

Esther Discusses "What is an '*Elimination Endplay*' by Declarer, and How Does Declarer Perform an '*Elimination Endplay*'?"

Bruce Thompson

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Esther: Today, we are honored to have with us Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, Quintuple Gold Emerald Life Master (20 Million+ ACBL MasterPoints), who will discuss "**What is an '*Elimination Endplay*' by Declarer, and How Does Declarer Perform an '*Elimination Endplay*'?**"

Bruce: Well, Esther, thank you for talking to 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, very sorry about that, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen. Why don't you first explain the basic idea of *what an "endplay" is?*

Esther: Well, my *Malodorous Misanthrope*, an "**elimination endplay**"¹ can be defined as a "tactical play in which the Declarer *intentionally* puts an Opponent on lead at a strategic moment previously *engineered* by the Declarer such that the Opponent **must** make a lead that then loses one of

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¹ An early, influential book on endplays was the 1932 book by George Sturgis Coffin: Endplays at Bridge Explained: A Systematic Treatise on the Three Kinds of Master Plays, Eliminations, Coups, Squeezes, which was published in numerous editions over decades, and is still available on Amazon under a similar title. A more recent book (2008) on "*endplays*" was written by David Bird, who has written more than **130** bridge books and is bridge correspondent for both the Mail on Sunday and the London Evening Standard: Bridge Endplays for Everyone: Yes, Even You!

more Tricks in an advantageous manner from the Declarer's perspective." A Declarer executes an "endplay" either to allow his contract to make when it otherwise would not make, or to secure vitally important Overtricks!

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, could you give us an example of what an "**elimination endplay**" is, please?

Esther: Well, my *Simpering Simpleton*, of course. This example is a modification from one in David Bird's (2008) book, Bridge Endplays for Everyone: Yes, Even You! In this example you are sitting SOUTH as Declarer, and the 4 Hands hold the following Diamonds:

	NORTH	
	D: Q 5 3	
WEST		EAST
D: K T 7		D: A 9 8 4
	D: J 6 2	

As David Bird explains,

"As the cards lie, you cannot make a diamond trick if you play the suit yourself. However, if East or West has to lead the suit first, the situation is different. One of them will have to play high third seat and you will then make the queen or jack in the third round [of diamonds being played]." (p. 5)

The idea of "**elimination endplay**" is to "engineer" the card layout over the course of several Tricks such that EAST or WEST **must** lead a Diamond, which you can then either Overtake or ruff!

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, how then does Declarer "engineer" this favorable situation for Declarer?

Esther: Well, my *Bodacious Bupkus*, Joan Butts in "Five Steps to Simplify the Endplay"² suggested the following steps:

1. Count your "losers" if you are Declarer in a Suit contract, or your "winners" if you are playing a **NT** contract, and determine whether (1) you must execute an "endplay" to make your contract, or (2) you wish to try to take Overtricks via an "endplay".

² See: <https://csbnews.org/the-endplay-by-audrey-grant/>

2. Identify if there is a "**Danger Suit**" that is *better* led by an Opponent such that you will take more Tricks.
3. Identify your "**Exit Card**" that you will play to put an Opponent on lead such that the Opponent **must** lead the "Danger Suit".
4. **Eliminate** the Defender's options to successfully lead other Suits by "**stripping their Hands**".
5. Put the Defender on lead by yourself now leading the "**Exit Card**".

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, are there any required conditions that are **essential** for you to be able to successfully execute this 5-step "**elimination endplay**" strategy?

Esther: Well, Bruce, yes! There is indeed one condition that is **essential** for you to be able to successfully execute an "**elimination endplay**":

An "endplay" can be successful if, and only if, both Dummy and Declarer's Hands hold sufficient Trump cards to allow you to (1) "draw" Trump and (2) still have at least one Trump card in both Dummy and Declarer's Hand.³

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, could you talk us through an example of executing all 5 of the steps in this 5-step process?

Esther: Well, my *Dandruff-ridden Dufus*, of course. Let's consider further the modified example from David Bird's book on the "endplay". Here is the somewhat modified example Board:

³ In David Bird's words from his Endplay book, "It is an important condition of every elimination play that both the dummy and declarer's hand contain at least one trump when the defender has been put on lead. That is exactly why West, on the present deal, could not exit safely in spades. It would give you a ruff-and-sluff." (p. 7) [Emphasis added.]

This implies] that Declarer can perform an "**elimination endplay**" if the Partnership holds 4-4 (as in this example), or 5-4, or 5-5 in Trump, but not if the Declarer's Partnership holds, for example, 6-2.

