

**Esther Discusses "The First Subset of Boards
from the 2023 Summer 'Instant Matchpoint Game':
Learn *Bidding* from the Bridge Experts"**

Bruce Thompson

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<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 issues surrounding the bidding on **the first subset of the 36 Boards played in the Summer, 2023 "Instant Matchpoint Game"**. 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.

Esther: Well, Bruce. Please try to exercise at least a modicum of empathy, assuming you have at least the limited capacity to do so. Can you imagine how relentlessly all the other girls in grades K through 4 of my elementary school years relentlessly, endlessly tormented me about my last name, Klinktoast-Houstonhousen? As I have previously told you, they would encircle me routinely, **loudly** singing:

*Klinktoast-Houstonhousen,
Klinktoast-Houstonhousen,
What a stinky name!
And you stink too,
Klinktoast-Houstonhousen!*

Bruce: Well, yes, sorry again, Esther! I do understand that young girls can indeed be quite vicious to each other.

Well, in any case, Esther, first, let's discuss 8 of the 9 Boards played in the July 10, 2023 ACBL IMP Game.

Esther: Of course, my malodorous misanthrope. These IMP games are always interesting, because they are played across the entirety of ACBL, and ACBL always identifies 1 or 2 great players to write a brief narrative about the bidding on each Board, and the narrative is quite instructive. The bids discussed are *what the 2 writers believe are the correct bids at each turn in each position*. The written narrative can be found at:

<https://web2.acbl.org/documentlibrary/play/analysis/071023.pdf>

This year's narrative was written by Rob Barrington and Gavin Wolpert. ACBL also posted 3 videos in which 3 subsets of the 36 Boards are discussed in more detail by Barrington and Wolpert and 5 other master players:

<https://www.acbl.org/portfolio/digital-img/>

Bruce: Great, Esther. But some of that discussion is pretty "high-level," and assumes knowledge of some conventions not well known by new and rising players. Would you here discuss some of these 36 Boards from the perspective of newer players, and with more *detailed discussion* of more sophisticated bidding options? And would you also tie your discussion to your *previous lessons on the "Esther Bridge Lessons" website*?

Esther: Well, certainly my simpering simpleton!

Bruce: Well, OK, Ms. Klink..., errr, I mean, Esther. Thanks so much! In this "Esther Bridge Lesson," let's focus on the first **9** of the **36** Boards, *omitting* discussion of any Boards that you find less interesting from an instructional point of view. Here is Board **#1**, along with the bidding suggested by Barrington and Wolpert. Remember: Their bidding assumes knowledge and use of some pretty rarified conventions. But perhaps you can also briefly touch on these as part of your more extended discussion.

Board #1

Dealer: **NORTH**

Vul: **NONE**

	NORTH (14)	
	S: A Q J 5 3	
	H: T	
	D: A K 8 4	
	C: 9 7 2	
WEST (5)		EAST (16)
S: T 7 2		S: K 8
H: Q 8 5 3 2		H: A K J 6
D: Q J 2		D: 6 5
C: T 6		C: A J 8 5 3
	SOUTH (5)	
	S: 9 6 4	
	H: 9 7 4	
	D: T 9 7 3	
	C: K Q 4	

Bidding

NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	WEST
1 S	1 NT	2 S	PASS
PASS	PASS		

Esther: Well, NORTH's 1**S** bid as Dealer is quite straightforward. Now 1 possibility for EAST's bid is "DOUBLE", which would be a "take-out Double". A "take-out Double" in this sequence (Opponents having bid only 1 suit) shows: (1) opening HCPs, (2) shortness in Opponents' Spade suit, and (3) exactly 4 Hearts (with 5 a Heart Overcall might be in order).¹ Furthermore, EAST holds a "protected" King in Opponents' bid Spades only protected for 1 Round). And, if WEST's bid in response to EAST's Double takes the contract, SOUTH can't be "on lead" and if on lead expected to lead to NORTH's Spade suit. The main reason that EAST cannot Double is that EAST holds only 2 Diamonds, which also happen to be low Diamonds. A "take-out" Double promises shortness in the Opponents' bid suit, 4 in an unbid Major(s), and at least 3 cards in each unbid suit.

