

**Esther Discusses "As Declarer,
(1) Coping with the Blessing/*Curse* of Holding
'Too Many' Trump Cards, and (2) Facilitating
Opponents' Errors"
(Avoiding What is Technically Called 'Dumb' *End Play*)**

Bruce Thompson

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 "**As Declarer, (1) Coping with the Blessing/*Curse* of Holding 'Too Many' Trump Cards, and (2) Facilitating Opponents' Errors**". 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 EAST/WEST bidding the following Board:

Board #11

Knoxville 499er 10/12/23

Vul: **NONE**

Dlr: **SOUTH**

WEST (11)

S: T 9 8 4 3

H: A 6

D: Q J 9

C: A 7 5

EAST (12)

S: A 6

H: K Q T 9 8 5 4

D: K 6

C: 9 8

Note. The cards in **bold** were played on the first Trick, which was won by E/W.

Bidding

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
PASS	PASS	PASS	1H
PASS	1NT	PASS	3H
PASS	4H	PASS	PASS
PASS			

Bruce: OK, Esther. I assume that you agree with all the bidding. First, EAST's Hand is *too strong* to preempt. After EAST opens 1H, WEST bids 1NT to keep the bidding open, and see whether, per chance, EAST is able to show at least 6 Hearts. Once EAST does so, by jumping to an "invitational" 3H bid, EAST shuts things down at a Game 4H bid. All fairly straightforward.

Esther: Well, my *gracious giver*, BINGO!!!

Bruce: Oh my goodness, Esther, are you actually being nice to me???

Esther: Well, Well, yes, my *inquisitive interlocutor*. I like occasionally to "mix things up"! SOUTH leads the King of Clubs from SOUTH's K,Q Club holding, which certainly is sensible, either to take Club winners early if NORTH holds the Ace of Clubs, or to "promise" holding the Club Queen, so that NORTH can lead Clubs back later in play, if NORTH gets the lead. Dummy then comes down. Declarer EAST then takes the first Trick by playing Dummy's Ace of Clubs.

Declarer EAST must now formulate his tentative "Line of Play" by focusing where Declarer in planning must ALWAYS focus: (1) **Counting losers**, and (2) then developing a "line of Play" to **DUMP LOSERS**! Here, EAST sees that losing 1 Spade Trick is UNAVOIDABLE, and losing 1 Club Trick is also UNAVOIDABLE.

Drawing Trump, of course, is *No Problemo*, because the E/W partnership holds $2 + 7 = 9$ of 13 Trump cards, including the Top 3 Hearts! And it is always *massively better* if Declarer's Partnership has a lopsided Trump holding, rather than an evenly "split" holding, because then (1) Declarer can draw Trump 1-for-2 or 1-for-1, and (2) a long Trump holding implies shortness in Declarer's other Suits, and thus ruffing opportunities! The 4 missing Hearts may even fall on the first 2 Trump Tricks if the Opponents' "split" is 2-2! Where things get tricky is in

setting things up to lose ONLY 1 Diamond Trick, so that the contract of 4H exactly makes!

Bruce: OK, Esther. Here Declarer then wants to draw Trump. The Opponents' Trump "split" is either 2-2, 3-1, or 4-0, with the 2-2 and 3-1 "splits" being about roughly equally likely (3-1: **49.7%**; 2-2: **40.7%**; 4-0: **9.5%**)¹. Now, playing "High to Low" is a **massive CARDINAL (INEXCUSABLE) SIN**², especially if you do so *before* finding out more about the Opponents' Trump "split". So, Declarer EAST led Dummy's 6 of Hearts toward Declarer's King of Hearts. And the 2 and the 3 of Hearts dropped, showing that at least the "split" is not the dreaded 4-0, and likely is 2-2, because both Opponents' cards (i.e., the 2 and the 3) are so low! And now Declarer can, if he wishes, lead back to Dummy's Heart Ace to (hopefully) draw both the remaining Trump cards. Doesn't this sound like a *thoughtful, reasonable* "Line of Play"?

Esther: Well, Bruce, actually there may be *better* "Lines of Play" on this Board!

Declarer Dealing with the Blessing/Curse of Holding So Many Trump Cards

Bruce: OK, Esther. Are there any *special challenges* here occasioned by E/W holding so many (7 + 2 = **9! out of 13**) Trump Hearts?

Esther: Yes, indeed, my *gracious giver*! The problem is Declarer must maintain TRANSPORTATION back to Winners in Dummy! Before the first card was led, Declarer had exactly 3 "entries" to the Board: (1) lead toward Dummy's Ace of Clubs, (2) lead toward Dummy's Ace of Trump Hearts, and (3) "promote" Dummy's Diamond Q,J Honors into winners. The problem, after Dummy takes the first Trick in Clubs, is that Declarer then has only **1 immediate sure "entry" back to Dummy** via the Dummy's Trump Heart Ace!

¹ Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons", see the "Probabilities Section". The *main thing* to remember is the *PATTERN* of "split" Probabilities when there is an **Odd** number of cards out versus and **Even** number of cards out!

² Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons", see: "Lesson #58: Drawing Missing Cards *Low to High*..."

Bruce: OK, Esther. What "Line of Play" would you suggest?

Esther: Well, my *generous gadfly*, there are several options. But the KEY DECISION is the decision to postpone drawing all the Trump, because you want to preserve that precious Heart Trump entry back to Dummy!

Bruce: Errr, well, Esther... So, after Declarer wins the first Trick in Dummy, what "Line of Play" would you then follow?

