

**Esther Comments About the Importance of
(1) "Listening to the Auction", and
(2) Interpreting the First Lead**

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 as Declarer the **Importance of (1) "Listening to the Auction", and (2) Interpreting the First Lead.** 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, ever** call me Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen! Always, **ALWAYS, ALWAYS** instead call me, Esther!

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? They would encircle me routinely, **loudly** singing:

*Klinktoast-Houstonhousen,
Klinktoast-Houstonhousen,
What a stinky name!
And you stink too,
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, today's discussion focuses on the following Board:

Board #2

249er Knoxville 12/9/22

Dealer: EAST

Vul: N/S

NORTH (12)

S: A K 9 7 6 4

H: 5 4

D: K J 2

C: J 2

WEST (8)

S: Q T 8 3

H: T 8 6

D: T 9 7 4

C: K Q

EAST (10)

S: T 5

H: K J 9 7 2

D: A Q 6 5

C: 7 6

SOUTH (10)

S: 2

H: A Q 3

D: 8 3

C: A T 9 8 5 4 3

Bidding

EAST: PASSS SOUTH: 1**C** WEST: PASS NORTH: 1**S**

EAST: 2**H** SOUTH: 3**C** WEST: PASS NORTH: 3**S**

EAST: PASS SOUTH: PASS WEST: PASS

Bruce: Well, Esther, first, do you agree that EAST's opening bid of PASS is reasonable?

Esther: Well, EAST holds 10 HCPs, plus almost meets the requirements of the "Rule of 20" (i.e., 10 HCPs + 9 cards in the longest 2 suits = 19), so an opening of 1**H** might be reasonable. Two-suited hands do "play better" in suit contracts! But I would also not rule out a bid of PASS.

Bruce: OK, so do you agree with SOUTH's 1**C** bid?

Esther: Well, SOUTH obviously can't bid 2**C** to show length, because that would be an "artificial" bid not showing Clubs, but showing a Giant hand, and thus lying twice!

And the hand is too weak to show 6 or 7 Clubs by opening 3C. But since 10 + 7 Clubs + 3 Hearts = 20, so I would indeed open 1C!

Bruce: Well, NORTH's 1S bid seems quite reasonable! And EAST's overcall as a PASSEd hand of 2H seems reasonable, especially since EAST arguably could have opened with a Heart bid. Do you agree with SOUTH's response of 3C?

Esther: Yes, my bodacious bobblehead. I generally agree that it is OK to deny Partner's Spades 1 time. *In general, it may be OK to "rescue" Partner once, but never twice!* SOUTH has now shown Club length, and NORTH does hold 2 Clubs. But, of course, if the contract is made, Spades will generate a higher Bridge Score than Clubs.

Bruce: OK. So do you agree with NORTH's final bid of 3S?

Esther: Well, I think this is a "judgment call". As NORTH, I would have expected that in a 3C contract Declarer could probably ruff some of NORTH's Spades, and that SOUTH held long Clubs, and that NORTH held 2 Clubs, so the "**Law of Total Tricks**" says that a 3C contract is probably makeable. But, on the other hand, a Spade contract will, if made, generate a higher Bridge Score than a contract in a Minor.

Bruce: OK. Let's turn to "play of the hand". On this Board, EAST led the 7 of Clubs. Before the Board comes down, what does Declarer NORTH now know?

Esther: Well, if EAST held A,K of Hearts, EAST would have led Ace promising the King, and asking Partner to discard on the Ace lead the answer to the question, "Partner, after I next take my King winner, can you take the 3rd Heart trick either with the Queen, or by trumping?" Because EAST did not lead the Ace, EAST does not hold A,K. And if EAST held K,Q of Hearts, EAST would have led King, promising Partner the Queen, and either winning the King, or promoting the Queen if the King lost the trick.

Bruce: OK. So, once the Board comes down, NORTH sees A,Q,3 in Hearts. This makes it **OBVIOUS** to NORTH that EAST must hold the King of Hearts. **NOBODY** would overcall 2H without holding at least 1 of the 3 top honors in Hearts! So, now NORTH knows NORTH **must** run a Heart finesse through EAST. If EAST ducks, NORTH will play the Queen of Hearts from the Board. If EAST covers with the King of Hearts, NORTH will play the Ace from Dummy. Once Dummy in either case takes 2 Heart tricks, NORTH will at some point lead the 3 of Hearts from Dummy so that NORTH can trump it, even if E/W don't eventually lead Hearts!