Bruce: OK. What does EAST's 1**NT** bid show?

¹ Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons", see: "Convention #14: 6 'Not-for-Penalty' Doubles".

Esther: Well, EAST is showing (1) at least 1 “protected stopper” in the Opponents’ bid suit, (2) a **NT** point count, and (3) no void, no singleton, and if bid before any Opponent has bid anything other than Pass, no more than 1 doubleton. Making this **1NT** Overcall is a bit dicey with 2 doubletons, because this **1NT** bid may get Passed out. But EAST has no other really good options. I prefer to hold **6** cards in an Overcall at the 2 level. And EAST’s Clubs don’t meet the requirements of Ron Klinger’s **SQT**, or “**Suit Quality Test**” for a 2-level bid, because (1) the number of cards in the suit plus (2) the number of honors does not equal 8 or more.²

Bruce: OK. So what do you think of SOUTH’s **2S** bid?

Esther: Well, SOUTH knows that (1) NORTH holds 5 or more Spades and roughly an opening point count, although NORTH may have opened using the “**Rule of 20**”³, which says you can open in *any position* if the sum of (1) the number of cards in your longest 2 suits and (2) the number of HCPs you hold is **20 or more**, and that (2) NORTH and EAST together hold most of the points. However, SOUTH, even holding only 5 HCPs, knows that the “**Law of Total Tricks**” says that N/S can likely make a 2-level contract.⁴ So, this bid seems quite reasonable. The **2S** Overcall also *shuts down* WEST from executing a transfer to Hearts, if WEST, with few points, holds 5 or more Hearts!

Bruce: So, should WEST then bid **3H**?

Esther: I generally **hate** letting Opponents play 2-level bids when we know Opponents hold an 8+ card fit in a Major.⁵ But that preference mostly involves Opponents opening a Major, followed by Pass by our side, and a “constructive” response by the second Opponent. So, sitting WEST here I would probably simply Pass.

² See “The Suit Quality Test by Ron Klinger”, at:

<https://csbnews.org/new/the-suit-quality-test-by-ron-klinger>

³ See within the “**Esther Bridge Lessons**”: “**Lesson #25: Some of the 40 or so Bridge Bidding/Play ‘Rules’**”.

⁴ See within the “**Esther Bridge Lessons**”: “**Lesson #6: Bidding the ‘Law of Total Tricks’ versus HCPs**”.

⁵ See with the “**Esther Bridge Lessons**”: “**Lesson #39: Do NOT Let Opponents play a 2H or 2S Contract!**”.

Bruce: OK. Here is Board #2:

Board #2

Dealer: **EAST**

Vul: **N/S**

NORTH (12)

S: K Q J 8
H: 3
D: K J 8 4 3 2
C: Q 3

WEST (11)

S: 9 7 3
H: A 9 6 4 2
D: T
C: A K 5 4

EAST (8)

S: A 6 5 4 2
H: Q T 8 5
D: Q 9 5
C: 2

SOUTH (9)

S: T
H: K J 7
D: A 7 6
C: J T 9 8 7 6

Bidding

EAST	SOUTH	WEST	NORTH
PASS	PASS	1 H	2 D
3 D	DBL	3 H	PASS
PASS	PASS		

Esther: Well, EAST's Pass is understandable. SOUTH's holding 6 "touching cards" including the J,T honors is very *important*. However, the hand is not strong enough to open 1**C** (but almost). 2**C** is not an option, since 2**C** is an "artificial" bid showing a giant hand and not necessarily Clubs. And there certainly is not enough length or strength to open 3**C**! So, Pass is probably SOUTH's best choice.

Bruce: What about WEST's 1**H** opening bid?

Esther: Well, Bruce, this bid is pretty straightforward. WEST holds 11 HCPs, plus 9 cards in the longest 2 suits, which equals **20**! Also, WEST holds 3 "quick tricks", which are "control cards," in 2 of the 4 suits!

Bruce: And what do you think of NORTH's 2**D** Overcall?

