

**Esther Discusses Both (1) in Setting Suit Contracts, Count *Primarily* Trump Cards, and Not HCPs, & (2) Various Bidding and Play Strategies and the Importance of "*Leading Low to High*"**

**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 discuss **both (1) in setting suit contracts, count *primarily* trump cards, and not HCPs, & (2) various bidding and play strategies, and the importance of "*Leading Low to High*".** Esther, 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 Esther! Always, **ALWAYS, ALWAYS** instead call me, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen!

**Bruce:** Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, in any case, thank you for talking to us today. Here is the Board that I wanted you to discuss.

**Board #3**

Knoxville 299er 3/23/23

Dealer: SOUTH

NORTH (11)

**S:** J  
**H:** Q J 8 6 5 3  
**D:** A 4  
**C:** K T 4 2

WEST (8)

**S:** K 8 6 3  
**H:** A 7 2  
**D:** 8 5  
**C:** J 8 6 5

EAST (10)

**S:** A T 9 7  
**H:** --  
**D:** K J 6 3 2  
**C:** Q 9 7 3

SOUTH (11)

**S:** Q 5 4 2  
**H:** K T 9 4  
**D:** Q T 9 7  
**C:** A

Bidding

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1 <b>D</b>	PASS	1 <b>H</b>	<b>DBL</b>
2 <b>H</b>	2 <b>S</b>	3 <b>H</b>	PASS
PASS	PASS		

**Bruce:** Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, do you agree that Dealer SOUTH should have bid 1**D**, rather than PASS? SOUTH only has 11 HCPs!

**Esther:** Well, my Bobble-headed Bupkus, SOUTH has 11 HCPs, but also an Ace singleton! I tend to count Aces as being worth more than 4 HCPs, and sometimes 6 HCPs. And a singleton Ace is ABSOLUTELY the best there is, assuming we get a suit contract in a different suit! And the two longest suits hold 8 cards, and 11 + 8 = 19, which doesn't meet the requirements of the "Rule of 20"<sup>1</sup>, but is pretty darn close! So, yes, I definitely would have made exactly this bid, every single time!

**Bruce:** Err, ok. Well, of course WEST holding only 8 HCPs, PASSes, which I know you agree is the correct bid. NORTH, holding 11 HCPs, and 6 Hearts, bids 1**H**. Do you agree with this bid?

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<sup>1</sup> On the Esther Bridge Lessons website, see "**6. Bidding the 'Law of Total Tricks' versus HCPs.**"

**Esther:** Well, my Simpering Simpleton, yes, I do again agree with this bid. NORTH can show length in Hearts later, and gives SOUTH the opportunity to support, or not, the Heart bid. And you want to elevate bidding levels **slowly**, when you think your Partnership has more to talk about, which you should expect is the case, because SOUTH opened, and as North you hold 11 HCPs, and  $\sim 13 + 11 = 24!$

**Bruce:** Well, EAST then bid DOUBLE. Do you agree with EAST's bid?

**Esther:** Well, my Malodorous Misanthrope, yes, indeed, I totally agree with this bid also. WEST holds 10 HCPs. Normally, to do a "Take Out Double,"<sup>2</sup> one should (1) hold a void, a singleton, or at most a doubleton in Opponents' bid suit, and (2) an opening or near-opening point count. Here EAST holds a void in the Opponents' Heart suit, which is as good as it gets! N/S won't take many tricks in Hearts, if E/W gets a contract in a different suit! EAST's DOUBLE promises 4 Spades, and length in all suits except Hearts. So, this is clearly the correct bid!

**Bruce:** Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, SOUTH by bidding **2H**, after first opening **1D**, then showed a holding of exactly 4 Hearts, since SOUTH opened Diamonds initially. That is clearly appropriate. WEST then bids **2S**, knowing that E/W should be holding a total of 8 Spades. WEST hopes that a **2S** contract can be made holding 8 trump cards. Do you agree with WEST's bid?

**Esther:** Well, yes!!! The "Law of Total Tricks"<sup>3</sup> says that E/W can probably take 8 tricks in total, but no more. As a general rule, try to *avoid contracts on which you will go down more than 1*. A **2S** bid is likely to make, or maybe go down only 1. Even going down only 1 may be reasonable, since Opponents bidding and making a **2H**

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<sup>2</sup> See the "Some Duplicate Bridge Conventions" on the [Esther Bridge Lessons website](#), "**#14. 6 Not-For-Penalty Doubles.**"

<sup>3</sup> See on the [Esther Bridge Lessons webpage](#), "**#19. The 'Law of Total Tricks', and Some Bridge Probabilities.**"

contract would give Opponents a Bridge Score of 120+, versus +50 or +100 if you go down 1, depending on Vulnerability.

**Bruce:** Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, NORTH then bids 3H. Do you agree with this bid?

**Esther:** Well, my Dandruff-ridden Dufus, not "No!", "But, **HELL NO!!!!**" After SOUTH shows holding 4 Hearts after having opened a Minor (1D), NORTH now knows that SOUTH holds 4 Hearts, and NORTH also knows that NORTH hold 6 Hearts. This means that NORTH knows that N/S hold 10 Hearts!!! The "Law of Total Tricks" says that N/S can probably take 10 tricks in total, pretty much irrespective of HCPs!!! How, *crazy*, then, is, this, 3H bid??? PLUS, (1) NORTH does not know that SOUTH holds an Ace singleton!, but (2) NORTH does know that NORTH also holds 1 A,x doubleton, and a Jack singleton in the Opponents' Spade suit!!! In fact, N/S hold (1) a singleton in Spades, (2) an A,x doubleton in Diamonds, and (3) an Ace singleton in Clubs. On this Board, even with only 22 HCPs, N/S is going to make 4H all day, every day. Please, Dufus, try to remember that "Points are for No Trump!", and "Points Schmoints!"

