

**Esther Discusses "Some 'Rules' for Making
Either 'Low-Level' or 'High-Level'
'DOUBLES for Penalty' "**

Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen¹

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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 "**Some 'Rules' for Making Either 'Low-Level' or 'High-Level' 'DOUBLES for Penalty' "**". 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 so "warm and caring"!

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?

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, is there anything you wish to

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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**.

emphasize before you begin to delve into today's bridge lesson?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. It is fundamentally important for bridge players to understand that there are two distinctly different flavors of DOUBLES: (1) "**Penalty DOUBLES**" and (2) "**Not-for-Penalty DOUBLES**". "**Penalty DOUBLES**" say to Partner, "Partner, I think we are going to set the Opponents' latest bid if that bid becomes the final contract. Please do not bid again unless after I DOUBLE your RHO makes an additional bid!!!"

"**Penalty DOUBLES**" can really help your Partnership to "rack up" high Bridge Scores especially when the Opponents are Vulnerable. *Some of my highest Bridge Scores ever* have happened at the bridge table as a result of "**Penalty DOUBLES**"! For example, if you and Partner are not Vulnerable and you make a 4**H** or 4**S** contract your Bridge Score will be **+420**. But on the same Board if the Opponents are Vulnerable and you set them by **2** Tricks your Bridge Score will instead be **+500** and if you set them by **3** your Bridge Score will be **+800**!

"**Not-for-Penalty DOUBLES**", on the other hand, are made not for penalty scores but instead to communicate various kinds of information such as, "Partner, my RHO 'stole' my bid. Please pretend I had bid what my RHO just bid!", or "Partner, I have 'support' for your bid Major!", or "Partner, I have **~13+** HCPs, no 'biddable' **5**-card Suit, and I am 'short' in the Opponents' bid Suit. If your RHO does not bid after I DOUBLE please bid your 'longest and strongest' Suit." The "Esther Bridge Conventions Lesson **#26: 7 'Not-for-Penalty' DOUBLES**": <https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/double.pdf> elaborates several of these choices.

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther, it seems to me that it must be *absolutely, abundantly, absolutely critical* that you and Partner **must** have an *absolutely clear* Partnership Agreement about which kind of DOUBLE you are making whenever you bid DOUBLE!

Esther: Well, Bruce, yes indeed. This *cannot* be emphasized too much! Now newer bridge players will make a *simple and unambiguous* boundary between when you are making a "**Penalty DOUBLE**" versus a "**Not-for-Penalty DOUBLE**". For example, some novice bridge players simply agree, "Partner, if I DOUBLE any Opponents' bid that is at the **3S** level or *lower*

I am always making a '**Not-for-Penalty DOUBLE**'. If I DOUBLE any Opponents' bid that is at the 3NT level or *higher* then I am always making a '**Penalty DOUBLE**'"

Of course, Partners can make other Partnership Agreements about special cases in which even certain "low-level" DOUBLES are nevertheless "**DOUBLES for Penalty**". For example, "Esther Bridge Dialog Lesson #71: 6 Cases in Which Even '*Low-Level*' DOUBLES are DOUBLES for Penalty":

https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/low_DBL.pdf

covers several of these special situations.

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther, would you now turn your attention to providing your intrepid loyal readers with some guidelines about when it is prudent to make reasonable "**Penalty DOUBLES**"?

Esther: Well, Bruce, of course I will try to help you. I am going to share some "rules" or "guidelines" for deciding whether or not to make "**Penalty DOUBLES**" that are drawn from Ron Klinger's excellent 2003 book, 100 WINNING BRIDGE TIPS for the Improving Player.

Bruce: Errr, well, hmmm... Well, before you cover some of Klinger's "Penalty DOUBLE rules" would you first tell us a little about this Ron Klinger fellow?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I would be happy to do so!

Ron Klinger

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.

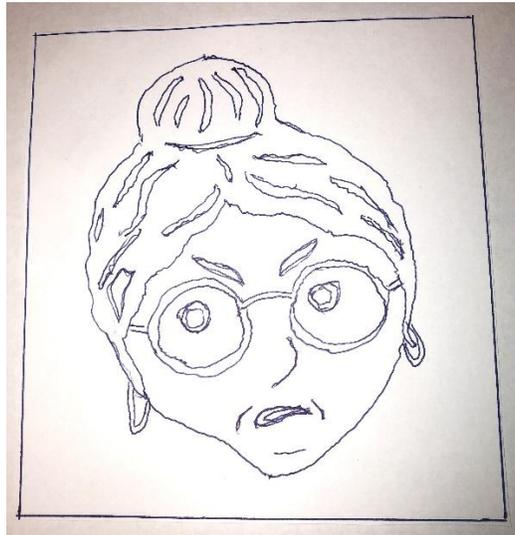
Klinger also originated the Ron Klinger "**Suit Quality Test ('SQT') Score**". The "**SQT Score**" is computed by adding together (1) the number of cards held in the Suit and (2) the number of Honors (including the Ten) held in the Suit. Suit contracts set at a level of "**SQT Score**" – 6 are generally relatively safe.

