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"When Leading on Defense or Bidding, Take Into Account 'Reciprocal Fit Probabilities' and Ron Klinger's 'Rule of Suit Length Parity'"

Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen¹

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Ron Klinger (1941-) is an Australian contract bridge player who 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." His book, Right Through the Pack Again, won the 2010 "International Bridge Press Association Book of the Year Award." He was Editor of Australian Bridge for 13 years (1972-1985). 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 is also the inventor of the Ron Klinger "**Suit Quality Test ('SQT') Score**". The "**SQT Score**" is computed by adding together (1) the number of cards you hold in a Suit plus (2) the number of Honors (including the Ten) that you hold in the Suit. *Suit contracts* set no higher than "**SQT Score**" - 6 are generally pretty "safe".

The present discussion is drawn from **Tip #41** (pp. 66-67) from Ron Klinger's 2003 book, 100 WINNING BRIDGE TIPS for the Improving Player. The example Board has been modified by Esther.

Ron Klinger's "Rule of Suit Length Parity"

As Esther explained in the "**Reciprocal Fit Probabilities**" section of her "**Esther Bridge Lesson #40: A Comprehensive List of 8 Different Categories of Bridge Probabilities, and How These**

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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.

May Help Guide Your Bidding and Play",² whenever you and Partner together hold **2** 8-card Suit "fits", the Opponents also together hold **2** 8-card Suit "fits". This is called a "**Double-Double ('DD') Fit**". As Ron Klinger (2003) says, "*Whatever length you and [P]artner have in your two longest combined [S]uits, the [O]pponents have the same total length in their two longest [S]uits*" (p. 66, italics in original, underling added).

Mastery of the "**Rule on Suit Length Parity**" and "**Reciprocal Fit Probabilities**" can be useful in making decisions during play, including what to lead on defense. Let's consider the bidding and play on the following Board:

Dealer: **EAST**

Vul: **NONE**

	NORTH (10)	
	S: Q 9 7	
	H: A 9	
	D: A 8	
	C: T 9 7 4 3 2	
WEST (7)		EAST (12)
S: 6		S: K 8 5 3
H: Q J 8 7 5 3		H: K T 6
D: J 7 5 2		D: Q T 9 6 3
C: K 5		C: A
	SOUTH (11)	
	S: A J T 4 2	
	H: 4 2	
	D: K 4	
	C: Q J 8 6	

Bidding

EAST	SOUTH	WEST	NORTH
1 D	1 S	2 H	2 S
3 H	3 S	4 H	4 S
DBL	PASS	PASS	PASS

Leading: WEST's Selection of His Lead

EAST's initial bid showed **4+** Diamonds and WEST holds **4** Diamonds, so WEST knows that E/W together hold $4 + 4 = \mathbf{8+}$ Diamonds. WEST's first bid showed **5+** Hearts, EAST's bid "supporting" Hearts shows **3** Hearts. WEST holding **6** Hearts shows his 6th Heart through his re-bid. Thus, WEST knows that E/W together hold $6 + 3 = \mathbf{9}$ Hearts.

² See: https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/8_probs.pdf

E/W have bid both "red" Suits. But neither Partnership has bid Clubs. Given his knowledge of "**Reciprocal Fit Probabilities**" and Ron Klinger's "**Rule on Suit Length Parity**", WEST knows that N/S hold **8+** Clubs and length in both "black" Suits even though neither NORTH nor SOUTH bid Clubs.

A lead by WEST of the King of Clubs seems improvident because N/S are likely to hold the Ace and losing the Club King would not "promote" a "touching" Honor. If WEST leads his Club King Declarer SOUTH takes 12 Tricks. For the same reason leading the Club 5 seems to be unwise.

WEST must lead a Heart, probably 4th from the "top" of his Hearts so that EAST can invoke the "**Rule of 11**" against the SOUTH Declarer. If Declarer SOUTH wins Tricks **#1** with the NORTH Dummy Heart Ace the Declarer then is "draw" Trump. Declarer leads the NORTH Dummy Spade 9 to finesse against EAST *who showed more HCPs than WEST* by opening the bidding. EAST will play "second Hand low" against the Trump Spade 9. If Declarer "draws" all the Trump Spade cards Declarer SOUTH will lose control of the lead.

If the SOUTH Declarer "draws" 2 Rounds of Trump and then shifts to Diamonds EAST wins, "cashes" his Heart King, and then plays his 3rd Heart, which Declarer SOUTH ruffs in his Hand. If Declarer SOUTH leads another Diamond WEST wins, and when WEST leads another Heart EAST will "win" with his Trump Spade King, thus setting the contract.

In summary, WEST on his initial lead had **2** reasons not to lead the unbid Club Suit. *First*, WEST knows that E/W hold "long" Hearts with good "Suit Quality." Furthermore, because N/S showed little fear of your Hearts, *you may need to take E/W Heart "winners" early while you still can*, and before N/S sluff Heart "losers" to create opportunities to ruff. *Second*, WEST knows from the "**Rule on Suit Length Parity**" that N/S hold "long" Clubs in addition to their "long" Spades and can create "winners" and "dump" "losers" in their "long" 2nd Suit.

Bidding: EAST's Decision to Overall Opponents' 5D Bid

After Esther initially finished the present lesson, Esther and Partner *later* played a Board of which EAST had to decide whether to Overcall the Opponents' 5D by bidding 5H. A **General Bridge Principle** is that:

"The 5 level belongs to the Opponents!"

However, bridge is quite literally a game of *exceptions*. And on this Board "**Reciprocal Fit Probabilities**"/Ron Klinger's "**Rule on Suit Length Parity**" was one factor in EAST's decision to "bid on" to 5H.

Knoxville 499er 11/19/24
 Board #17
 Dealer: NORTH
 Vul: NONE

	NORTH (10)	
	S: J T 9	
	H: 8 3	
	D: A K J T 9 7 6	
	C: J	
WEST (8)		EAST (16)
S: K Q 7		S: 8 4
H: 9 6		H: A K Q J T 2
D: 5 4 2		D: --
C: K 9 8 4 3		C: A Q T 6 2
	SOUTH (6)	
	S: A 6 5 3 2	
	H: 7 5 4	
	D: Q 8 3	
	C: 7 5	

Bidding

NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	WEST
1D	1H	1S	PASS
2D	3H	4D	4H
5D	5H	PASS	PASS
PASS			

Why did EAST ignore the **General Bridge Principle** that "**the 5 level is for the Opponents**"? There were several reasons. *First*, EAST's void in Diamonds means that N/S will take no "winners" in Diamonds and EAST can ruff WEST's Diamonds from the start. *Second*, EAST knows that E/W hold 6 + 2 = 8 Hearts including the "top" 5 of the 5 highest Heart Honors. *Third*, N/S are bidding both Diamonds and Spades and the "**Rule on Suit Length Parity**" suggests that E/W therefore likely *also* hold a Club "fit" on which "losers" can be "dumped."