

Esther Discusses "Some of Ron Klinger's Tips on Making the First Lead Drawn from His '100 Winning Bridge Tips' Book"

Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen¹

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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 talk us through "**Some of Ron Klinger's Tips on Making the First Lead Drawn from His '100 Winning Bridge Tips' Book**". 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, because I am so "warm and caring"!

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?

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, are there any preliminary

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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**.

comments you wish to make before you begin teaching your lesson?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. Yes, I think it might be good to talk a little about who Ron Klinger is before we talk about some of his "bridge tips" for making the first lead on defense.

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 also originated the Ron Klinger "**Suit Quality Test ('SQT') Score**". The "**SQT Score**" is computed by adding together (1) the number of cards held in the Suit and (2) the number of Honors (including the Ten) held in the Suit. Suit contracts set at a level of "**SQT Score**" - 6 are generally relatively safe.

Tip #38:

"When making a short [S]uit lead in no-trumps, prefer an unbid [M]ajor to an unbid [M]inor". (p. 63)

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther, against a **NT** contract, assuming Partner did not bid during the auction, I usually lead (1) the "top" of a "long" Suit holding **3** "touching" Honors or (2) **4th** from the "top" of my "longest and strongest" Suit so that Partner (and Declarer) can invoke the most important "rule" in bridge: the "**Rule of 11**".² Isn't that "correct"?

² The "**Rule of 11**" allows Partner to determine exactly how many cards higher than the led card the Declarer holds in the led Suit. For example, if Partner leads the Spade 7, and the Dummy holds **2** Spades higher than the Spade 7, and you hold **1** Spade higher than the Spade 7, then because $11 - 7 = 4$, and $4 - 2 - 1 = 1$, then Declarer holds exactly 1 Spade higher than the 7.

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. Yes, everything you said is exactly "correct". But what if you and Partner were both silent during the auction and you are on lead against a **NT** contract and:

1. Your Opponents during the auction bid your "long" Suit", or
2. Your "long" Suit is extremely "weak" and you hold no "side" entries to your Hand, or
3. Your "long" Suit (a) is "weak" and (b) only holds **4** cards?

For example, let's say the auction was:

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1H	PASS	2C	PASS
2NT	PASS	3NT	PASS
PASS	PASS		

You sitting WEST hold:

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WEST (9)3
S 9 5 2
H A J 7 3 2
D 8 6 3
C A 3

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A lead of a Heart is unattractive because Declarer SOUTH initially bid Hearts. Sitting behind you if you lead a Heart Declarer SOUTH will "win" a Heart Trick cheaply by playing last from his wide selection of 5+ Heart cards.

You also do not want to lead Clubs because your LHO NORTH bid Clubs. You need to choose between leading a Diamond or a Spade. But if your Opponents held "long" Spades they *likely* would have "shown" Spades. Opponents are *less likely* to have *concealed* a long Diamond Minor holding. As Klinger noted, "As [O]pponents are likely to have bid any [M]ajor [S]uit they hold, the absence of a [S]pade bid suggests that [P]artner might have [S]pade length" (p. 63).

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther, that seems straightforward. Can you give us a second example?

Esther: Well, Bruce, of course. let's say the auction was:

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1NT	PASS	PASS	PASS

But these comments would also apply to an auction with **2NT** PASSed out, or **1NT: 2NT** PASSed out. You sitting WEST hold:

³ Esther may have altered some of the cards in Klinger's example Boards.

WEST (8)
S A J 5 3
H J T 4
D J T 4
C J 5 3

Leading from a "long" Suit holding only 4 cards with "broken" Honors when Partner and only 1 Opponent bid is unlikely to be very helpful. Leading from a J,T,x Suit is more appealing. Lead the Heart Jack from a "touching" Heart sequence rather than a Diamond sequence for the reasons already discussed.

Tip #39:

"If you have decided not to lead your long [S]uit in no-trumps and hope to hit [P]artner's length, beware of leading a [M]ajor which [P]artner could have conveniently indicated at the 1-level". (p. 64)

Bruce: Errr, well, hmmm... Let's say the auction proceeded as follows:

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

You sitting WEST hold:

WEST (2)
S 9 8 3
H J 7 6 4 3
D J 3
C 8 7 3

You cannot lead a Heart from your "longest and strongest" Suit, Hearts, because you will allow Declarer SOUTH to win a "cheap" Trick using the wide selection of Honors held by NORTH who opened 1**H**. A Spade lead here is unappealing. Because you hold only 2 HCPs Partner very likely is fairly "strong", but Partner did not Overcall in Spades, which he would have done if he held a Spade Suit with a good Ron Klinger "**Suit Quality Test ('SQT') Score**". So here WEST should lead an unbid Minor. Specifically, WEST should lead the Club 8 from the "longer" of his 2 Minors. The actual Board was:

