

Esther Discusses "The 'Art' of (Correctly) Drawing Trump"

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 "The 'Art' of (Correctly) Drawing Trump". 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. Well, in any case, I thought it might be interesting to discuss the bidding and the play of the following Board:

Dealer: **NORTH**

Vul: **NONE**

NORTH (14)

S: K 7 4

H: A Q 9 8 4

D: A

C: J T 9 2

WEST (7)

S: J 9 3 2

H: J 7 6 2

D: J 8 4

C: A 8

EAST (7)

S: Q T 8 5

H: 3

D: K Q 5 3 2

C: 6 5 3

SOUTH (12)

S: A 6

H: K T 5

D: T 9 7 6

C: K Q 7 4

Bidding

NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	WEST
1H	PASS	3H	PASS
4H	PASS	PASS	PASS

Bruce: OK, Esther. Obviously NORTH, because N/S are playing 1NT as an opening bid as showing 15-18 HCPs, and no void or singleton, correctly opened 1H. First, do you agree with SOUTH as "Captain" responding 3H?

Esther: Well, my *gracious giver*, 2C, if N/S were playing the most important bridge convention, "2 Over 1"¹, sitting SOUTH I would probably respond 2C, even holding only 12 HCPs, showing 4+ Clubs and roughly opening HCPs, and saying nothing about Heart support, and "asking" NORTH to show 6 Hearts, if he indeed holds 6+ Hearts. And if N/S were playing "Jacoby 2NT"², another very important convention, if SOUTH responds 3H, NORTH would know that SOUTH holds HCPs, but not 4 Hearts, because by not bidding Jacoby 2NT! SOUTH denied holding (1) 4+ Hearts and (2) ~13 HCPs. And I think that a 2H response is too weak, and might get passed by NORTH, and N/S holding ~13 + 12 = ~25 HCPs and 8+ Heart Trump cards, probably belong in a Game contract. So, in summary, yes, I believe that SOUTH's 3H response is appropriate.

Bruce: Errr, well, Esther... Are you actually being nice to me?

Esther: Well, my *inquisitive interlocutor*, of course I am being "nice" to you! Why wouldn't I be "nice" to you?

Bruce: Well, OK, Ms. Klink..., errr, I mean, Esther. The bidding continues, and NORTH sets the contract at 4H. Do you agree with NORTH's 2nd bid?

Esther: Well, Bruce, NORTH would see SOUTH's response of 3H as very strong, and holding a big Hand, NORTH might then ask for Aces or "key cards". But here, if sitting NORTH I would probably consider the very important bridge "Rule", the

¹ Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons", see: "Conventions #1: '2 Over 1' ('2/1')".

² Conventions #1: 'Jacoby 2NT'".

"Rule of 5"³. Normally I use the "Rule of 5" primarily as Opener when I open 1H or 1S, and Responder gives me a "constructive" raise showing 8-10 HCPs and 3-card support, to decide whether as Opener to then PASS, or bid 4H or 4S. On this Board, sitting NORTH, I am missing the Spade A, Q = 2, the Trump Heart Queen = 1, 0 Diamonds, since I hold the Diamond Ace singleton, and the Club A, K, Q = 3. So, 2 + 1 + 0 + 3 = 6. When my Total equals <=5, bid Game! When my Total equals >=7, PASS!!! When my Total equals exactly 6, make a judgment! Of course, you should **always** "make a judgment"! But in this case holding an Ace singleton paired with 5 Trump Hearts makes the decision to set the final contract at 4H fairly straightforward.

Bruce: OK. Well, on lead EAST leads his Diamond King, promising WEST that he holds the Diamond Queen, and hoping that WEST holds the Diamond Ace, and E/W can take 3 Diamond Tricks "off the top", or that in the alternative WEST will know to later lead a Diamond toward my promised Diamond Queen. The SOUTH Dummy comes down. Declarer NORTH sees that, as expected, N/S holds 5 + 3 = 8 Trump Hearts. NORTH wins Trick #1 with his singleton Diamond Ace. What should NORTH's initial "Line of Play" be?

Esther: Well, my *handsome hombre*, in formulating my initial "Line of Play", I first look to see whether there are any ruffing opportunities in Dummy that I need to exploit before I begin to "draw" Trump. Ruffing in Declarer's Hand can provide "transportation", but will not add **any** "new" Tricks to my result. But ruffing in Dummy, if Dummy is "short" Trump cards, will "add" new Tricks, and I will want to "spend" Dummy Trump cards before I begin to "draw Trump", assuming it is "early" in play, and Opponents are unlikely to themselves start ruffing, so that later I may be able to capture Opponents' Trump cards 1-for-2 rather than 2-for-2. That is not the situation on this Board!