Esther: Well, NORTH holds (1) 6 Diamonds, and the **SQT** = 8, which is appropriate for a 2-level bid, since $8-6=2$. And NORTH holds (2) a singleton in the Opponents bid Major, Hearts, which makes NORTH's hand more valuable. And (3) NORTH holds 3 of the 4 top Spade honors, and NORTH's 3 Spades are "touching". Finally, NORTH does not hold a hand in which a Double would be appropriate.

Bruce: OK. What the heck does EAST's 3D bid mean? *Why did EAST bid the Opponents' bid suit?*

Esther: Well, Bruce, this is an "artificial" bid saying exactly nothing about Diamonds! Instead, this is a rather exotic bid called a "support cue bid".⁶ More experienced players use this convention, because it has the advantages of (1) showing Partner "support" without eating up much "bidding space", and (2) jamming up the Opponents by forcing Opponents to *jump 2 levels* if they wish to compete in their bid suit.

Bruce: OK. What does SOUTH's Double mean?

Esther: Well, this is called a "**Support Double**".⁷ SOUTH's Double says, without using up valuable "Bidding Space," "Partner, I support your Diamonds, and I have 10+ HCPs, and I have now 'limited';⁸ my hand, and, as a 'limited' hand, will never bid again unless you demand that I do so."

Bruce: OK. Well, enough of that Board. The bidding made me vomit! Do us *newer players* really have to know all this stuff???

Esther: No, *of course not*, Bruce! But it is not a bad idea for you to hear a little bit about conventions that you are not

⁶ See within the "Esther Bridge Lessons": "Lesson #12: Overcall Two-suited Distribution and 'Support Cuebids'".

⁷ See within the "Esther Bridge Lessons": "Lesson #10: A 'Support Double' is Both an Offensive and a Defensive Weapon".

⁸ A hand is "limited" when you tell Partner *everything* you think Partner needs to know about your HCPs and your distribution, and since that job is accomplished, Partner will know that you have *nothing further to say* unless Partner demands an answer to an inquiry. An example of "limiting" your hand is you opening 1NT: Partner pretty much knows your point count and your card distribution, so you will not bid again unless Partner as Responder/"Captain" demands that you do so.

yet ready to try, so that you will have at least some vague idea about what may be in your bridge future. And to know at least a little bit about conventions that your Opponents may use against you, even if you yourself do not yet play these conventions. But, of course, I do not encourage you to play conventions that you are not ready to play! And do not try to do things in bridge that make you vomit, or sick in any other way! Afterall, **bridge is intended to be for fun!!!**

Bruce: Well, OK, I suppose. In any case, here is Board #3:

Board #3

Dealer: **SOUTH**

Vul: **E/W**

	NORTH (5)	
	S: K Q T 9 7 6 4	
	H: 8 6	
	D: T	
	C: T 8 5	
WEST (6)		EAST (21)
S: 8 3		S: A
H: Q 9 5 4 2		H: J
D: J 7 5 4		D: A K Q 9 8 6 3
C: Q J		C: A K 3 2
	SOUTH (8)	
	S: J 5 2	
	H: A K T 7 3	
	D: 2	
	C: 9 7 6 4	

Bidding

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
PASS	PASS	3S	6D
PASS	PASS	PASS	

Esther: Well, Bruce, NORTH holds 7 Spades, 2 of the 3 top Honors, and otherwise a crummy hand, but 1 singleton, and 1 doubleton. So, a 3-level "pre-empt" bid is reasonable.

Bruce: OK. What do you think of EAST jumping to a "close out" **6D** bid?

Esther: Well, it doesn't get much better than this, does it? EAST holds (1) 7 Diamonds, including the top 3 Diamond honors, (2) a singleton Ace in the Opponents' bid Spades suit, (3) first-round control 3 of the 4 suits, and second-round control in Hearts, and 6 "quick tricks". Once NORTH bids 3S, EAST could bid 4NT to find out if WEST holds the missing Heart Ace, to explore a 7-level bid, but EAST knows that at least a 6-level bid is going to be made in any case. So, as the saying goes, "He who knows, goes!!!" SOUTH holding A,K of Hearts might consider a Double, but EAST's jump to 6D suggests that this Double would be improvident.

