

"Points are for No Trump" (Yoda) and "Points Schmoints!" (Marty Bergen)

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 about an Interesting Board involving the fundamental principle of bridge: *Points Schmoints!* 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. Could you talk us through the basic aspects of *Points Schmoints?*

Esther: Of course, I can, my *malodorous misanthrope!* Also, *I will!* Points Schmoints! is the title of a very popular duplicate bridge book written by famous bridge champion, Marty Bergen, who also wrote the popular sequel book, More Points Schmoints! Bergen's 1996 Points Schmoints! book won the Bridge Book of the Year Award from the American Bridge Teachers' Association. My personal friend, Marty, is a strong advocate that beginning bridge players pay way *too much* attention to HCPs, and not enough attention to card counts and distributions, and the always important "**Law of Total Tricks.**" This view is the basis for Marty's important "**Rule of 20,**" which emphasizes the sweet and special properties of 2-suited Hands when playing suit contracts!

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, does *anyone other* than your close personal friend, Marty Bergen, emphasize this principle?

Esther: Of course! My other personal friend, Yoda, whose Home Club is in Savannah, and has about 10,000 MPs. She frequently advises, "**Points are for No Trump!**" Same idea. Just different words!

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, can you show us a Board on which this principle applies?

Esther: Of course, my *dandruff-ridden dufus!* A good example is the bridge Board played by famous bridge player, James Bond, against the evil bridge player, Sir Hugo Drax, in the duplicate bridge documentary film, **Moonraker**. This Board is presented in the **Appendix** to the present "Esther Bridge Lesson."

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, would you describe the unusual features of this Board for us?

Esther: Sure. Of course, my *malodorous misanthrope!* The Board involves Bond sitting SOUTH as Dealer holding 8 HCPs, WEST holding **1** HCP, the Head of the British Secret Service, "M," as NORTH holding 0 HCPs, and Drax sitting EAST holding **31** HCPs. Bond opens by bidding **7C!** After 2 Passes, Drax **DOUBLES**, Bond **REDOUBLES**, and the Hand is Passed out. Bond then proceeds to make his contract, a Large Slam, *even though holding **only 8 HCPs** within his Partnership!*

Bruce: But really, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, this Board, involved Dummy holding **1** void, and Bond as Declarer holding **2** voids, and thus there being voids in all suits except the Trump suit!

Esther: So what, my *simpering simpleton?* This Board is mathematically possible. Therefore, it *has occurred* in real bridge, and *will occur again* in future real bridge!

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, in any case, can you give us a similar example for *actual* *real* recent bridge?

Esther: Sure. How about *real actual* bridge Board #8 from a recent duplicate 499er game?

Board #8

Knoxville 499er 9/26/22

Dealer: WEST

Vul: **None**

	NORTH (11)	
	S: 6 4	
	H: A 7	
	D: Q 8 6 5	
	C: A J T 6 5	
WEST (11)		EAST (8)
S: Q 8 2		S: A K J 9 7 5 3
H: K Q T 9		H: 8 2
D: K J 7 3		D:
C: 7 2		C: 9 8 4 3
	SOUTH (10)	
	S: T	
	H: J 6 5 4 3	
	D: A T 9 4 2	
	C: K Q	

Bidding

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1 D	PASS	3 S	PASS
4 S	PASS	PASS	PASS

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, why don't we begin by talking about WEST's opening bid?

Esther: Well, my *dandruff-ridden dufus*, this is indeed a somewhat challenging bidding decision! WEST holds **11** HCPs, and the sum of his HCPs and the number of cards in his longest 2 suits equals $11 + 8 = 19$. 19 does not equal 20, so the requirements of Bergen's "**Rule of 20**" are not fully met. But close! The "**Rule of 20**" says you *can* and *should* open in any seat with a Suit contract bid if the sum of (1) you HCPs and (2) the number of cards in your longest **2** Suits is **20** or more! So, I think this 1**D** opening bid by WEST is *reasonable*.

Bruce: OK. So in this actual competition, NORTH Passed. Do you agree with this decision?

Esther: Well, my *simpering simpleton*, I do not! NORTH has **11** HCPs, and **9** cards in his longest **2** suits, and thus does meet the requirements of the "**Rule of 20**"! If this Hand is good enough to open with a bid, it is good enough to Overcall! With this holding, I would overcall **2C**.

Bruce: OK. Well, what do you think of WEST's jump **3S** response bid?

Esther: Well, I love it! WEST holds **7** Spades, including **3** of the top **4** Spades, and has a void to go along with trump length.

