

Rule of 11, Redux

Bruce Thompson

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The "**Rule of 11**" is the most important (#1) of the dozens of bridge "rules", each of which in fact are not really rules, but instead are guides to bidding or play. The "**Rule of 11**" is more important than other important bridge rules, such as (in order of importance) (#2) the Rule of 20, (#3) the Rule of 7, (#4) the Rule of 17, and (#5) the Rule of 15.

The Rule of 11 applies whenever the Player who is leading leads 4th from the top of a suit. The rule says that if you subtract the face value of the led card from 11, you obtain the number of cards in that suit in the other 3 hands that are higher than the face value of the led card. This rule lets the Defending, Non-Leading player, who can see the board once it then comes down, know how many higher cards in the led suit the Declarer holds. Of course, the rule also gives the Declarer the same important information! This rule applies against **BOTH No Trump and Suit contracts!!!**

Good partners almost always lead 4th from the top of their longest and strongest suits against a **NT** contract. The exception is that leading the top of "touching" honors in a long suit can also be a very good lead against a **NT** contract.

Today, we are very blessed to have access to Esmerelda Klinkentoasthousen, ACBL Quintuple Diamond Emerald Life Master, to discuss a related recent Board played in the Savannah Duplicate Bridge Club:

Board #2

99er Game, 3/30/21

Dealer: EAST

Vul: N/S

		NORTH (2)	
		S: J 9 8	
		H: 7 4	
		D: 5 4 2	
		C: J 9 6 4 2	
	WEST (12)		EAST (14)
	S: K Q 7 2		S: T 6 3
	H: K Q T 9 6		H: 8 3
	D: Q 7		D: A K J 8 3
	C: 5 3		C: A Q T
		SOUTH (12)	
		S: A 5 4	
		H: A J 5 2	
		D: T 9 6	
		C: K 8 7	

Bruce: All people playing EAST opened by bidding 1D. This clearly is the definitively correct bid with 14 HCPs and a 5-card suit, though in most partnerships EAST is only so far showing 4 Diamonds. Some people playing SOUTH then bid, DOUBLE. Essie, what do you think about this DOUBLE?

Esmerelda: \$^#@%%^\$%Y!!!!. Bruce, as I have previously told you: Do not under any circumstances ever called me "Essie." You may call me "Ms. Klinkentoasthousen", or "QDELM".

Bruce: Err, well, yes, QDELM, I am so sorry! Please, please, forgive me!

Esemereida: Yes, well, I will let it go (again) this time. But please don't ever do this again! Well, with respect to the DOUBLE, there are things I like, and things I don't like.

Regarding things I like, (1) SOUTH has a near opening hand. (2) SOUTH has TWO Aces! I count Aces as being worth between 4 and 6 HCPs, because they are the kings of cards, and control cards. (3) SOUTH, as SOUTH claims, denies (correctly) a 5-card suit.

Regarding things I do not like, (1) SOUTH has 3 Diamonds, rather than a Singleton or a Doubleton. (2) SOUTH only has 3 Spades. Most pairs play this DOUBLE as claiming

4-card suits in both Majors. But, NORTH does have 3 Spades, and the Ace. I might (possibly) lie if I held Ace, King or Ace, Queen of Spades with only 3. But, bottom line, I would not make this DOUBLE.

But the key, critical, and also crucial consideration is that you and your partner both know what your bids mean, even if your bidding agreements are stupid. ***The single greatest pitfall (and road to perdition) in bridge is partners not knowing what each other's bids promise.***

Bruce: Most E/W pairs played this Board as a 3NT contract. And SOUTH usually led the 2 of Hearts. I know that you consider this the correct lead. Focusing on what you as EAST know at various points in the play, (1) what do you know once the lead comes down, and (2) what do you know once the dummy comes down?

Esmerelda: Once the lead comes down, I know that Hearts is SOUTH's longest and strongest suit. If SOUTH Doubled, I would assume that SOUTH holds exactly 4 Hearts topped by honors. If SOUTH did not Double, I know that SOUTH does not hold "touching" honors in Hearts.

Once the dummy comes down, I know that E/W holds 6 Hearts, and that I as Declarer have 8 Hearts, 5 of which are on the Board. I know that I am missing the Ace, Jack, 7, 5, 4 and 2 of Hearts. I also know, even if SOUTH did not Double, that SOUTH holds 4 Hearts, and NORTH holds 2 Hearts.

Bruce: Say what???? How do you know even if SOUTH did not Double that SOUTH holds exactly 4 Hearts?

Esmerelda: Because SOUTH played the 2 of Hearts. If SOUTH did not hold "touching" Heart honors, but held 5 Hearts including the 2, SOUTH would have played 4th from the top of 5 Hearts, and not the 2! Similarly, for example, if E/W held the 2 of Hearts, and SOUTH led the 3 of Hearts, I would again know that SOUTH had exactly 4 Hearts.

Bruce: OK. Neat. But how does this information help EAST play the contract?

Esmerelda: When you are Declarer playing a suit contract, you need to formulate your line of play by counting "losers," and by then trying to get rid of losers, either by trumping them, or by sloughing them on other long-suit tricks that

you are winning. But when you are Declarer playing a **NT** contract, you need to count your winners, and try to promote additional winners in long suits, or through finesses. On this Board, Declarer can see 11 sure tricks: 1 Spade, 4 Hearts, 5 Diamonds, and 1 Club. And Declarer has 2 sure entries to the Board, with the Queen of Diamonds, and either the King or Queen of Spades.

Now, once the lead was made, I as Declarer EAST knew that SOUTH holds exactly 4 Hearts. And once NORTH covers Dummy's 6 with the 7 of Hearts, after NORTH saw the Dummy, I am going to assume that NORTH held neither the Jack nor the Ace of Hearts, or NORTH would have won the first trick, and led back a Heart to SOUTH. So, I assume that SOUTH holds after the first trick either Ace, Jack, 5, or Ace, Jack, 4.

Now, from the beginning of play, I as Declarer EAST knew that the contract would be made. But this ain't "party" bridge! This is duplicate!!! And if I can make 1 more trick that the other E/W pairs playing this Board, assuming the other E/W pairs are playing a **3NT** contract, our pair will get "top" Board Matchpoints. And if I make 1 less trick than the other E/W pairs playing this Board, our pair will get 0 Matchpoints, or a "bottom" Board.

So, I want milk these Hearts for everything they have to give. So, on the second trick I am going to lead the 3 of Hearts through SOUTH and toward the Dummy. If SOUTH plays the 5 or the Ace of Hearts, I will play Dummy's 9. If SOUTH played the 5 of Hearts, I will next lead the King or the Queen of Hearts to either knock out SOUTH's Ace of Hearts, or take a second Heart trick if SOUTH ducks.

Bruce: Wow! That "Rule of 11" is pretty important, and even magical!

Esmerelda: Ummm. Yes, Bruce. Glad you now more fully realize that.