

Esther Discusses "Listening to the Auction"

Bruce Thompson

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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 "**listening to the auction**". Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, thanks for taking time to be with us today!

Esther: D**n it, Bruce! How many times do I have to tell you to NEVER call me Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen! Instead, call me Esther! I am a very *warm, caring, friendly* person, and prefer to be casual and friendly, my malodorous muffinhead!

Bruce: Errr, well, sorry again about that, Esther. As we begin, please explain the general idea of "**listening to the auction**".

Esther: Well, of course, my malodorous misanthrope, when you are bidding, you need to take into account every single thing you can glean from the auction. This means you must consider each of the following: (1) vulnerability of BOTH pairs, (2) seat position of EACH bidder, (3) what each bid shows a given person holding, (4) what each bid shows each person does not hold, and (5) the "room" that is bidding the Board.

Bruce: Well, OK. That's *quite a lot* to think about! Let's talk through the following Board as an example of "**listening to the auction**".

Board #15

Tuesday 3/8/22 199er Game

Competition Size: **4 Tables**

Dealer: SOUTH

Vul: N/S

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

Initial Bidding

SOUTH: PASS WEST: PASS NORTH: 1**D**

Bruce: OK. Obviously the bids by SOUTH, WEST, and NORTH are all reasonable. What should EAST "hear" from listening to this auction?

Esther: Well, my twittering twit, here are some things I would think about sitting EAST. (1) Because N/S are Vulnerable, and E/W is not vulnerable, (a) N/S will get a score bonus for making a game contract, but E/W will not, and (b) N/S will be penalized more for being set than E/W will be penalized for going set. (2) Neither SOUTH nor WEST holds 12+ or 13+ HCPs. (3) Sitting third, NORTH holds at least 11+ HCPs, but maybe only 11. (4) Given the way that most pairs play, NORTH holds 4+ Diamonds, and may hold a 4-card Major, and given EAST's Heart holdings, NORTH probably holds Spades if NORTH has a 4-card Major. (5) If NORTH holds 4 strong Spades, WEST's hand gets better due to the singleton Spade WEST holds, although EAST holds limited cross-rough or trumping power with only 4

cards in potential trump suits, because WEST holds only 4 Clubs and 4 Hearts. (6) WEST has 2 "quick tricks" in NORTH's strong suit. (7) Because NORTH did not bid Clubs, and NORTH would have bid the lower suit if NORTH's Clubs and Diamonds were roughly equal in length and strength, this increases the odds that either SOUTH or Partner WEST holds my Clubs.

Bruce: OK, so EAST holds 14 HCPs. But obviously EAST cannot bid Diamonds over NORTH's Diamond bid. And EAST cannot bid Hearts with only 4 Hearts holding Q,x,x,x. EAST's only semi-reasonable bid is 2C. Would you make that bid?

Esther: Well, let me name some additional considerations. This competition involved 4 E/W pairs competing for the Top on this Board. That means the mathematically-maximum Board Matchpoint score would be 4-1, or 3.0, which would occur if, and only if, there were no ties for top Bridge Score, and thus the Top Matchpoint score. This means that the maximum gap between Top and Bottom Matchpoint Scores is 3.0 - 0.0 for the Bottom Board, or 3.0. If there were more E/W pairs in the competition, both (1) the rewards for taking risk to obtain Top Matchpoints and being right, and (3) the penalties for taking risks and being wrong, are smaller than they would be if the competition was larger.

Bruce: OK, anything else that WEST should have considered in deciding whether to make this 2C overcall?

Esther: Well, my malodorous misanthrope, it is important always to, as Yoda teaches, "play the room". In a Limited game with less experienced players, most E/W pairs would not take this risk, so, if you are correct in taking the risk by bidding 2C, most other E/W pairs will not also get this Matchpoint advance. On the other hand, you also won't have the downside protection of knowing that other E/W pairs will likely be doing the same thing. For example, if you are "on the bubble" about making a Slam bid in the Shark Tank, you know that all the Sharks will indeed bid Slam, so if you bid and make Slam, you will not obtain the sure

penalty from the Sharks having bid and made Slam. And, conversely, you also are unlikely to be severely penalized for bidding and not making Slam, when all or most of the other Shark pairs will have done the same thing.

Bruce: OK, can you give us any other examples of "listening to the auction"?

Esther: Well, OK. Consider the following auction:

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

So you, sitting EAST, are on lead. You hold:

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

Bruce: OK. What does the auction tell you, and what would you lead?

Esther: Well, I know that SOUTH holds at least 1 4-card Major. I know that (1) SOUTH holds 8-10 HCPs (probably 9+ if SOUTH listens to the Stayman teachings of Yoda), and (2) SOUTH's distribution bidding Stayman should not be 4-3-3-3 or 3-4-3-3. And I know that SOUTH does not have a 5-card Major, because SOUTH did not transfer. And NORTH has denied holding either 4 Hearts, or 4 Spades. And because I as EAST hold only 2 Hearts, but 4 Spades, I think that SOUTH most likely holds 4 Hearts, but, like NORTH, also not 4 Spades. Possibly the auction has told me, if I listened, that N/S have a weakness in Spades. Therefore, I am going to lead my 3 of Spades, 4th from the top of my Spade suit. Note that, against a **NT** contract, if I held 3 (not 2) touching honors, I would lead my Top touching honor. (Against a suit contract, I would lead the top of touching honors in an unbid suit, if Partner had not bid.) In any case, I have now told Partner WEST that I think we should attack Spades. And WEST's play on my lead may tell odd or even card count, if we are

playing that, so that I have a better understanding of
the lay of the land.