Bruce Discusses, "Bridge 'Distribution Safety Play': As Declarer Is It Better to Play the *Most Likely* Split as *Certain*, or to Play the *Least Likely* Split as *Possible*?"

Bruce Thompson

To return to the "Esther Bridge Lessons," CLICK:
https://esther-bridge.com/index.html

<u>Editor's Note</u>. Your intrepid usual Host, **Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen**[1], *inexplicably* is "on strike". So Bruce Thompson will try to fill Esther's *big* shoes in teaching this *important* "**Esther Bridge Lesson**". Esther will *presumably* in due course return to teach these lessons.

Today's "**Esther Bridge Lesson**" draws upon the *FREE* "**BBO Bridge Master**" website
https://www.bridgebase.com/v3/anon/bridgemaster
bridge Hand from Bridge Skill **Level 3**, Lesson **A-2**.[2] The "**BBO Bridge Master**" website is the best of the several *FREE* instructional bridge sites that allow you to practice your bridge play, because the "**BBO Bridge Master**" site (1) allows you to select your **Skill Level**, and (2) then allows you to play, and finally (3) then shows you *step-by-step* the best way to have played your Hand. Good stuff!

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[1] As noted in an article in the Winter/Spring, 2024 article in <u>The American Bridge Teachers' Association (ABTA) Journal</u>, **https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/ABTA_1_24.pdf**, Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen in fact is a hypothetical, and <u>not</u> a real person!.

[2] "**BBO Bridge Masters**" **Level 3**, Lesson **A-2** will <u>not</u> *always* deal the Opponents' Club "split" as 5-0, but it did several times repeatedly the first few times Esther played this lesson. And this 5-0 "split" can indeed occur in real bridge!

```
            NORTH (16)
        S: A 3 2
        H: A K
        D: 4 3
        C: K Q T 8 7 6


            SOUTH (18)
        S: K Q J
        H: J 9 8 7 6
        D: A K 2
        C: A 2
```

Contract: 6**NT**, SOUTH

Both EAST and WEST PASSed throughout the auction. WEST leads the Diamond Queen. The NORTH Dummy comes down.

Declarer SOUTH's Initial Tasks

Declarer SOUTH's initial tasks in a **NT** contract are to (1) count his "winning" Tricks <u>and</u> (2) count the number of cards that his Partnership holds in <u>all</u> 4 Suits. In *virtually all* **NT** contracts Declarer will want to *relentlessly* attack the *longest* Suit held within the Partnership so as to "promote" even the *lowliest cards* into "winners". It is *essential* to remember that in duplicate bridge, while making your contract is very important, making *every, single* possible Trick that you can take is *vitally important*!

Declarer SOUTH's Initial Task #1: Count "Winners"

I can see as "winners" **3** Spades, **2** Hearts, **2** Diamonds, and hopefully **5** or **6** Clubs. I must lose *no more* than **1** Club in order to make my contract!

Declarer SOUTH's Initial Task #2:
Count Partnership's Cards Across *All* 4 Suits

N/S hold 3 + 3 = **6** Spades, 5 + 2 = **7** Hearts, 3 + 2 = **5** Diamonds, and 2 + 6 = **8** Clubs. *I need to attack Clubs*!

"Split" Probabilities for Opponents Holding 5 Clubs

When there are an "*odd*" number of cards out the most likely "split" is a *nearly-equal* "split".[3] Specifically, when there are **5** cards "out" the "split" probabilities: 3-2: **67.8%**, 4-1: **28.3%**, and 5-0: **3.9%**. So it is very, *very likely* (**67.8%**) that the Club "split" on this Board is a 3-2 "split". Indeed, if the "split" is 3-2 North dummy then SOUTH as Declarer can win Trick **#1** with his Diamond Ace, and then lead his Declarer Club Ace on Trick **#2**, and then on Trick **#3** lead his Club 2 to NORTH Dummy Club King, and then "run" all the remaining Clubs.

Declarer SOUTH knows:
1. If the Clubs "split" **3-2** (**67.8%**) Declarer SOUTH will take all **13** Tricks.
2. If the Clubs "split" **4-1** (**28.3%**) and the Club Jack is in the Hand of the Opponent holding the singleton Declarer SOUTH will take all **13** Tricks.

But Declarer SOUTH can still make his contract even if the Clubs "split" **5-0** (**3.9%**) *iff* (if and only if) SOUTH makes a **"Distribution Safety Play"**!

Very, *Very Important* Declaration by Esther

As every intrepid bridge player knows, I hold 20+ million ACBL MasterPoints! I, knows, bridge! But before I became a World Famous ACBL Quintuple, Gold, Diamond, Emerald Bridge LifeMaster, until I retired I was a World Famous Distinguished Professor of Applied Statistics. I wrote hundreds of journal articles, and more than a dozen books. I lectured all over the world. I was invited for a week to teach <u>not</u> students, but faculty, at the University of Padua in Italy, where Professor Galilei[4] once taught. I taught or lectured in Greece (4 times), Italy (4 times), South Africa (3 times), New Zealand (2 times),

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[3] Within the "**Esther Bridge Lessons**" there are several posts that deal with bridge probabilities and statistics, including: "**Esther Lesson** #40: **A *Comprehensive* List of 8 *Different* Categories of Bridge Probabilities, and How These May Help Guide Your Bidding and Play**": **https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/8_probs.pdf**

[4] Some people may be more familiar with Professor Galilei under his *first* name, **Galileo**. The University of Padua still has **Galileo**'s desk and lectern, but they *refused* to let me use them during my time teaching there.

