

Esther Discusses "Opening a *Non-Preempt* Suit Bid 'Light' When Sitting 3rd or 4th Within the Bridge Auction"

Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen¹

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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 "**Opening a *Non-Preempt* Suit Bid 'Light' When Sitting 3rd or 4th Within the Bridge Auction**".

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, well, very sorry about that, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen. Would you *first* talk about **when** and **why** following 2 PASSes you might open "light" with a Suit bid when sitting **3rd** within the auction?

Esther: Well, Bruce, of course I will try to help you! Of course, in any seat you can open a **Suit** bid "light" with fewer than **13** HCPs if you add together (1) your HCPs plus (2) the number of cards in your 2 longest Suits and the total equals **20** or more. This is Marty Bergen's "**Rule of 20**". The "**Rule of 20**" honors the facts that 2-Suited Hands play well in Suit contracts, and holding a 2-Suited Hand

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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**.

vastly increases the odds that you will find a Suit "fit" with Partner.²

But you can also open "light" with as few as **11** HCPs iff (if and only if) you are sitting in the **3rd** seat within the auction as long as your "best" Suit has good "Suit Quality." One way to characterize Suit Quality is to compute the Ron Klinger "**Suit Quality Test ('SQT') Score**" by adding together (1) your HCPs plus (2) the number of Honors (including the Ten) that you hold within your Suit.

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, why would you want to open with a Suit bid "light" with only **11** or perhaps even fewer HCPs?³

Esther: Well, my *Simpering Simpleton*, I think that Larry Cohen said it well in an article, "When/Why to Open Light in 3rd Seat",⁴ on his "Bridge With Larry Cohen" website noting that:

"There are many hands with which you would pass in any other position, but should open in 3rd seat... Why? Because it makes it harder on the opponents! ...Simply put, bidding is much harder when the opponents have struck the first blow. 'Defensive bidding' (responding to takeout doubles and overcalls) is much tougher than when your side gets to open the bidding... When in doubt, open light in 3rd seat. It makes life much tougher on your opponents."

Bruce: OK, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, specifically **why** would you be willing to open a Suit bid "light" with only **11** HCPs

² Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons" see: "Esther Discusses 'A Comprehensive List of 8 Different Categories of Bridge Probabilities, and How These May Help Guide Your Bidding and Play'":

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

³ You and Partner should reach a "Partnership Agreement" about whether you will or will not *always* hold **11** HCPs to open "light" when sitting 3rd within the auction. Some Partnerships agree, "I *will* open 'light' sitting 3rd as long as I hold a Suit with good 'Suit Quality', and I *may* open with slightly fewer than **11** HCPs in some cases, especially if my long Suit with good 'Suit Quality' is Spades."

⁴ See: <https://www.larryco.com/bridge-learning-center/detail/883>

(or maybe even a *little less* if the Vulnerabilities are favorable) when sitting **3rd**?

Esther: Well, my *Beaudacious Bupkus*, as explained in the Villages Duplicates Bridge Club "TIP OF THE WEEK: Opening Light in Third Seat"⁵

"In third seat, you know you're not robbing bidding space from your partner because she already said she didn't have a great hand when she passed as dealer. Your right-hand opponent passed so they don't have opening values. Most likely *the other opponent has the balance of power*, so **you want to take away as much bidding space as you can**" from your LHO. [emphases added]

Additionally, your opening Suit bid is "Lead Directing" in the event that your Opponents set the final contract.

Bruce: When you open a Suit bid "light", won't you always be opening either **1H** or **1S**, and usually **1S**, because otherwise you are not stealing much "bidding space" from your LHO?

Esther: Well, *BINGO!*

Bruce: Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, would you give us some examples of Hands that you would and would not open a 1-level Suit bid sitting **3rd** with 2 PASSes to you?

Esther: Well, sure. But first I want to emphasize that must take Vulnerability into account when you are opening a Suit bid "light". I am most likely to make such bids when Partner and I are not Vulnerable while our Opponents are Vulnerable, because the Opponents will necessarily be more cautious about being competitive, and at the same time Partner and I will be penalized less if we set the final contract and go down. In keeping with Cohen's similar examples, sitting **3rd** not Vulnerable with 2 PASSes to me I probably would open **1S** if I held:

♠ K Q T 9 7 ♥ 5 ♦ 7 5 ♣ K J T 8 4 (9)

Sitting **3rd** not Vulnerable with 2 PASSes to me I probably would not open **1S** if I held:

⁵ See:

<https://www.bridgewebs.com/villages/Opening%20Light%20in%20Third%20Seat.pdf>

♠ T 9 7 6 5 ♥ J 6 ♦ A J 7 ♣ A J 4 (11)

However, sitting 3rd not Vulnerable with 2 PASSes to me I probably would open 1S if I held:

♠ K Q J T ♥ 9 8 6 ♦ 4 ♣ A T 8 7 3 (10)

Note that *normally* I would not open 1S holding only 4 Spades, but I hold 4 "touching" Honors, and Partner knowing that I am bidding 3rd within the auction and holding a PASSED Hand is unlikely to get too carried away.

Bruce: Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, are there any **special principles** that must be considered if your Partnership agrees to play "light" Suit openings when sitting 3rd?

Esther: Well, my *Malodous Misanthrope*, yes, indeed! When your Partnership plays "light" Suit bid openings, and you are sitting 1st and your Partner opens a Suit bid when sitting 3rd, you absolutely, positively as Responder must *always remember* that Partner *may* have opened "light" and make your own bid accordingly.

Bruce: Well, would you now talk briefly, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, about opening a Suit bid "light" when sitting in the 4th position?

Esther: Well, of course. When the first 3 players each PASS, you are in the "balancing" position. If you PASS, the Board is "PASSED Out". This might happen, for example, if all 4 Hands hold exactly 10 HCPs and have "flat" or "rectangular" distributions. Indeed, some duplicate bridge Directors create bridge Boards randomly but subject to the restriction that at least 1 Hand must hold at least **11-12** HCPs, so that Boards are less likely to be PASSED Out.

Most duplicate bridge players bid when 4th in the "balancing" position such that you can bid a Suit at the 1-level if you hold 13 HCPs "*minus a King*", or in other words with as few as **10** HCPs. Additionally, I strongly recommend that sitting 4th in the "balancing" position that you also *always* invoke the "**Rule of 15**", which says you should open 1S if the sum of (1) your HCPs and (2) the number of Spades you hold is **15** or more.