"The Bridge Bidding '*Rule of 2, 3, 4*' to Guide Making a Pre-empt Bid and the Play of a Pre-empt 4H Contract as Declarer Thereafter"

Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen[1]

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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 **"The Bridge Bidding '*Rule of 2, 3, 4*' to Guide Making a Pre-empt Bid and the Play of a Pre-empt 4H Contract as Declarer Thereafter"**. Well, Esther, thank you for talking to 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, Est… err, I mean Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, sorry about that. Well, at the outset why don't you tell us where the ideas and example in today's lesson come from?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. The ideas and the bridge Board example in this "**Esther Bridge Dialogue Lesson**" come from a bridge newspaper column, "Logic Defies Mathematical Odds", written by Richard Pavlicek and published October 8, 1989.

Bruce: Errr, well… Err, I mean… Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, ummm… Well, before we delve into your fascinating topic

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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.

would you please first tell us a bit about this Richard Pavlicek fellow?

Esther: Well, Bruce, of course I am happy to address your question.

About **Richard Pavlicek**

Richard Pavlicek (1945-) has won **11** North American Bridge Championships, including a record-setting **3** straight wins in the Reisinger Board-a-Match Teams, 1982-84, and again in 1990. He won the 1973 inaugural Grand National Teams tournament and repeated a win there in 1997. He has written or co-authored several bridge books, including with co-author William S. Root their 1981 book, Modern Bridge Conventions. From 1984 until 1990 Pavlicek was the Bridge Columnist for the Fort Lauderdale News and Sun-Sentinel. Esther particularly likes the Bridge Simulation Studies presented on his bridge website:
https://www.rpbridge.net/rpsi.htm
and his re-posts of his newspaper bridge columns:
https://www.rpbridge.net/rpco.htm

Bruce: Errr, well… Err, I mean… Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, OK. Would you now present this "Real Deal" bridge Board played in a 1989 practice match in Florida?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I certainly want to help you:

Dealer: **SOUTH**
Vul: **BOTH**

	NORTH (**12**) **S:** A J T 8 6 **H:** 2 **D:** K 9 6 3 **C:** A 3 2	
WEST (**11**) **S:** 9 7 2 **H:** T 3 **D:** A J T 7 **C:** K Q J 5		EAST (**11**) **S:** K Q 5 **H:** A 6 **D:** Q 6 2 **C:** T 9 8 7 5
	SOUTH (**6**) **S:** 4 3 **H:** K Q J 9 8 7 5 4 **D:** 5 4 **C:** 4	

Bruce: Errr, well… Err, I mean… Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, oh, my, goodness, what did SOUTH bid at his **1st** turn to bid within the auction? *WHY?* Afterall, SOUTH holds *only* ***6*** *HCPs*. Can SOUTH possibly bid *anything* other than PASS?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. SOUTH was a sophisticated bridge player! He knew that in Suit contracts card counts and distribution are what really matter, not HCPs! This was reinforced by Marty Bergen in his award-winning bridge book, **Points Schmoints!**. This view is also in keeping with Larry Cohen's award-winning bridge book, To Bid or Not to Bid: The Law of Total Tricks. The "Law of Total Tricks" suggests that as a Declarer playing a Suit contract you can generally succeed in "making" your Suit contract if the contract is set *no higher* than the number of Trump cards your Partnership together hold – 6.

Indeed, to honor the importance of Trump card counts when playing Suit contracts a very famous Australian bridge player, bridge teacher, and bridge author, Ron Klinger, invented his Ron Klinger "**Suit Quality Test ('SQT') Score**"[2] which is computed by adding together (1) the number of Trump cards you hold and (2) the number of Trump Honors you hold (including the Ten, if you hold at least **1** Suit Honor higher than the 10). Suit contracts set no higher than the

[2] Within the "**Esther Bridge 'Pop' Quizzes**" see: "**"Several Bidding Conundrums and a *Centennial-Quiz* Tribute to** Ron Klinger **and His '*Suit Quality Test ('SQT') Score*'"**:

"**SQT Score**" – 6 will usually make. Here SOUTH's "**SQT Score**" is (1) **8** Heart cards plus (2) **3** Honors, or 8 + 3 = **11**. So SOUTH can probably "make" a Heart contract set no higher than 11 – 6 = **5**!

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, I know that there are many, many bridge "rules" that can be used to guide bridge bidding and play.[3] Is there a bridge "rule" that can help SOUTH decide what to bid on this bridge Board?