Bruce: OK. So, here is Board #5:

Board #5

Dealer: **NORTH**

Vul: **N/S**

	NORTH (7)	
	S: T 8 3	
	H: J 9 5 3	
	D: K Q J 6 2	
	C: T	
WEST (11)		EAST (9)
S: A Q 7		S: J 9 6 5
H: A 6 4		H: Q T 8 7
D: T 9 8 5 4 3		D: A 7
C: J		C: Q 9 2
	SOUTH (13)	
	S: K 4 2	
	H: K 2	
	D: --	
	C: A K 8 7 6 5 4 3	

Bidding

NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	WEST
PASS	PASS	1C	1D
PASS	1H	3C	PASS
PASS	PASS		

Bruce: Well, what do you think of SOUTH's 1C opening bid?

Esther: Well, I think SOUTH is too strong to open 3C. I think that 1C is the appropriate bid. SOUTH hopes that WEST will Pass, and NORTH will show Diamonds, such that a 3NT bid may become reasonable. But WEST holding 6 Diamonds to the

"touching" T,9,8, and 10+ HCPs, and 2 Aces including an A,Q,x, wisely bids 2D. NORTH holding 1 4-card Major, but only 7 HCPs, wisely Passes. EAST holding 9 HCPs and 4 Hearts, shows his Hearts, in case WEST is searching for them. SOUTH then jumps to 3C to shut down the bidding.

Bruce: OK. Here is Board #6:

Board #6

Dealer: **EAST**

Vul: **E/W**

	NORTH (8)	
	S: A T 7 6 2	
	H: 9 5	
	D: 6 5 3 2	
	C: A 6	
WEST (11)		EAST (10)
S: K J 8 3		S: Q 9 5 4
H: J 7 6 2		H: K T 8
D: K J 7		D: Q 8
C: Q 7		C: K 9 8 3
	SOUTH (11)	
	S: --	
	H: A Q 4 3	
	D: A T 9 4	
	C: J T 5 4 2	

Bidding

EAST	SOUTH	WEST	NORTH
PASS	1D	PASS	1S
PASS	2C	PASS	2D
PASS	PASS	PASS	

Bruce: OK. EAST with 10 HCPs, Passes. SOUTH holds 11 HCPs, plus 9 cards in the Minors, and 11 + 9 = 20! But SOUTH opened 1D, with 4 Diamonds, and not 1C, holding 5 Clubs!!! Do you agree with this bid?

Esther: Well, SOUTH has some subtle, but *very interesting* choices! SOUTH could initially bid 1C, and if NORTH responds 2H, happily proceed from there. But if NORTH bids, 1S or 1NT, SOUTH will be forced to then bid 2D. One problem with this is that this bidding sequence by SOUTH is what some Partnerships play as what is called a "reverse" (2nd

bid going beyond the “rank” of the originally bid suit), which shows a BIG 17+ HCP hand!⁹ So, if your Partnership is playing the “reverse” convention, you cannot bid 1C and later 2D, because your hand is not big enough to do this!

Bruce: OK. Is there any other good reason to first bid 1D, and later 2C?

Esther: Absolutely, my dandruff-ridden dufus! There is a FUNDAMENTALLY important principle of bridge: **NEVER, EVER make a first bid, unless you believe that you have a reasonable second bid, which you have identified before you initially bid!!!** On this Board, by SOUTH opening 1D, SOUTH knows that if NORTH bids 1S (very likely!), SOUTH can then bid 2C as the second bid, thus saying to NORTH, “I do not like your Spades. I am 2-suited in the Minors. Either leave me in 2C, or bid 2D, if you can instead support that suit!!!!” In the words of Barrington and Wolpert, “If you opened 1C as South, you faced the tough rebid and a choice that will *inevitably* lead to the wrong contract” [italics added].

Bruce: OK, Esther. Below in Board #7. Any explanation of this bidding sequence?

⁹ See within the “Esther Bridge Lessons”: “Lesson #15: 3 Ways to Show Partner Your Extraordinary Points Holding”.

