

## **Esther Discusses "Aggressive, Offensive Bidding When (1) You Sit Third with 2 Passes to You, and (2) Using the 'Rule of 24' You Know Your LHO Holds a Giant or a Big Hand"**

**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, "**Aggressive, Offensive Bidding When (1) You Sit Third with 2 Passes to You, and (2) You Know Your LHO Holds a Giant or a Big Hand.**"<sup>1</sup> 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!

**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? As I have previously told you, they would encircle me routinely, **loudly** singing:

*Klinktoast-Houstonhousen,  
Klinktoast-Houstonhousen,  
What a stinky name!  
And you stink too,  
Klinktoast-Houstonhousen!*

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<sup>1</sup>The ideas of this "Esther Bridge Lessons" are from Marty Bergen's August, 2023 Bridge Bulletin article (p. 57), "Improve Your Bidding Judgment—Part 27". Although the article begins by saying, "After two passes, if you're in third or fourth [sic] seat...", clearly the article instead is solely about sitting in third seat with 2 Passes to you.

**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, first, are there any preliminary important principles that you initially would like to cover?

**Esther:** Of course, my *malodorous misanthrope*. At every, single step as the auction progresses you should incorporate what you have learned from the auction, and re-evaluate your hand at each step. You must think about (1) how many HCPs each hand likely holds, (2) where honors cards likely lie, and (3) in which suits certain hands hold length and honors cards. Now, when Partner is Dealer, and Passes, Partner doubtless does not have 13+ HCPs, or even simply meet the less restrictive HCP requirements of the "**Rule of 20.**"<sup>2</sup> Your RHO who also Passed. I find it useful to presume, as a rough estimate, that Partner and my RHO both hold **8** HCPs, for a total of **16** of the 40 HCPs across all 4 Hands. This means that my hand and my LHO's hand hold a total roughly **24** HCPs!

**Bruce:** Great, Esther. What next?

**Esther:** Well, certainly my *simpering simpleton*, add 16 to the number of HCPs your hand holds, and then use the "**Rule of 24**" and subtract that Total from 24 to estimate your LHO's HCPs. Now, if you sitting 3<sup>rd</sup> have 11 HCPs, or meet the requirements of the "**Rule of 20**", you can open the bidding, if you wish to do so.

**Bruce:** Well, let's say that your hand sitting 3<sup>rd</sup> with 2 Passes to you instead is quite weak. Does the *necessarily* mean that you should not bid???

**Esther:** Well, NO! NO! NO! NOOOOOO!!! Not, necessarily! Remember that there are several purposes for you bidding. First, you want to tell Partner, and unfortunately also Opponents, about your HCPs and card distributions. Second, you may wish to bid a Suit to "direct" your Partner what to lead to you upon Partner's first opportunity. Third, you may want to eat up "bidding space" to **interfere** with Opponents'

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<sup>2</sup> Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons", see: "Lesson #25: Some of the 40 or so Bridge Bidding/Play 'Rules'".

opportunities to communicate, and thus **interfere** with their abilities to find an optimal contract!

**Bruce:** Ummm. OK. Would you talk more about this third purpose: **interfere** with Opponents' opportunity to find their optimal contract?

**Esther:** Ok, sure. Let's say that sitting third after 2 Passes to you, you hold:

**S:** Q, J, T, 9, 7, 5, 4    **H:** 4, 2    **D:** 8, 5, 4    **C:** 5

Thus, you hold 3 HCPs, and with your Partner's assumed HCPs, your Partnership holds  $3 + 8 = 11$  HCPs.

**Bruce:** Surely, you must Pass. Right?

**Esther:** Well, according to the "**Rule of 24**", you expect that your **LHO** holds roughly  $24 - 3 = 21$  HCPs. Your Opponents *together* hold roughly  $21 + 8 = 29$  HCPs, and your LHO's most likely bid is either a strong **2C** or **2NT** opening. And, holding ~29 HCPs combined, your Opponents are *likely* to both bid, and make, a Game contract. You want to possibly **interfere** with your Opponents bidding and making a **3NT** or a 4-level Game in a Major. You could bid **2S**, even holding 6 Spades, but holding 7 Spades, you also could bid **3S**. Now *your LHO cannot open either 2C or 2NT!*

**Bruce:** That seems SO DANGEROUS, even if you, unlike Opponents, are not Vulnerable!

**Esther:** Well, it may make Partner mad, if your interference is unsuccessful, because many Partnerships require that a preempt bid must show holdings of either 2 or the top 3 cards, or 3 of the top 5 cards! But how likely do you think it is that your LHO holding ~21 HCPs is going to let you have the contract *without bidding*? Thus, Partner is also likely to have a say in setting the final contract!

**Bruce:** Well, YIKES! Are there any other considerations?

**Esther:** Well, yes, indeed. *First*, note that your Ron Klinger **SQT**<sup>3</sup> Score in Spades is  $7 + 3 = 10$ , which given that  $10 - 6 = 4$  supports a bid at either the 2 or even the 3 level. *Second*,

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<sup>3</sup> See: <https://csbnews.org/the-suit-quality-test-by-ron-klinger/>

it is important to notice the very positive influences of "touching" honors. *Third*, do not underestimate the import of length in the Trump Suit! Bernard Smith in his web article titled "Hand Evaluation"<sup>4</sup> discusses the results of computer simulations on the value of *Trump card length*, beyond the usual Hand Evaluation system Ace=4, King=3, *et cetera*:

But what is really impressive is the value of small trump cards. The 10 is worth 1.8 points, the 9 is worth 1.6 points, the 6-7-and 8 are worth each about 1.4 points, and even the 5, 4, 3 and 2 of trumps are worth about 1.3 points each... Small cards in other suits are worth nothing, and what is surprising is that a simple 2 of trumps can be worth almost as much as a King (1.4 points) when 'exposed' in a difficult to exploit side suit.