The "**SQT Score**" recognizes the fact that card counts and distributions may be more important than HCPs when setting Suit contracts. This view was popularized by Larry Cohen's 1992 ABTA award-winning book, To Bid or Not to Bid: The LAW of Total Tricks. And Cohen's compatriot Marty Bergen, in Bergen's ABTA 1996 award-winning book, Points Schmoints!, also teaches the all-important philosophy underlying the "**Law of Total Tricks**".

Bruce: Errr, well, hmmm... Well, are you going to separate your discussion of "low-level" "Penalty DOUBLES" from your discussion of "higher-level" "Penalty DOUBLES"?

Esther: Well, Bruce, yes indeed!

Some of Ron Klinger's "Rules" for Making Reasonable "Low-Level" "Penalty DOUBLES"



Esther's Warning....

The topic of "Low-Level" "Penalty DOUBLES" is important but is a topic of more interest to "advancing" bridge players as against newer players. But newer players may benefit from exposure to these ideas even if they are not yet prepared to play them.

Esther: Ron Klinger's Tip #31 generally emphasizes that "When considering a [P]enalty [D]ouble of a [S]uit [contract] below game, you need [both] strength and length in their [S]uit" (p. 47). In general, to make a "Penalty DOUBLE" of a "low-level" Suit contract you need:

1. Both "strength and length" in the Opponents' bid Suit;
2. 20+ HCPs between you and Partner which implies if Partner sat earlier than you in the auction and Partner bid and you could also bid, or vice versa; and
3. a "misfit" with Partner's bid Suit or *otherwise* competing for the contract may be more reasonable than making a "Penalty DOUBLE".

Bruce: Errr, well, hmmm... Well, did Klinger make all this any more concrete?

Esther: Well, Bruce, yes indeed! Klinger suggested 2 "rules" for deciding whether to "**DOUBLE for Penalty**":

1. "**Rule of 10**": Add together (a) the number of Trump Tricks the Opponents are contracting to win and (b) the number of Trump **Tricks** that you hold. If the answer is **10 or more**, then a "**Penalty DOUBLE**" is reasonable. The "**Rule of 10**" focuses on the "strength" of your Trump card holdings.
2. "**Rule of 12**": Add together (a) the number of Tricks that the Opponents are contracting to make and (b) the number of Trump **cards** you hold and (b). If the answer is **12 or more**, then a "**Penalty DOUBLE**" is reasonable. The "**Rule of 12**" focuses on the "length" of your Trump card holdings.

Bruce: Errr, well, hmmm... Well, exactly how do I assess how many "winning Tricks" I hold in the Opponents' Trump Suit?

Esther: Well, Bruce, Klinger suggests that you assume the Declarer leads the Trump Suit from the "top" and estimate how many Tricks you will "win" if he does so.² For example:

1. **Q-T-8-6-2**: If Declarer plays the Trump Suit Ace and then the King, you estimate **3** "winners" from your Q-T-8 versus the Declarer's J-9-7.
2. **K-Q-9-4**: After the Declarer plays the A,J, with you winning versus the Jack, you will also "win" 2 more Tricks with your K,9 against the Declarer's 8 for a total of **3** Tricks.
3. **K-Q-7-5**: After the A,J you win 1 Trick versus the Declarer's Jack, and against the Declarer's T,9 your K,7 gives you 1 more Trick for a total of **2** Tricks.

Bruce: Errr, well, hmmm... Would you summarize some of Klinger's example?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. Let's say that your Partner as Dealer opens with a bid of **1S**. You hold:

² Esther has modified some of the cards in Klinger's examples.

YOU (10)

S: 8

H: Q T 2

D: A J 8 5 2

C: K 9 6 3

1. If your RHO Overcalled by bidding 2**C** would you make a "Penalty DOUBLE"? You hold only **1** Trump Club "winner". Because $1 + 8 = 9$ you do **not** meet the requirements of the "Rule of 10" in order to make a "Penalty DOUBLE".
2. If your RHO Overcalled by bidding 2**D** would you make a "Penalty DOUBLE"? You hold **3** Trump Diamond "winners". Because $3 + 8 = 11$ you **do** meet the requirements of the "Rule of 10" in order to make a "Penalty DOUBLE". Your Partnership also together holds more than the **20+** HCPs required to make a "Penalty DOUBLE".
3. If your RHO Overcalled by bidding 2**H** would you make a "Penalty DOUBLE"? You hold only **1** Trump Club "winner". Because $1 + 8 = 9$ you do **not** meet the requirements of the "Rule of 10" in order to make a "Penalty DOUBLE".

Bruce: Errr, well, hmmm... Esther, is there anything else we need to know especially with respect to making "low-level" "DOUBLES for Penalty"?

Esther: Ron Klinger's Tip #32 generally emphasize that you should "Be very wary of playing for penalties at a low level, even if you have five good trumps, if [P]artner is known to be void in trumps" (p. 50). This is especially true at the 3 level or lower! Consider the following auction in which you are sitting SOUTH and Partner NORTH is the Dealer:

NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	WEST
1 C	1 S	PASS	2 S
DBL	PASS	???	