Dealer: **EAST**

Vul: **N/S**

	NORTH (12)	
	S: K 8	
	H: K 8 6 2	
	D: Q 5 3	
	C: K J T 5	
WEST (8)		EAST (5)
S: Q J T 6		S: 9 7 4 3 2
H: Q T 4		H: J 7
D: K T 7		D: A 9 8 4
C: 8 4 2		C: 7 3
	YOU	
	SOUTH (15)	
	S: A 5	
	H: A 9 5 3	
	D: J 6 2	
	C: A Q 9 6	

Bidding

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1 NT	PASS	2 C	PASS
2 H	PASS	4 H	PASS
PASS	PASS		

Bruce: OK, Est... Errr..., I mean, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen. WEST "on lead" leads the top of "touching Spade Honors", the Queen of Spades, thus promising his Partner that he also holds the Spade Jack. The Board in NORTH comes down. **Step #1** is "count your 'losers', and formulate your tentative 'Line of Play'". Where do you see the "losers"?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I may lose **1-2** Trump Hearts, **0** Spades, **0** Clubs, and **2-3** Diamonds. So, my contract is in some danger, and I must try to formulate a "Line of Play" that will cut my "losers" by at least 1. I have to hope for a 3-2 Trump Heart "split", and not a 4-1 or 5-0 "split", or else I am "going down"! Fortunately, with an "Odd" number of Hearts "out", **5**, the probability of a 3-2 "split" is **67.8%** versus the probability of a 4-1 "split" of **28.3%**, and 67.8% is **2.4 times** greater than 28.3%. Thank goodness!

But you **must** avoid losing *any more* than 2 Diamonds! So you have now completed **Step #2**, "identify your '**Danger Suit**'." Diamonds is your "**Danger Suit**"! This is the Suit that you want to force Opponents to lead to you!

Bruce: OK, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, what's next?

Esther: Well, Bruce, you must now think through **Step #3:**

"identify the '**Exit Card**' that you will use to force Opponents into the lead, after you have first **eliminated** the Opponents' ability once "on lead" to lead anything other than your "**Danger Suit**". On this Hand, assuming that the Heart Trump Queen does not "drop" once you draw 2 Rounds of Trump, you will later lead a low Heart "loser" as your "Exit Card" to (1) draw that last Trump card while at the same time (2) putting the Opponents "on lead". But before you do that, you must "engineer" the situations so that Opponents **must** lead Diamonds once they are "on lead".

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, how do you eliminate Opponents' ability to "exit" once "on lead" into any Suit other than your "**Danger Suit**" that you want to force them to lead?

Esther: Well, Bruce, there are **4 ways to eliminate Opponents' Exit Suit options**, by "stripping Opponents' Hands", leaving only a lead in your "**Danger Suit**" as the only option open to them once "on lead". The first 3 methods involve you eliminating Opponents' "Exit Suit" by playing winners, and involve you having one of the following kinds of holdings:

1. Play Winning Doubletons in Both Dummy and Declarer's Hands

YOU: A 7

DUMMY: K 5

2. Play "Winners" in All the Cards in a Side Suit

YOU: K J 8 3

DUMMY: A Q 9 4

3. Create New Winner(s) by Creating a Ruff

YOU: K T 4

DUMMY: A 5

There is a 4th way to eliminate Opponents' Exit Suit" options by playing "a loser on a loser" with cards you will inevitably lose while creating new ruffing opportunities:

4. Play "Loser" on "Loser" to Create Ruffing Opportunities

YOU: A 7

DUMMY: T 4

Bruce: OK, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, please talk us through the play, including the "endplay", for our example.

Esther: Well, Bruce, SOUTH takes the Trick #1 Spade with the Spade Ace in his Hand. SOUTH then draws 2 Rounds of Trump by playing "Low to High" back and forth between Dummy and Declarer's Hand on Tricks #2 and #3. The Heart Trump Queen does **not** drop. SOUTH takes Trick #4 with Dummy's Spade King. SOUTH then plays 3 Rounds of Clubs, taking Tricks #5 - #7. EAST sloughs a "loser" on the 3rd Club Trick. Here are the 4 Hands after 7 Tricks:

	NORTH (12)	
	S: --	
	H: 8 6	
	D: Q 5 3	
	C: J	
WEST (8)		EAST (5)
S: J T		S: 9 7
H: Q		H: --
D: K T 7		D: A 9 8 4
C: --	YOU	C: --
	SOUTH (15)	
	S: --	
	H: 9 5	
	D: J 6	
	C: 9	
Tricks Won	N/S: 7	E/W: 0

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, SOUTH has **eliminated** the abilities of E/W to play the Black Suits! SOUTH now leads a small Heart "loser", the "**Exit Card**", toward E/W, thus both (1) drawing the last E/W Trump card, the Queen "winner", and (2) putting the Opponents on lead. In the present case, WEST is "on lead" after taking Trick #8 with WEST's Heart Queen, and WEST's only rationale choice, seeing a Spade void in Dummy, is leading a Diamond. E/W will take 2 Diamond Tricks, for a total of 3 E/W Tricks, and N/S will make 10 Tricks, and their Game contract!

Esther: BINGO!

Bruce: OK, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, what would have happened if N/S had *instead* on Trick #8 led a Diamond from either Dummy or Declarer's Hand?

Esther: Well, Bruce, if Declarer leads a "low" from either Dummy or Declarer's Hand, E/W "second hand low" will play a low Diamond, N/S will have to play "high" with either the Dummy Diamond Queen or the Declarer's Diamond Jack, on both on the next 2 Diamond Tricks, and the contract will go "down" 2!