...Holding more trumps is worth more than holding honour cards in a 'useless' side suit. Holding a 5-4-3 in trumps is collectively worth about 4 points, and can be worth the same as an Ace and a badly placed King in side suits... We can start to see why experts are willing to play game with a 10-card major and a 20-20 break in points.

**Bruce:** WOW! I am completely blown away!!! However, this does indeed generally make some vague sense to me!

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, here is what Marty Bergen said in his recent Bridge Bulletin article, and everything he said here was **bolded** in his original article, as it well should have been:

The philosophy I recommend with weak hands in third seat is that with a shapely hand and the right vulnerability, **the weaker you are, the greater the need to make life difficult for your LHO.** [Underlining added]

**Bruce:** WOW! So do you have *another* example?

**Esther:** Well, a second example Bergen used was somewhat like the following holding for the person sitting third after 2 Passes:

**S:** 8,7,6,4,3    **H:** 4    **D:** A,K,J,T,8    **C:** J,3

Sitting first, I might open this hand **1D**, given the "Rule of 20", because I hold 9 HCPs plus 10 cards in my longest 2 suits = **19**. And if Partner sitting instead as Dealer opened **1C**, I probably would hold my nose and respond **1S** if my RHO

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<sup>4</sup> See: [https://www.bernardsmith.eu/cabinet\\_de\\_curiosites/bridge/hand\\_evaluation/](https://www.bernardsmith.eu/cabinet_de_curiosites/bridge/hand_evaluation/)

Passed. But what should I do sitting *third* after 2 Passes to me?

**Bruce:** I am not sure. Please, Esther, enlighten us!

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, sitting third, I would not open the bidding by booming out 1**S**! This would demand that Partner on his first lead must lead a Spade to my top Spade holding of an 8! I could open 1**D**, which would prompt Partner to lead a Diamond to my superior Diamond holdings, and might even result in my Partner being able to ruff a Diamond after a couple of Tricks!

**Bruce:** OK. So, you sitting third you would bid 1**D**?

**Esther:** Well, *NEGATORY*, Bruce-ster! I would open the bidding with a "weak" 2**D** preempt bid. Because I hold 4 of the 5 Top Honors, I will *add 1 card* to my Diamond card count. And, in addition to "demanding" a Diamond lead from Partner, I am much more greatly with this bid interfering with my LHO's bid. According to the "Rule of 24", given that I hold 9 HCPs, LHO holds about  $24 - 9 = 15$  HCPs. I would like to interfere with LHOs bidding 1**NT**, or some suit at the 1-level.

**Bruce:** OK. Well, enough of that Board. The bidding made me vomit! Do you by any chance have a third example?

**Esther:** Well, *of course*, Bruce! Let's say after 2 Passes to you, you hold:

**S:** 6,3,2    **H:** 8    **D:** T,9,7,4    **C:** K,Q,J,T,7

Based on the "Rule of 24", given that you hold 6 HCPs, then your LHO sitting fourth is likely to hold  $24 - 6 = 18$  HCPs! And your 2 Opponents *together* are likely to hold  $18 + 8 = 26$  HCPs! Don't you think it might be helpful to try to **interfere** with your Opponents' first and subsequent bidding, since they may be headed for a successful part score?<sup>5</sup>

**Bruce:** Well, OK, I suppose. So what would bid?

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<sup>5</sup> If you knew that you would be on lead against a **NT** contract, you might well simply want to shut up, and once play starts lead a Club honor to alert Partner that you can probably kill the Opponents using Clubs!

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, with only 6 HCPs you are *too weak* to bid 1C! And, of course, you are *way too weak* to open an "artificial" 2C bid showing a GIANT hand. You should open 3C!

**Bruce:** But, Esther, you only hold 5 Clubs. How can you open a preempt bid at the 3 level?

**Esther:** Well, as I noted previously, when you hold 4 of the 5 top Honors you can add 1 to your card count. Also note that your **SQT** Score is  $5 + 4 = 9$ , which suggests that a bid at the  $9 - 6 = 3$  level is reasonable!

**Bruce:** Simply, mind-blowing! But it does seem to make some sense. What, then is the "bottom line" on all of today's discussion?

**Esther:** Well, bidding is about, *first*, telling Partner, and unfortunately also Opponents, about your HCPs and card distributions. And *second*, bidding can be used to "direct" your Partner what to lead to you upon Partner's first opportunity. But, *third*, when you are sitting third after 2 Passes, bidding is also possibly to **interfere** with Opponents' opportunities to communicate, and thus **interfere** with their abilities to find an optimal contract!

**Bruce:** OK. So I guess the "Word of the Day" is: "sitting third after 2 Passes, **interfere**, if you reasonably can"?

**Esther:** **Bingo**, my *bodacious bobblehead*!