Board #7

Dealer: **SOUTH**

Vul: **BOTH**

NORTH (18)

S: A K T 9 6 5

H: Q

D: A K Q 6

C: 8 6

WEST (5)

S: Q 8 7

H: T 6 4 2

D: 8 2

C: K T 7 2

EAST (5)

S: 3

H: K 7 5

D: T 9 7 5 3

C: Q 9 5 4

SOUTH (12)

S: J 4 2

H: A J 9 8 3

D: J 4

C: A J 3

Bidding

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1 H	PASS	1 S	PASS
1 NT	PASS	2 C	PASS
2 S	PASS	4 NT	PASS
5 H	PASS	6 S	PASS
PASS	PASS		

Esther: Sure. There are A LOT of different conventions being used in this bidding sequence, many of which will be *unknown* to newer players.

1. SOUTH's 1**H** bid says: "Partner, I have at least roughly an opening hand point count (but don't forget the "**Rule of 20**"). I have 5+ Hearts with sufficient suit quality."
2. NORTH's 1**S** bid says: "I have 5+ Spades with sufficient suit quality, and at least 7-10 HCPs. I do not have 3+ Hearts!"
3. SOUTH's 1**NT** bid says: "I want to keep the conversation going, at a low level, and give you the opportunity to ask more questions."
4. NORTH's 2**C** bid is an "artificial" bid, saying nothing about Clubs, and is a fairly exotic variation of the

convention called "**New Minor Forcing**"¹⁰ used to ask Partner to further describe his hand.

5. SOUTH's **2S** bid says: "I have 3 Spades."
6. NORTH's **4NT** bid says: "Now that we have established a Spade fit, and I know (but you do not) that we have 9 trump cards, how many 'key cards' (Aces, the King of Spades, possibly the Queen of Spades) do you hold? This is a very good 'Aces asking' convention called 'Roman Key Card (RKC) 14-30'.¹¹
7. SOUTH's **5H** bid says: "From among the 4 Aces, and the King of Spades, I hold 2 of these 'key cards,' and I do not hold the Queen of Spades." Because NORTH holds 2 Aces and the King of Spades, NORTH now knows that N/S hold all 4 Aces, first-round control in every suit, and the King of Spades. So, now NORTH knows that N/S holds 0 Heart losers, and only 1 Club loser, and thus a **6S** bid is potentially makeable. However, there are 4 Spades out, and the probability of a 3-1 split is more likely (**49.7%**) than a 2-2 split (**40.7%**).¹² If there is a 2-2 split, the **6S** bid will make. If there is a 3-1 split, the **6S** bid may only make if the E/W player holding the singleton holds the Queen, which has a barely favorable probability of **52%**.¹³

Bruce: OK, Esther. Below in Board **#8**. Any explanation of this bidding sequence?

¹⁰ Within the "**Esther Bridge Lessons**" see: "**Convention #13: New Minor Forcing (NMF)**".

¹¹ Within the "**Esther Bridge Lessons**" see: "**Convention #3: Roman Key Card (RKC) 1430**".

¹² Within the "**Esther Bridge Lessons**" see the Section on "**Bridge Probabilities**",

¹³ Within the "**Esther Bridge Lessons**" see Section #7, "*Probabilities of Dropping Opponents' Honors*", within "**Lesson #40: 8 Different Categories of Bridge Probabilities, and How These May Help Guide Your Bidding and Play**".

Board #8

Dealer: **WEST**

Vul: **NONE**

NORTH (3)

S: 5 2
H: T 7 6 5
D: T 8
C: Q J 9 4 3

WEST (4)

S: 7 6 3
H: K J 9 3
D: 6 4 3 2
C: 6 2

EAST (18)

S: K T 8 4
H: A Q 4
D: K Q J 7
C: K T

SOUTH (15)

S: A Q J 9
H: 8 2
D: A 9 5
C: A 8 7 5

Bidding

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
PASS	PASS	1D	1NT
PASS	PASS	DBL	PASS
PASS	2C	PASS	PASS
2D	PASS	PASS	PASS

Esther: Sure.

