum of (1) your HCPs plus (2) the number of cards in your 2 longest suits equals 20 or more. This "Rule", invented by World Champion Marty Bergen, and discussed in his two Points Schmoints! books, honors the fact that 2-suited hands play better than "flat" hands in suit contracts!
2. The "Law of Total Tricks", advocated by Bergen and his frequent Partner, Larry Cohen, says, "In suit contracts, about 85% of the time you can make a suit contract equal to the number of Trump cards held by your Partnership, minus 6, assuming you don't go crazy by totally ignoring HCPs.

Bruce: OK. Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, let's consider the following Board in order to further discuss these issues?

Knoxville 249er Board #18

Vul: **N/S**

Dealer: **EAST**

	NORTH (12)	
	S: 986542	
	H: --	
	D: A9	
	C: AKJT3	
WEST (11)		EAST (11)
S: Q3		S: AJ
H: AKJ94		H: QT876
D: J32		D: Q6
C: 986		C: Q752
	SOUTH (6)	
	S: KT7	
	H: 532	
	D: KT8754	
	C: 4	

Bidding

EAST	SOUTH	WEST	NORTH
PASS	PASS	1H	1S
4H	PASS	PASS	PASS

Bruce: Well, first, Esther... Err, I mean, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, do you agree with Dealer EAST's bid of Pass?

Esther: Well, my Bodacious Bupkus, probably not! 11 HCPs + 9 cards in the longest 2 suits (Hearts and Clubs) = 20, so I probably would have opened **1H**. Of course, while I do hold 1 Ace (and Aces are super important, and worth more than 4 HCPs, because they are "control" cards), on the other hand (1) I only hold **2 of the 5** top Hearts, and (2) I do not hold "high-end" "touching honors" (e.g., Q,J,T,x,x, or K,T,9,8,x). However, Ron Klinger's "Suit Quality", or "**SQ**" **test**, says that you should not bid at a level higher than the sum of (1) the number of honors, including the Ten and/or Jack only if you hold a higher honor, that you hold in the suit you are considering bidding, plus (2) the number of cards you hold in the suit. Here, the "SQ" test

equals $2+5=7$, so you can open **1H** according to this "SQ test".

Bruce: OK. Well, I know that you agree with SOUTH's bid of Pass. Do you agree with WEST's bid of **1H**, even though Dealer/Partner EAST Passed?

Esther: Well, my Simpering Simpleton, of course! One can open in 3rd chair with only 11+ HCPs! (And Partnerships playing this way should both **always** remember that a Partner opening in 3rd position *may* only hold 11 HCPs!) And WEST holds 3 of the top 4 Heart honors, and Hearts is a Major, which yields higher Bridge Scores than making a contract in a Minor!

Bruce: Well, what do you think of NORTH's Overcall of **1S**, when NORTH holds 6 Spades but ZERO honors?

Esther: Well, NORTH is void in Hearts, the suit bid by the Opponent, and holds 6 Spades! So, I think this is very adventurous, but not totally insane!

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, what do you think of EAST's Response bid of **4H**???

Esther: Well, my Dandruff-ridden Dufus, EAST knows that the Partnership holds 10 Spades! And, according to the "Law of Total Tricks", the Partnership is indeed likely to make a Heart game contract, since $10-6=4$. But EAST also should remember that WEST, sitting 3rd, may only hold 11 or do HCPs, and since EAST holds only 11 HCPs, that may be pretty dicey! And since WEST opened in 3rd position, almost all WEST's honors are possibly in Hearts, and WEST may hold no "Control" cards in other suits. However, EAST holds A,J in the Opponents' bid Spade suit, so EAST knows that E/W may lose no more than 1 Spade trick.

Bruce: OK, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, bottom line, please. What would you have bid as EAST when Partner opened **1H**, and NORTH overcalled **1S**?

Esther: Well, I think I would bid **3H**. I am afraid that N/S against a Heart contract will make 1 Spade Trick, probably 2 Diamond Tricks, and possibly 2 Club Tricks. If WEST had been dealer, and opened **1H**, a **3H** response

by me sitting EAST would have been very strong. But, sitting as Dealer, and having (incorrectly) Passed, a 3H response by me sitting EAST says to Partner: "Partner, I have a boatload of your Hearts, but because I am not bidding 4H, I am showing you that I do not know for sure that we can make 4H. If you are at the top of your bid, only then bid 4H. Good luck!!!"

Bruce: OK, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen. On this Board most E/W Pairs ended up in a 4H contract, and went down several Tricks. NORTH led the Diamond Ace, The Club Ace, the King Ace, and then having discovered that SOUTH held a Club singleton, and was now void, another Club Trick that SOUTH took by ruffing. Does this mean that the "Rule of 20" and the "Law of Total Tricks" are *both* broken?

Esther: Well, no, Bruce. The "Rule of 20" and the "Law of Total Tricks" are not universal bridge principles that always work! Instead, they are bridge principles that instead usually work! And remember...

Bruce: Remember what, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen?

Esther: Well, Bruce, all the E/W Pairs holding these hands will likely bid in a somewhat similar fashion, and achieve a similar result on this Board. So, while on this Board the "Rule of 20" and the "Law of Total Tricks" may not have worked, they also didn't hurt E/W too badly! And remember...

Bruce: Remember what, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen?

Esther: Well, Bruce, on this board, played properly, E/W stopping at a 3H contract would have been a Top E/W Board!!!