Bruce: OK, Esther. What is the significance, if any, of there being 5 Trump cards "out"?

³ Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons", see, for example: "Lesson #7: The 'Rule of 5'."

Esther: Well, my beaudacious beau, what is significant is that there is an "odd" number⁴ of Trump cards out. When there are 5 cards out, the probability of a 3-2 "split" (67.8%) is greater than the probability of a 4-1 "split" (28.4%). So, a 3-2 "split" is $67.8\% / 28.4\% = 2.4$ times more likely than a 4-1 "split". Of course, it must also be remembered that 28.4% is less than 67.8%, but 28.4% is **certainly not 0%**!

For comparison, if there were 4 Trump cards "out", the probability of an *unequal* 3-1 "split" would be 49.7%, while the probability of an *equal* 2-2 "split" would be 40.7%. And if there were 6 Trump cards "out", the probability of an *unequal* 4-2 "split" would be 48.4%, while the probability of an *equal* 3-3 "split" would be 35.5%.

Bruce: OK. Well, Esther, on this Board N/S hold the "top" 3 Heart Trump cards, the A,K,Q. Do you think the Declarer NORTH playing his Heart Ace, then his Heart Queen, and then finally SOUTH Dummy's Heart King, is a good "Line of Play"?

Esther: Well, Bruce, NO! No, no no, no, NO! **NOOOOOOOO!!!** As a general rule, playing "High to Low" is exceedingly stupid. Of course, it does depend on both (1) *how many Trump cards* are "out", and (2) *whether you do or do not hold all* the "top" Trump Honors. For example, in the following examples, it will be irrelevant whether you "draw Trump" by playing "Low to High" or "High to Low":

1. You in your Hand alone hold **all 13** cards in a given Trump Suit⁵, or your Partnership together holds **all 13** cards in a given Trump Suit.
2. Your Partnership holds **12** Trump cards, and the Ace.
3. Your Partnership holds **11** Trump cards, including the A,K.
4. Your Partnership holds **10** Trump cards, including the A,K,Q.

⁴ Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons", see the "Very Important Bridge Probabilities" Section.

⁵ If you play 26 Boards in competitions twice per week, you will draw a Hand containing **all 13** cards in a single Suit on average once every 60,000 years, but it could happen tomorrow, or in 180,000 years. See the "Very Important Bridge Probabilities" Section of the "Esther Bridge Lessons", or: <https://www.bridgewebs.com/taverham/Probabilities.pdf>

However, in general, as a Declarer you want to draw Trump cards "Low to High" whenever you hold ~8+ Trump cards, unless the ~5 Trump cards you are missing are the lowest ~5 cards in the Trump Suit. As a **CARDINAL PRINCIPLE OF BRIDGE:**

Draw Trump cards "Low to High" to give the Opponents every possible opportunity to play their *intermediate* Trump cards, thus "promoting" your own remaining *intermediate* Trump cards into "winners"!

Bruce: Very well, Esther. Point well taken. On the current Board, after your win in your Hand as Declarer with your Diamond Ace, what would your initial "Line of Play" plan be?

Esther: Well, Bruce, on this Board the SOUTH Dummy does not have favorable opportunities to ruff. Unfortunately, there also is not a "long" side Suit that you can run, so there also is no special urgency to immediately "draw" Trump. But, on the other Hand, it is best to go ahead and "do the work", and avoid nasty surprises. For example, if there is an unfavorable "split", it is best to discover this promptly, and then deal with the situation.

On this Board, on Trick #2 I would lead a "low" Heart from Declarer's Hand toward the SOUTH Dummy's King. Both Opponents will play "low" Hearts, the Heart 2 and the Heart 3. No news here regarding this unlikely 4-1 Trump "split". But when on Trick #3, Declarer leads a "low" Heart Trump from the SOUTH Dummy, then the bad news about EAST's Heart Trump singleton becomes evident.

But Declarer NORTH has numerous entries back to Dummy, so that the Declarer can repeatedly lead "low" Hearts from Dummy through WEST, and then "barely" cover with intermediate Trump Hearts in Declarer's Hand, and economically "draw" WEST's Trump Hearts.