Esther: Well, Bruce, of course I will try to help you. Yes, you are correct that there is indeed a bridge "rule" that can help guide your bidding on this bridge Board! The relevant bridge "rule" is the "**Rule of 2, 3, 4**":
https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/RR bid.pdf

Rhoda Walsh (1933 -) is an American bridge player who resides in Los Angeles. She is an attorney. She has won **12** North American Bridge Championships and was Runner-up in **6** North American Bridge Championships. She is now currently inactive in curating her "Rhoda's Rules" bridge website:
https://rhodasrules.com
However, her website is still online and includes numerous "Rhoda's Rules". Rhoda's "Rule 74" notes that:

> "The Rule of 2, 3, 4 tells you precisely how high [you can bid]: Vul vs [opponents] nonvul: Bid *two* more tricks than you have. Equal vul: Bid *three* more tricks than you have. Nonvul vs [opponents] vul: Bid *four* more tricks than you have. **Note**: This useful Rule is applicable to all preemptive bidding **except** for Weak Two Bids, which have unique rules."

On this Board both N/S and E/W are Vulnerable and SOUTH can see **7** Tricks from his **8** Hearts which is "missing" the Heart Ace. Because 10 – 7 = **3** SOUTH's correct opening bid is 4**H**. And indeed, that is actually the contract that SOUTH set at the bridge table!

Bruce: Errr, well… Err, I mean… Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, on this Board WEST led his Club King thus "promising" the "touching" Club Queen. SOUTH "won" Trick **#1** with the NORTH Dummy's Club Ace. On Trick **#2** SOUTH led a "low" Trump Heart, EAST holding the Trump Ace "ducked", and SOUTH "won"

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[3] Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons" see: "**Some of the 40 or So Bridge Bidding/Play 'Rules'**":
https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/rules.pdf

with his Trump King. On Trick **#3** SOUTH led the Trump Heart Queen, WEST "followed", SOUTH discarded a "low" Spade from the NORTH Dummy, and EAST "won" with his Trump Heart Ace. Now E/W held **0** more Trump Hearts. On Trick **#4** EAST quite correctly returned a "low" Club and Declarer SOUTH ruffed from his own Hand.

On Trick **#5** Declarer SOUTH led his Spade 3 to the NORTH Dummy's Spade Jack and EAST "won" with the Spade Queen. On Trick **#6** EAST returned another Club and SOUTH ruffed a 2nd time. On Tricks **#7** and **#8** Declarer SOUTH "cashed" 2 more Trump Hearts "winners". After Trick **#8** N/S had "won" **6** Tricks and E/W had "won" **2** Tricks.

S: A J T 8 6
5 3
H: 2
2
D: K 9 6 3
8 7
C: **A** 3 2
1 6 4

WEST (**11**)
S: 9 7 2
8 5 7
H: T 3
3 2
D: A J T 7

C: K Q J 5
1 6 4

EAST (**11**)
S: K **Q** 5
5
H: **A** 6
3 2
D: Q 6 2

C: T 9 8 7 5
8 7 6 4 1

SOUTH (**6**)
S: 4 3
5
H: **K** Q J 9 **8 7 5 4**
2 3 **8 7 6 4**
D: 5 4

C: 4
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Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, on Trick **#9** what should Declarer SOUTH do?

1. Should SOUTH on Trick **#9** lead again to the NORTH Dummy's Spade Ten for a finesse assuming that WEST holds the Spade King? or
2. Should SOUTH on Trick **#9** lead a Diamond hoping that WEST holds the Diamond Ace and finesse by playing the NORTH Dummy's Diamond King if WEST "ducks"?

Esther: Well, Bruce, *mathematically* Choice **#2**, playing WEST as holding the Diamond Ace, seems *unlikely*. WEST has now played the Club King and "promised" the Club Queen. So, it seems that *mathematically* EAST is *more likely* to hold the "missing" Diamond Ace.

S: **A** J **T** 8 6
9 5 10 3
H: 2
2
D: **K** **9** 6 3
8 7
C: **A** 3 2
1 6 4

WEST (**11**)
S: 9 7 2
8 5 7
H: T 3
3 2
D: **A** **J** T 7
10 6
C: K **Q** J 5
1 9 4

EAST (**11**)
S: K **Q** 5
10 **5** 9
H: **A** 6
3 2
D: **Q** **6** **2**
C: T 9 8 7 5
8 7 6 4 1

SOUTH (**6**)
S: 4 3
9 5
H: **K** Q **J** **9** **8** **7** **5** **4**
2 3 **10** **8** **7** **6** **4**
D: **5** **4**
C: 4
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However, at this bridge table Declarer SOUTH played *logically* rather than *mathematically*. Declarer SOUTH reasoned that if WEST held the Spade King he likely would have led the Spade King on Trick **#1** rather than the Club King. Therefore, on Trick **#9** SOUTH led his own Spade 4 and "cashed" the NORTH Dummy's Spade Ace. On Trick **#10** SOUTH led the NORTH Dummy's Spade 8 and ruffed from his own Hand.

On Trick **#11** Declarer SOUTH led a "low" Diamond. No matter how WEST plays Declarer SOUTH will eventually "win" **10** Tricks and exactly "makes" his 4**H** contract!