Esther: Well, there are 2 primary possibilities:

1. Lead the Dummy's 6 of Hearts toward Declarer's King of Hearts Trump, thus drawing 1 Round of Trump, and then lead Declarer's King of Diamonds to knock out the N/S Ace of Diamonds. If N/S "duck", you can later lead back toward Dummy's Trump Ace winner, drawing the 2nd Round of (hopefully all) Trump, and regaining "entry" to the Dummy, and play a Diamond Honor in Dummy, in which case N/S will then play the Ace of Diamonds, and you have no further "entry" back to the remaining Diamond winner in the Board! The success of this "Line of Play" requires N/S to play the Ace of Diamonds on Declarer's King, which N/S might not do!
2. But there may be a better way! Do not "draw" Trump in the second Round of play! Instead, lead Dummy's 9 of Diamonds toward Declarer's King. If NORTH holds the Ace, he will likely cash the Diamond Ace. If not, play your Declarer's King, and then still lead Declarer's 6 of Diamonds toward the Dummy's Diamond Q,J, and either take a winner in Dummy, or force out the N/S Diamond Ace, in which case you can later get back to Dummy to play the last Diamond winner via the Trump Heart Ace!

Bruce: Errr, well, Esther... Are there any special considerations when playing your preferred second "Line of Play"?

Esther: Well, yes, Bruce. This next point is very *HARD TO SEE!* If NORTH does not play the Diamond Ace on Dummy's led 9 of Diamonds, then EAST must play the King of Diamonds, either to take the Trick, or to force out the Ace, if it is held by SOUTH, thus "promoting" Dummy's remaining Honors into "winners". However, if NORTH does play the Ace of Diamonds on Dummy's led 9 of Diamonds, EAST MUST STILL PLAY

EAST/DECLARER'S KING OF DIAMONDS, SO AS TO "UNBLOCK" DECLARER'S ACCESS BACK TO DUMMY'S REMAINING DIAMOND WINNERS. "UNBLOCKING" is an important skill that takes newer bridge players time to master, but it is nevertheless an important skill!³ You **must** lose only 1 Diamond Trick to make your 4**H** contract, and you must maintain transportation back to Dummy to accomplish this. Furthermore, once you are back in the Dummy, you should then be able to dump your Spade 6 "loser" on a Dummy Diamond winner!

Facilitating Opponents' Errors

Bruce: Well, OK, Ms. Klink..., errr, I mean, Esther. Well, at this Bridge Table, unfortunately Declarer EAST did not follow either of your 2 preferred "Lines of Play". Instead, Declarer took the first Club Trick with Dummy's Ace, and then immediately drew 2 Rounds of Trump, successfully drawing all Trump Hearts, because they were actually "split" 2-2! At the end of the first 8 Tricks, E/W had taken **6** Tricks, and N/S had taken **2** Tricks. Here are the remaining **5** cards held by the 4 Players, with Declarer EAST "on lead":

	NORTH	
	S: K J	
	H: --	
	D: 8 7 5	
	C: --	
WEST		EAST
S: T 9 8 4		S: 6
H: --		H: Q T 9 8
D: Q		D: --
C: --		C: --
	SOUTH	
	S: Q 5	
	H: --	
	D: T	
	C: Q 3	

³ See, for example:
<https://www.intelligencer.ca/opinion/columnists/unblocking-at-the-bridge-table>, and
https://www.bridgebum.com/unblocking_play_declarer.php

Esther: Well, Bruce, all is not lost!!! The contract now will definitely make! Yea! Yea! Yea!!!

Bruce: Well, OK, Esther. Any further thoughts and/or WISDOM about how Declarer EAST should play this out?

Esther: Well, Bruce, isn't it RATHER OBVIOUS??? EAST **must** play 4 winning Heart Trump cards one after another, and hope that N/S will improvidently both dump both their 2 Spades, thus "promoting" Declarer's lowly Spade 6 into an Overtrick "winner" on the very last Trick!

Bruce: But my goodness, Esther!!! How likely is that?

Esther: Well, my *inquisitive interlocutor*, that is HUGELY unlikely to happen. But...

Whenever you have *ANY CHANCE WHATSOEVER* to take an extra Trick in duplicate bridge, no matter how remote that chance is, you simply **must** provide your Opponents with **every possible** opportunity to make *errors*, sometimes when there is LOW risk to doing so, and **ALWAYS** when there is **ZERO** risk to doing so!!! Quite simply, this may well be the difference between making a "Top Board" and a "Bottom Board"!

So, Bruce, what then happened on this Board at this actual Table?

Bruce: Well, Esther, sad to say, but in reality EAST on this next Trick led his certain losing Spade 6, and did not instead first cash a series of 4 certain Trump "winner" leads by EAST, hoping that N/S would discard their Spades on some of these 4 Tricks, thus yielding an all-important Overtrick by converting EAST's last card, the Spade 6, into a "winner"! Thus, EAST (improvidently) converted a **likely** less-than-favorable result into a **certain, guaranteed** less-than-favorable result, when there was *no/zero/nada cost* to at least allowing N/S to screw up!

Esther: Oh my!!! What happened then after the competition was over???

Bruce: Well, Esther, shortly after the competition ended, while EAST's house was temporarily vacant while errands were being run, there was a mysterious, and quite tragic accident! A **blimp** mysteriously crashed into EAST's house, and his house and the 2 luxury cars in his garage were sadly engulfed in flames and utterly destroyed!!!