1. EAST holds a "flat" hand with no void, no singleton, and not more than 1 doubleton. However. EAST holds 18 HCPs, so a **1NT** bid is not possible if the Partnership has declared that they are playing 15-17 or 14-17. Holding no 5 card suit, the **1D** bid is the most reasonable bid. In my Partnerships we play that a **1D** opening always shows Diamonds with reasonable "suit quality," but possibly no more than 4 cards, but always at least 4.
2. EAST's later Double says: "Partner, I have a hand that will play well in **NT**, and I have 18-19 HCPs, but couldn't bid **1NT** because I had slightly too many HCPs. We can probably set this **1NT** contract, but if you hold an interesting long suit, take us out of this Double."
3. NORTH's later **2C** bid says, "I think that EAST is so strong that we better not try play **1NT** Doubled. I know that SOUTH has at least 2 Clubs, and that together we have 7+ Clubs, so according to the "**Law of Total Tricks**," maybe a **2C** bid

won't be a complete disaster, and playing that would be better than playing 1NT Doubled."

4. WEST's subsequent 2D bid says: "Well, both NORTH and SOUTH have bupkus. But we hold your 18-19 HCPs, plus my 4 HCPs, so we should probably get this contract, especially since Diamonds is a higher ranking suit than Clubs, so the 2-level bid is possible."
5. Ultimately, SOUTH is in the "balancing" position, because if SOUTH Passes, the contract is set at 2D. SOUTH knows that both Pairs are not Vulnerable, the contract is going to be set in an innocuous suit (a Minor), both Pairs have roughly the same number of points, and the 2D bid would be located in the *stronger* E/W hand, while a 3C bid will be set in the *weaker* of the 2 N/S hands. And SOUTH expects that N/S hold 9 Clubs. But it's a dicey choice!

Bruce: OK, Esther. One final Board. If you will comment, we can then go try to recover later over an "adult" beverage.

Board #9

Dealer: **NORTH**

Vul: **E/W**

	NORTH (13)	
	S: A K 9 7 6 4	
	H: K 9 8	
	D: K 5 3	
	C: 7	
WEST (9)		EAST (11)
S: --		S: J 3 2
H: 7		H: Q 6 4
D: A J 8 7 4		D: Q T 6 2
C: K J T 8 6 5 3		C: A Q 4
	SOUTH (7)	
	S: Q T 8 5	
	H: A J T 8 3 2	
	D: 9	
	C: 9 2	

Bidding

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

Esther: No problem, Bruce.

1. NORTH holds 13 HCPs, and 6 Spades, The 1S bid is clear-cut.
2. After EAST with 11 HCPs, but no 5-card suit, Passes, SOUTH knows that N/S together hold holds 9+ Spades (actually 10), SOUTH holds 7 HCPs, and an Ace Heart winner together with 6 Hearts including the "touching" J,T. SOUTH also knows that 2-suited hands play better in suit contracts, because Declarer can potentially slough losers on Dummy's long suit. So, remembering the "Law of Total Tricks," SOUTH jumps to Game.
3. WEST then overcalls 4NT. This is not a real NT bid. Do, you, really, really, really, think, WEST, wants, to play, a, 4NT contract, when N/S have shown both (1) Game-going points and (3) long Spade holdings that will kill you in NT???? This is, instead, an "artificial" and Alertable bid, similar to the "Unusual 2NT"¹⁴ bid, saying, "Partner, I am very long in both Minors, and both my Minors have good 'suit quality.' I demand that if my LHO Opponent Passes after my bid that then you bid your 'longest and strongest' Minor."

Bruce: OK, Esther. What do you think of this 4NT Overcall bid?

Esther: Well, Bruce, this bid is very aggressive. It is "aggressive" because E/W is Vulnerable. However, WEST is void in the Opponents' Spade suit, has a singleton Heart, and has 7 Clubs with K,J,T, and 5 Diamonds with A,J.

Bruce: Well, thank you, Esther. I am now definitely ready for that "adult" beverage!

¹⁴ Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons" see: "Convention #8: The 'Unusual 2NT' Overcall Bid".