

c:\bridge\lead_v_NT.docx 11/17/24 ++

Esther Discusses "Leading on Defense Against Opponents' NT Contract When Partner Bid a Suit During the Auction"

Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen¹

To return to the "Esther Bridge Lessons," CLICK:

<https://esther-bridge.com/index.html>

To return to the "Esther Bridge 'Pop' Quizzes", CLICK:

<https://esther-bridge.com/quiz.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 "Leading on Defense Against Opponents' NT Contract When Partner Bid a Suit During the Auction". 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 a "warm and caring" person!

Bruce: Errr, well, sorry about that, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther.

Esther: Well, my *gracious giver*, don't worry too much about it! As you know, I am a very patient bridge teacher! Now, Bruce, at the outset I feel obligated to note that the present discussion is drawn from **Tip #36** (pp. 58-59) from Ron Klinger's 2003 book, 100 WINNING BRIDGE TIPS for the Improving Player. The examples have been slightly modified by Esther.

© Copyright, Bruce Thompson, 2024. All rights reserved.

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**.

Bruce: Errr, well, Esther... Ummm... Errr... First, I am not sure I believe this, but are you again *actually being nice to me?*

Esther: Well, my *handsome hero*, certainly, I am being nice to you. Occasionally, I like to "change things up!"

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther. Who is this Mr. Klinger fellow? Could you tell us a little about him, please?

Esther: Well, Bruce, of course. **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".

Bruce: Errr, well, Esther... Ummm... Well, thank you *very much* indeed for that review. Now Esther, can we look at some Hands as part of your discussion so that your instruction is more concrete?

Esther: Well, my *inquisitive interlocutor*, I would be happy to help you! Let's say the auction proceeded:

Bidding

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

Bruce: Well, Esther, what can we discern from this auction?

Esther: Well, my *fortuitous friend*, we know that:

1. **NORTH** holds (1) **4+** Diamonds, and (2) **~13** HCPs, or at least meets the requirements of Marty Bergen's "**Rule of 20**" in order to open the bidding. The "**Rule of 20**" says you can, and should, open the bidding with a Suit bid if the sum of (1) your HCPs and (2) the number of cards in your "longest" 2 Suits is at least **20!**
2. **EAST** holds (1) **5+** Hearts including some Honors and (2) enough HCPs for an Overcall, meaning **~11+** HCPs. EAST may be bidding (1) in pursuit of a possible contract, (2) to make a "lead directing" bid, and/or (3) to force the Opponents to bid higher and use up some of the Opponents' "bidding space".
3. **SOUTH** holds (1) **7+** HCPs, (2) fewer than 4 Diamonds, and (3) at least **1** Heart "stopper" (i.e., the Heart Ace or a "protected" high Heart Honor, such as K,x or Q,x,x,x).
4. **NORTH** by jumping 3**NT** shows a "big" Hand with **18+** HCPs.

Bruce: Well, Esther, sitting WEST "on lead" I should lead Partner's bid Suit, Hearts. Is that correct?

Esther: Well, my *sentimental sensei*, that would often be the correct lead against Opponents' **NT** contract. **But not always!** Let's learn about *when* to lead Partner's bid Suit against a **NT** contract, and *when not* to do so. Let's say you held the following cards sitting WEST:

HAND #1	HAND #2
WEST (3)	EAST (8)
S: J T 8 3 2	S: J T 8 3 2
H: 9 2	H: 9 2
D: Q 4	D: A K
C: 7 6 5 3	C: 7 6 5 3

Against **NT** you on Defense want to "attack" your Opponents in your Partnership's "longest" Suit. As Klinger (2003) notes,

"Just as [D]eclarer, with a choice of [S]uits to attack, would choose the long [S]uit in the [H]and which has the [side] entries, so the [D]efenders **must** follow the same policy." (p. 59, emphasis added)

EAST has shown **5+** Hearts, but you hold only **2**, for a total of **7+** Hearts. That's not a very "long" Suit for your Partnership! (Of course, if instead like Partner EAST you sitting WEST also held "long" Hearts, there would be no question that you would lead Hearts!)

WEST, on the other hand, holds **5** Spades including the "touching" J,T. Maybe EAST holds some Spades, and it would be better for WEST to lead a Spade rather than a Heart???

Bruce: Well, Esther, sitting WEST "on lead", what should I lead holding Hand **#1**, and what should I lead holding Hand **#2**?

Esther: Well, Bruce, the key issues are (1) how many cards you hold in your "long Suit", and their "Suit Quality", and (2) whether or not you hold "side-Suit" "control" cards that can provide "entries" to your Hand so that you can get back to your Hand later in play after you and Partner are together "attacking" your "long" Spades.

With Hand **#1**, holding **0** "side-Suit" "control" card "entries," I would probably lead the Heart 9, to "signal" Partner that I ain't got much in Hearts. With Hand **#2**, on the other Hand, because I hold **2** "side-Suit" Diamond entries to my "long" Spades, I would lead **4th** from the "top" of my Spades so that Partner EAST can use the "**Rule of 11**" to know how many cards Declarer holds that are higher than my Spade 3.²

Bruce: Well, Esther, let's say the Board was:

² EAST will then subtract 3 from 11 = **8**, and subtract from **8** (1) the number of Spades in the NORTH Dummy that are higher than the 3 and (2) the number of Spades EAST holds that are higher than the Spade 3 so that EAST knows exactly how many Spades Declarer SOUTH holds higher than the Spade 3.

2 Diamond Tricks and 2 Spade Tricks and set the N/S 3NT contract!

Bruce: Well, ummm..., Esther, what if the Declarer hadn't "ducked" on Trick #1 and won the Trick with the NORTH Dummy Ace?

Esther: Well, Bruce, E/W will still "romp" to victory iff (*if and only if*) Defender EAST does something *very, very clever* that most new bridge players will not see! EAST must "unblock" Partner WEST's Spades by "dropping" his Spade King on NORTH's Spade Ace!!! EAST has seen the Spade Ace on the NORTH Dummy, and EAST holds the Spade King. Based on the "**Rule of 11**" EAST knows that Declarer SOUTH holds 3 Spades higher than the Spade 3. If WEST held Q,J,T of Spades, WEST would not have led the Spade 3! Instead WEST would have led the Spade Jack if E/W were playing M.U.D. (Middle, Up, Down) or otherwise the Spade Queen from the Spade Q,J,T. So it appears that EAST holds J,T,x,x,x and EAST **must** "unblock" his Partner WEST's Spade "winners"! And EAST must expect that Partner WEST holds "side-Suit" entries to regain the lead later and take Spade winners, or WEST would have led a Heart rather than a Spade!

Bruce: YIKES!!!!

Esther: Bruce, here is another **Cardinal Bridge Principle:**
Whenever (1) you know your Partner's "long" Suit, and that the Suit has good Suit Quality, (2) you hold only 2 or 3 cards in Partner's "long" Suit (3) including a "top" Honor, you must consider whether you should "dump" your "top" Honor in Partner's Suit in order to "unblock" your Partner.