**Bruce:** Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, does this mean that N/S could make a 4-level contract holding (1) 10 or 11 trump cards, but (2) together only a total of 10 or 12 HCPs?

**Esther:** Well, *of course not!!!* **The "Law of Total Tricks" does assume that both Partners are bidding reasonably, and not bidding with virtually no HCPs!!!**

**Bruce:** Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, can we now turn to the "play of the hand"? EAST is on lead. Here is how the **first** trick played out:

					Trick Count	
01.	E	S	W	N	N/S	E/W
	<b>S:A</b>	<b>S:2</b>	<b>S:3</b>	<b>S:J</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>

Do you agree with EAST leading the Spade Ace?

**Esther:** Well, that lead is not unreasonable. But I might have led a small Spade, thinking that WEST holds the King. And I would assume that WEST would then "return Partner's opening lead," which is a very important

principle of good play. But, holding a Heart void, EAST might assume that NORTH or SOUTH has a Spade void or singleton, and want to take the Spade Ace winner early, even without letting the Ace does its usual job of "killing a King", which may not be an issue here, since EAST having bid Spades is likely to hold the King. Of course, if NORTH had (correctly) jumped to a final bid of 4H, WEST would have been particularly likely to lead the Ace of Spades, thinking that the jump by NORTH means NORTH is probably long Hearts *plus* short Spades.

**Bruce:** Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, here is how the **second** trick played out:

				Trick Count		
01.	E	S	W	N	N/S	E/W
	<u>S:A</u>	S:2	S:3	S:J	0	1
02.	D:2	D:7	D:8	<u>D:A</u>	1	1

Do you agree with EAST on Trick #2 not leading a low Spade to WEST's Spades?

**Esther:** Well, as EAST, I believe I know that (1) E/W together hold 4+4 = 8 Spades, and once the Board comes down also holding 4 Spades, (2) NORTH is void in Spades after the first Trick. So, on the second Trick a lead of some suit *other than* Spades is thus required.

**Bruce:** Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, here is how the **third** trick played out:

				Trick Count		
01.	E	S	W	N	N/S	E/W
	<u>S:A</u>	S:2	S:3	S:J	0	1
02.	D:2	D:7	D:8	<u>D:A</u>	1	1
	N	E	S	W		
03.	H:Q	D:3	H:4	<u>H:A</u>	1	2

Do you agree with NORTH now leading a high Heart, the Heart Queen, and thus leading "high to low," rather than "low to high"?

**Esther:** Well, playing "high to low" is normally not just dumb, but is instead extra, special, *super dumb*! There are 2 problems. **First**, leading "high to low" to draw trump, such as leading an Ace, is *very bad*, because you are guaranteeing that you will only kill the lowest trump card in each Opponent's holdings. On the

other hand, if you play "low to high", the first Opponent to play will usually not play the lowest trump holding. So, you can kill some higher trump cards in Opponents' hands, and along the way "promote" into sure winners some of your own lower or intermediate trump cards, be leading "low to high". **Second**, when you play "low to high," you are better protecting yourself in case there is a very *unfavorable trump split*. For example, let's say your Partnership as Declarer holds 8 trump cards, and that Opponents hold a 4-1 trump split. If you play "low to high," once you discover the unfavorable split, you can then use other suits to transport yourself as Declarer to be where you can play through the dastardly Opponent holding the long trump suit. In this way, you can keep capturing that Opponent's trump cards with your lowest possible winning trump cards.

**Bruce:** Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, what if your Partnership holds 10 trump cards, including the 3 highest trump cards? Then, does it matter if you play "high to low" when drawing trump?

**Esther:** Well, fair enough. In such a case, playing "high to low" may not hurt you. The only consideration is where you want to end up after you are through drawing trump. But, still, it is a very, very *bad habit* (playing "high to low"), and there is never any advantage from playing "high to low," except that you can indeed end up where you want to be.

**Bruce:** Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, here is how the **fourth** and **fifth** tricks played out:

				Trick Count		
	E	S	W	N	N/S	E/W
01.	<u>S:A</u>	S:2	S:3	S:J	0	1
02.	D:2	D:7	D:8	<u>D:A</u>	1	1
	N	E	S	W		
03.	H:Q	D:3	H:4	<u>H:A</u>	1	2
	W	N	E	S		
04.	D:5	D:4	<u>D:K</u>	D:9	1	3
	E	S	W	N		
05.	D:6	D:Q	H:7	<u>H:8</u>	2	3

At this point, N/S took the next 4 tricks:

	N	E	S	W		
06.	<b>C</b> :2	<b>C</b> :3	<u><b>C</b>:A</u>	<b>C</b> :5	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
	S	W	N	E		
07.	<u><b>H</b>:9</u>	<b>H</b> :2	<b>H</b> :3	<b>C</b> :7	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>
08.	<b>D</b> :T	<b>C</b> :6	<u><b>H</b>:5</u>	<b>D</b> :J	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>
	N	E	S	W		
09.	<u><b>C</b>:K</u>	<b>C</b> :9	<b>S</b> :4	<b>C</b> :8	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>

At this point, NORTH holds **H**:J,6 and **C**:T,4, and SOUTH holds **H**:K,T and **S**:Q,5, and Declarer can cross-ruff 4 times to take all the remaining tricks, contract making! **And with only 22 HCPs!!!**