Bruce: OK. Do you agree with WEST then taking the contract to **4S**?

Esther: Well, of course, Bruce! Even if EAST holds a "weak" Hand, WEST knows that (1) EAST holds 7 Spades and (2) at least **2** of the top 3, **3** of the top 5, and probably even more in Spades. And where you hold 7 cards in 1 suit, the probability of a void or singleton goes up! WEST holds Q,x,x in Spades, so WEST presumes that E/W hold **10** Spades including all the top honors! The "**Law of Total Tricks**" suggests that, pretty much regardless of HCPs, about 85% or more of the time, EAST can make a **4S** contract, since $10 - 6 = 4!$

Bruce: Well, if it is of any interest to you, in this actual competition 10 (and only 10) out of 37 E/W pairs bid, and all made, **4S** on this Board, and they each got a Board Percentage on Board **#8** of ~83%!

"Points are for No Trump"

Saying by Yoda

Principle: In suit contracts, **distributions** can be **extremely important**, and indeed may be the most important feature of Hands. And suit contracts (e.g., 4 of a Major, a small Slam) can be made given certain distributions with substantially fewer High Card Points (HCPs) than many commonly accepted guidelines suggest: **26+** for game in a Major, **29+** for game in a Minor, **33+** for small Slam.

The "Moonraker" Hand

In the movie "Moonraker," James Bond, British Secret Service agent "007", is playing bridge with his partner, NORTH, "M", the head of the Secret Service, against the villain, Sir Hugo Drax. Drax is known to be cheating, so Bond punishes Drax by himself "fixing" the deck ahead of game time:

Dealer: SOUTH, Bond

"M": 0 HCPs

S: T987

H: 6543

D:

C: 76532

Meyer: 1 HCP

S: 65432

H: T9872

D: JT9

C:

Drax: 31 HCPs

S: AKQJ

H: AKQJ

D: AK

C: KJ9

Bond: 8 HCPs

S:

H:

D: Q8765432

C: AQT84

North / South: 8 HCPs

East / West: 32 HCPs

Bidding:

Bond: 7C

WEST: PASS

"M": PASS

Drax: DOUBLE

Bond: REDOUBLE

WEST: PASS

"M": PASS

Drax: PASS

Variation on the Situation

Variation: Pretend that "M", not Bond, "stacked" the deck, that Bond opened 1C, and "M" jumped immediately to 7C. Think about what Bond would do if Sir Hugo Drax did not Double; Bond in playing would have to be guided solely by statistical probabilities, because when Opponents do not bid, they give you as Declarer no additional information. But if Drax does indeed Double, does this mean he (1) has a lot of Points, but maybe no trump, or (2) a lot of the trump cards, or (3) both a lot of points and a lot of the trump cards???

Possible Trump Holdings by Bond's Opponents Known by Bond Once the Dummy Goes Down

Bond's	Fewest Possible	Bond's	Probability
LHO	Club Losses	Play	
KJ9	2		11%
J	1		13%
K9	1		13%
9	1		13%
KJ	1		13%
K	0	1. A, then Q	13%
J9	0	1. A, then Q	13%
None	0	2. Go to the Board	11%
		By trumping, small	
		Clubs to himself,	100%
		Trump one card	
		Higher than Drax	

Assuming that Drax had not Doubled, Bond knows that he has a 26% (13% + 13%) probability of making his contract if he selects strategy #1: play the Ace of Clubs, and then the Queen of Clubs. Of course, once he plays the Ace of Clubs, his fate is sealed, for good or bad.

But maybe, if Drax Doubled, Bond will select Strategy #2, and go to the Board repeatedly by trumping on the Board Diamonds led from his Hand, then leading small Clubs back to his Hand, overtaking Drax's Clubs by the next highest Club in his own Hand. If Drax had not Doubled, Bond might

not do this, but if Drax did Double, Bond might think this is the best line of play!

Some Probability Principles

1. When you and Dummy hold a suit missing an **even number** of cards, there is **less than a 50% probability** of an **even** split (e.g., 1-1, or 2-2, or 3-3), and a **greater than 50% probability** of an **almost-even-but-not-even** split e.g., 2-1, or 1-2).
2. When you and Dummy hold a suit missing an **odd number** of cards, there is **greatest and greater than 50% probability** of a **near-even** split (e.g., 2-1, 1-2, 3-2, 2-3).
3. The more cards there are out, the smaller is the probability of one Opponent holding a void while the other Opponent holds all the remaining missing cards.