Australia, Brazil, France, Israel, Malaysia, and Singapore, and Spain. For quite a number of years I travelled to Great Britain, Scotland, and Ireland each *several times* each year. And my travels and studies ultimately taught me TWO things:

1. Even though I was an accomplished statistician, I hate math!, and
2. People *invariably, stubbornly,* and *incorrectly* **equate** a *highly probable* event with a *certain* event. And people *invariably, stubbornly, and incorrectly* **equate** a *highly probable* event with a *certain* event. They do this when they interpret election polls. And they do this when they are playing bridge, often to their *dire* determinant.

    As my close personal friend and fellow ACBL Quintuple, Gold, Diamond, Emerald Bridge LifeMaster, the late **Walt Disney**, always used to say, "Esther, miracles happen *every* day!!!" <u>Always</u> remember:

    Unlikely, even *VERY* unlikely, ≠ IMPOSSIBLE, and

    Likely, even *VERY* likely, ≠ CERTAIN!

    Unusual, even *very unusual,* things happen at bridge tables around the world *every* single minute, *every* hour, of *every* day.

The "Real Deal"

Sadly, on this Board with SOUTH playing a 6**NT** contract the "*very unlikely*" (**3.9%**), but nevertheless "*possible*", did indeed occur:

```
                        NORTH (16)
                   S: A 3 2

                                  Round card
                   H: A K         played in bold
                      2
                   D: 4 3         Winner underlined
                      1
                   C: K Q T 8 7 6
                          4 3
        WEST (5)                      EAST (1)
    S: 7 6 5 4                    S: T 9 8
          4 3
    H: Q T 3 2                    H: 5 4
          2                            2
    D: Q J T 9 8                  D: 7 6 5
       1                                 1
    C: --                         C: J 9 5 4 3
                                         4 3
                        SOUTH (18)
                   S: K Q J

                   H: J 9 8 7 6
                            2
                   D: A K 2
                      1
                   C: A 2
                      4 3
```

How Can Declarer SOUTH *Still* Make His 6NT Contract?

To guard against a "*very unlikely*", but nevertheless "*possible*" "split", Declarer SOUTH **must** perform a "**Distribution Safety Play**" that will protect his contract even if the "split" is "*disastrous*":

1. Declarer SOUTH wins Trick **#1** with his Diamond Ace.
2. Declarer SOUTH then crosses to the NORTH Dummy's Heart Ace by leading Declarer's Heart **6** and thus wins Trick **#2**.
3. On Trick **#3** Declarer SOUTH leads the NORTH Dummy Club **6**. EAST expecting Declarer SOUTH holds the Club Ace or that WEST possible holds the Club Ace "ducks" and Dummy NORTH

wins the Trick. Everyone now sees that WEST was initially void in Clubs, and the initial Club "split" was 5-0.

4. On Trick **#4** Declarer leads the NORTH Dummy's Club **7** toward South's Club Ace. At this point (1) N/S have take **4** Tricks and Defenders E/W have taken **0** Tricks, and (2) the Hands hold:

```
                        NORTH (16)
                   S: A 3 2
                   H: K
                   D: 4
                   C: K Q T 8
        WEST (5)                        EAST (1)
   S: 7 6                          S: T 9 8
   H: Q T 3                        H: 5
   D: J T 9 8                      D: 7 6
   C: --                           C: J 9 5
                        SOUTH (18)
                   S: K Q J
                   H: J 9 8 7
                   D: K 2
                   C: --
```

5. On Trick **#5** Declarer can lead his Spade Jack toward the NORTH Dummy's Spade Ace.

6. On Trick **#6** Declarer can play Dummy NORTH's Club **Ten**, and if EAST "ducks" Declarer SOUTH will take **13** Tricks. If WEST "covers" by playing his Club **Jack** and wins **1** Trick, then Declarer SOUTH has all the Suits "stopped" and will take *all* the remaining Tricks and *exactly* make his 6**NT** contract. Certainly winning Tricks are **bolded** and underlined.

Conclusion: Expect the *most likely*, but be *safe* and play for the *least likely*, when there is no downside for making a "**Distribution Safety Play**".

Play It Yourself. Go to the *FREE* "**BBO Bridge Master**" website:
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CLICK "Bridge Skill **Level 3**", then CLICK "Lesson **A-2**".
"**BBO Bridge Masters**" Level 3, Lesson **A-2** will not *always* deal the Opponents' Club "split" as 5-0, but it did several times repeatedly the first few times Esther played this lesson. And this 5-0 "split" can indeed occur in real bridge!