

## Esther Discusses "How and When on Defense to Show Partner Your Suit Lead Preference"

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 through **how on defense you can show Partner your Suit Lead Preference**. 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 encircleme routinely, **loudly** singing:

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

**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, let's discuss what Partners on defense can communicate to each other.

**Esther:** Well, my malodorous misanthrope, first, you can tell your Partner on defense, by what you play on your Partner's lead, **Attitude:** "Partner, I like this suit, please keep leading it!", or "Partner, I do not like this suit, and as far as I personally am concerned, please don't lead it again!" Showing Partner "Attitude" while playing on Defense is usually your *highest priority*. Second, you can tell Partner, **Card Count:** "Partner, I now hold an odd number of this suit," or "Partner, I now hold an even number of this suit." Showing Partner Card Count can be particularly important when playing against Opponents' **NT** contracts. Third, you can tell Partner your **Suit Lead Preference**, which says, "Partner, if you get in the lead, please lead suit **X** back to me." Communicating to Partner while on Defense your **Suit Lead Preference** is especially important if you did not bid during the auction, and thus you have not communicated **Suit Lead Preference** by bidding. Of course, Partner will also suspect that you may have a **Suit Lead Preference** for a suit not bid by the Opponents during the auction!

**Bruce:** OK. How, then, can Partner communicate to Partner **Suit Lead Preference**?

**Esther:** Well, my simpering simpleton, a *simple* way to communicate to Partner your Suit Lead Preference is via **your first sluff when you did not bid during the auction**, and you sluff a suit not bid by the Opponents. Sometimes in some Partnerships this says, "Partner, please lead this suit back to me if you get in the lead." Of course, at other times this instead says, "Partner, I gotta dump something, and I got nothing, and this don't mean anything!"

**Bruce:** Well, OK, Ms. Klink..., errr, I mean, Esther. Is there anyway for Partner to suss out which **Suit Lead Preference** message you are sending???

**Esther:** Well, when the Opponents know that the contract has been set at a lower *level, non-game level*, then it is more likely that you hold honors, even when you didn't bid!!!

So, your first sluff in this situation is then more likely to be showing **Suit Lead Preference!** Or maybe not. The *ambiguity of "Signals" when you are on defense is exactly what makes Defense **so hard!!!***

**Bruce:** OK. Is there any other way on Defense to show Partner **Suit Lead Preference?**

**Esther:** Well, of course!!! Let's think through the bidding and initial play of the following Board! For our present focus we will *ignore* the question of whether EAST should have overcalled by bidding **2S**, especially when a special "DOUBLE over **1NT**" bid seems attractive.<sup>1</sup>

**Board #3 (with some modifications)**

**Knoxville 299er 5/11/23**

You and Partner sitting **N/S**

Dealer: **SOUTH**

	NORTH (5)	
	<b>S:</b> 8 2	
	<b>H:</b> T 8 2	
	<b>D:</b> J 8 7 5 4	
	<b>C:</b> A 9 5	
WEST (5)		EAST (15)
<b>S:</b> Q 9 5 4 3		<b>S:</b> A J 7 6
<b>H:</b> J 9 6 3		<b>H:</b> A K 4
<b>D:</b> Q		<b>D:</b> T 2
<b>C:</b> 6 4 2		<b>C:</b> K T 7 3
	SOUTH (15)	
	<b>S:</b> K T	
	<b>H:</b> Q 7 5	
	<b>D:</b> A K 9 6 3	
	<b>C:</b> Q J 8	

**Bidding**

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
<b>1NT</b>	PASS	PASS	<b>2S</b>
PASS	PASS	PASS	PASS

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<sup>1</sup> Within the "Esther Bridge Conventions Lessons" website see "Lesson #14: 7 'Not-for-Penalty' Doubles": <https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/double.pdf>

**Bruce:** OK. On this Board, SOUTH led the Ace of Diamonds, thus promising the King of Diamonds, and **DEMANDING** that NORTH immediately answers the question, "Can you take the **THIRD** Diamond trick, either by playing a winning Queen, or by trumping???"

**Esther:** Excellent! This is exactly the lead I would make! If the Dummy held 3 Diamonds, because I play "Inverted Attitude", or "Upside-Down Attitude," "Low = YES", and "Hi = NO", if I play a low Diamond on SOUTH's Ace of Diamonds lead, that says to Partner, "I promise I can take the 3<sup>rd</sup> Diamond Trick!" Of course, once the Dummy comes down with a singleton Queen of Diamonds, NORTH will not answer SOUTH's question about the 3<sup>rd</sup> Trick, because obviously Dummy will win the next several Diamond Tricks after the first Diamond Trick!

**Bruce:** So, how then should NORTH "signal" to SOUTH?

**Esther:** Well, first, signaling "Attitude" is no longer useful. Second, "signaling" "Card Count" (odd versus even) isn't useful once Dummy holds a Diamond void after the first Diamond Trick. That leaves "signaling" **Suit Lead Preference!**

**Bruce:** So, how does this work?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, a Partner signals "Suit Preference" *only* when it is *clear* to Partner that the "signal" is not for "attitude" nor for "count". There are mainly **3 situations** in which this occurs:

1. Partner leads and the Dummy comes down and has a void or a singleton in the Suit led by Partner. Clearly, you are not going to be "signaling" whether or not you "like" the led Suit!
2. You have already "signaled" "attitude" on Partner's 1<sup>st</sup> lead of the Suit, so now you want to "signal" "Suit preference" the 2<sup>nd</sup> time Partner leads the Suit. For example, on Trick **#1** Partner leads the Diamond Ace and you "signal" "attitude" to tell Partner whether you can "win" Trick **#3** if Partner leads a Diamond either by (1) playing the Diamond Queen or (2) ruffing. On Trick **#2** you "signal" Partner what

Suit you prefer him to lead when he has the opportunity.

3. You are clearly giving Partner a ruff. The card you lead for Partner to ruff tell Partner, "Partner, after you ruff my card please then lead back to me my preferred Suit!"

**Bruce:** OK, so now you have told us **when** to "signal" "Suit preference". Please now tell us **how** to "signal" "Suit preference"!

**Esther:** Well, let's say N/S are defending against a 2S contract by E/W. Against suit contracts Defenders never "signal" a preference for a Trump lead, because in theory the Opponents hold (1) several top honors in Trump, and (2) greater length in the Trump suit. And after the Dummy comes down with the Diamond singleton, SOUTH knows that NORTH does not prefer more Diamond leads! Clearly, if NORTH has a **Suit Lead Preference**, only *either* NORTH has a preference for Clubs, or a preference for a Heart lead!

**Bruce:** How can NORTH show this, Esther?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, if NORTH plays a **low** Diamond on SOUTH's Ace lead, that says, "Partner, please lead the **lower** of the 2 suits, Clubs and Hearts: Clubs!!!!" If instead NORTH played a **high** Diamond on SOUTH's Ace lead, that says, "Partner, please lead the **higher** of the 2 suits, Clubs and Hearts: Hearts!!!!"

**Bruce:** Wow, Esther, you are truly AMAZING!!!

**Esther:** Well, yes, I know, Bruce.