NORTH (19)

S: T 7 5 2

H: A Q 9 5 2

D: A K

C: A Q

WEST (2)

S: 9 8 3

H: J 7 6 4 3

D: J 3

C: 8 7 3

EAST (11)

S: A K 4

H: T 8

D: T 9 8 6

C: K J T 5

SOUTH (8)

S: Q J 6

H: K

D: Q 7 5 4 2

C: 9 6 4 2

On this Board a Spade lead helps the SOUTH Declarer "promote" lower Spade cards into "winners". Leading either "red" Suit gives Declarer the opportunity to immediately to "unblock" the Diamonds which is going to be quite painful for the E/W Defenders. On the other Hand a Club lead sets up **3** Club Tricks for E/W because EAST is sitting behind the NORTH Dummy Club A,Q.



Esther Says:

Duplicate bridge is a game of CARDINAL BRIDGE PRINCIPLES, but bridge is also a “game of exceptions”! For example, there is a well known CARDINAL BRIDGE PRINCIPLE about when you hold A,K in a Suit but are “missing” the Queen, and whether you should play for the Queen “drop” versus running a finesse: “**8 Ever, 9 Never!**” This “Principle” says you should play for the Queen “drop” only if you hold 9+ cards in the Suit. But there are exceptions to the “**8 Ever, 9 Never!**” “Principle”:

https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/8_ever.pdf

The same may be true with respect to whether it is or is not wise to lead a non-Honor singleton as the first lead against a Suit contract.

Tip #44:

**“Against a trump contract do not lead
a singleton from
a very strong [H]and”. (p. 70)**

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther, I have been thinking. Isn't it a *universally* “good” idea to lead a non-Honor singleton as the first lead when defending against a Suit contract?

Esther: Well, Bruce, that indeed is *usually* true. But note that “*usually*” ≠ “*always*”!!! However, paraphrasing Ron Klinger, leading a singleton or from the “top” of a doubleton is best *reserved* for you holding **weak Hands** because for a Suit lead to be useful in Partner later giving you a ruff, since Partner should almost always return your initial lead, Partner **must** hold a *strong enough* Hand to later indeed gain the lead. But if (1) your Hand is “strong” and (2) *both*

Opponents during the auction have shown some strength, Partner may be very weak and never get the lead to give you your ruff!

Bruce: Oh, my, Goodness, Esther. Can you give us an example?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. How about this situation?

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

You sitting WEST DOUBLE because hold (1) **13** HCPs and "length" in both the unbid Suits, Spades and Clubs:

WEST (13)
S K 9 8 5
H A 7 4
D 6
C A Q 9 6 2

Bruce: Oh, my, Goodness, Esther. WEST on lead holds a Diamond singleton, but the singleton is in a Suit bid twice by the Opponents!

Esther: Well, Bruce, you are indeed correct! Let's say the full Board is as follows:

NORTH (13)		EAST (2)	
S:	A 7 2	S:	Q T 3
H:	J 8 2	H:	T
D:	A Q J 8 4 3	D:	T 9 5 2
C:	J	C:	T 8 7 5 4

WEST (13)		SOUTH (12)	
S:	K 9 8 5	S:	J 6 3
H:	A 7 4	H:	K Q 9 6 5 3
D:	6	D:	K 7
C:	A Q 9 6 2	C:	K 3

There are **2** reasons why leading your Diamond 6 singleton will be disastrous! First, the SOUTH Declarer will almost certainly win Trick **#1** and will do so at a lower card level playing 2nd on the Trick from the NORTH Dummy and having a diverse collection of Dummy Diamond Honors to choose from.

Declarer SOUTH will then "draw" Trump Hearts and later discard his black Suit Honors on the NORTH Dummy's "long" Diamond "winners".

A Trump Heart lead also is improvident because NORTH as Dummy has shown a "long" "side" Suit and leading Trump in this case only enables Declarer to begin "drawing" Trump which he is going to wisely do anyway when the Pair on offence holds both (1) "long" Trump and (2) a "long" side Suit to "dump" "losers".

Leading a "low" Spade is the best choice. Partner may hold and then or later "win" with his Spade Queen. EAST seeing **6** Diamonds in the North Dummy and himself holding **4** Diamonds will expect the *most likely* 2-1 Diamond "split" and will eventually lead a Diamond knowing that you may be the player holding the Diamond singleton and may at some point be able to ruff.