NORTH's **DOUBLE** at his 2nd turn within the auction is a "Takeout/Demand DOUBLE" requesting Partner to bid either Hearts or Diamonds depending on which is "longer and stronger", unless (1) NORTH's LHO, EAST, bids again or (2) SOUTH holds a massive Spade "Trump stack". Here SOUTH held:

♠ K Q 7 5 3 ♥ J ♦ K 7 5 3 ♣ J 8 5 (10)

Bruce: Errr, well, hmmm... Esther, surely SOUTH, who meets condition #2 because he holds **5** Spades to the K,Q, should leave the DOUBLE in for penalty?

Esther: Well, Bruce, that may be your instinct. But there are 2 things that you should also consider. First, (1) you sitting SOUTH hold **5** Spades, (2) EAST holds **5** Spades, and (3) WEST holds **3** Spades. Because $5 + 5 + 3 = 13$ this means that your Partner, NORTH, holds exactly **0** Trump Spades. A "Trump stack" is good but Partner being void in Trump Spades is bad because Partner NORTH doesn't have ruffing as another opportunity to "win" Tricks. NORTH also once on lead will then be unable to lead Trump through the Declarer EAST toward your strong/long Trump holdings thus enabling you to take Trump "winners" at a lower level.

Second, SOUTH should also consider that this auction means that SOUTH's holdings together suggest that NORTH holds 5+ Clubs. You sitting SOUTH hold the Club J,8,5. This means that together N/S hold (1) your 10 + NORTH's 13+ HCPs = **23** HCPs and (2) $5 + 3 = 8$ Club Trump cards, so you SOUTH do not hold the "misfit" with Partner required to leave in a "low-level" **"DOUBLE for Penalty"**.

A Ron Klinger "Rule" for Making Reasonable "High-Level" "Penalty DOUBLES"

Bruce: Errr, well, hmmm... Esther, what about **"DOUBLES for Penalty"** against Opponents' Suit slam contracts? What if I (1) hold 2 Aces or (2) "long" Trump cards?

Esther: Well, Bruce, to DOUBLE a slam contract you need some combination of (1) "top" Honors and (2) "long" Trump cards. In the words of Ron Klinger:

"TIP 35: Do not double a [S]uit slam with just two [A]ces or with just very strong trumps." (p. 56, emphasis added)

Bruce: Errr, well, hmmm... Esther, does Klinger provide any additional examples?

Esther: Well, Bruce, suppose the bidding proceeded as follows:

NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	WEST
1 H	PASS	3 C	PASS
3 S	PASS	6 H	PASS
PASS	???		

Sitting EAST would you "**DOUBLE for Penalty**" if you held the following Hand?

EAST (9)
S: A J 8 4
H: 8 3
D: A 9 8 5 3
C: 7 3

Bruce: Errr, well, hmmm... Esther, no, I would not "**DOUBLE for Penalty**" given this auction. SOUTH's "jump" to 6**H** without asking Partner for Aces of "key" cards means that SOUTH is *not* worried about "missing" Aces. This means that SOUTH likely holds (1) a void in either Spades or Diamonds and (2) a "protected" King (K,x,x) or likely K,Q,x in 1 of these 2 Suits.

Esther: BINGO, Bruce, You have indeed come a long way! Probably due to my impeccable instruction. Now what will happen if you "**DOUBLE for Penalty**" assuming that your competitors are at least somewhat experienced bridge players?

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther. All or at least most of the N/S Pairs on this Board will bid 6**H**. And all the N/S Pairs will likely make 6**H**. And *only* N/S Pairs sitting at tables at which E/W "**DOUBLED for Penalty**" will earn "top" Bridge Scores and Board MatchPoints and Board Percentages and the E/W Pairs who "**DOUBLED for Penalty**" will correspondingly earn "bottom" Bridge Scores and Board MatchPoints and Board Percentages!

Esther: Well, Bruce, that indeed is exactly "correct"! Now what if the auction remained:

NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	WEST
1 H	PASS	3 C	PASS
3 S	PASS	6 H	PASS
PASS	???		

but now sitting EAST would you **"DOUBLE for Penalty"** if you held the following Hand?

EAST (6)

S: K 5 3
H: Q J T 9
D: 9 6
C: 9 7 3 2

Bruce: Oh, my, goodness, Esther. Again, I would not **"DOUBLE for Penalty"**, but for a *different* reason. E/W indeed defeat a 6**H** contract with his Heart holdings. But that may be only slam contract Partner and I sitting E/W can defeat. If I **"DOUBLE for Penalty"** the N/S Opponents are likely to run to a different and makeable slam contract such 6**NT** and you sitting E/W will have traded a "positive" Bridge Score for a "negative" Bridge Score!

Esther: Well, Bruce, right again! As Klinger explained:

"The moral is that if the [O]pponents have reached a slam which is due to fail, you do not need to double to obtain a good score... Furthermore, if you regularly refrain from doubling their slams with holdings like K-Q-J, Q-J-T-9 or J-T-9-8-x of trumps, you will gain a solid reputation for having a generous and magnanimous nature." (p. 57, emphasis added)