

## **Esther Discusses *Playing Trump Cards as Declarer***

**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 **playing trump cards as Declarer**. Specifically, Esther will talk us through both (1) when to play trump cards, either to pull trump, or to trump non-trump suits, and (2) from where to play trump cards. Esther, thanks for taking 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 Esther! Always, **ALWAYS, ALWAYS** instead call me, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen!

**Bruce:** Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, in any case, thank you for talking to us today. Here is the Board and the bidding that I would like to ask you about today:

## Board

Dealer: EAST

Vul: NONE

		NORTH (13)		
		<b>S:</b> 8		
		<b>H:</b> 9 6		
		<b>D:</b> A K Q 8 5 2		
		<b>C:</b> A 8 7 6		
WEST (1)			EAST (12)	
<b>S:</b> T 3			<b>S:</b> K J 9 5 2	
<b>H:</b> J 8 7 4 2			<b>H:</b> K Q	
<b>D:</b> 7 6 3			<b>D:</b> T 4	
<b>C:</b> T 5 3			<b>C:</b> Q J 9 4	
		SOUTH (14)		
		<b>S:</b> A Q 7 6 4		
		<b>H:</b> A T 5 3		
		<b>D:</b> J 9		
		<b>C:</b> K 2		

## Bidding

EAST	SOUTH	WEST	NORTH
1 <b>S</b>	PASS	PASS	2 <b>D</b>
2 <b>S</b>	3 <b>H</b>	PASS	PASS
PASS			

**Bruce:** Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, why don't you quickly talk us through your views on the bidding, even though that is not our primary focus today? No need to comment about WEST's repeated PASSes, given WEST holding only 1 HCP!

**Esther:** OK, my malodorous misanthrope. **First**, I agree with EAST's open of 1**S**. EAST has (1) 12 HCPs, (2) and the sum of EAST's 12 HCPs and 9 cards in EAST's longest 2 suits equals 21, which obviously is >20. **Second**, I agree with SOUTH's PASS, even though SOUTH holds (1) 14 HCPs, (2) 2 Aces, and (3) 2 doubletons. SOUTH obviously doesn't want to play a Spade contract with EAST holding 5 or more Spades, and with 2 doubletons SOUTH cannot bid No Trump, and with only 4 Hearts headed Ace, Ten, a Heart bid at the 2 level is unreasonable. Sometimes you just gotta PASS, and remember that you can also score points on defense!!!! And maybe WEST holds 3 Spades, and E/W will play a Spade contract against a 5-card trump stack with you

holding A,Q!!!! **Third**, I agree that NORTH should bid Diamonds, but I may disagree with NORTH's bid of 2**D**. With SOUTH having PASSEd, sitting NORTH, **not Vulnerable**, and holding (1) 13 HCPs, (2) 2 Aces, (3) 6 Diamonds, and (4) the top 3 Diamonds, I may instead bid 3**D**. I probably hold 5 Diamond winners and 1 Club winner, for a total of 6 "quick tricks", which is pretty close to 9 tricks. WEST doesn't have 3 Spades, and doesn't even have enough points to bid 1**NT**. So, probably SOUTH holds some points. And since NORTH holds only 1 Spade, probably SOUTH has Spades, and if E/W still wants to boom out a 3**S** contract, they may have been forced up into deep bad stuff. **Fourth**, I disagree with EAST then bidding 2**S**, because with WEST's PASS this bid claims 6 Spades over NORTH's 2**D** bid, and EAST don't got 6 Spades! **Fifth**, I probably disagree with SOUTH's 3**H** bid. SOUTH has points, but only 4 Hearts. Just because E/W aren't bidding Hearts does not guarantee that NORTH holds Hearts! Perhaps SOUTH's 3**H** bid is meant to say, "I have Hearts and Spades stopped, can we play 3**NT**? If not, rebid your Diamonds." But I am not sure that this message is clear, or that I would do this with only 4 Hearts.

**Bruce:** Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, let's now turn our attention to the "play of the hand", with a focus on playing trump. Let's henceforth ignore the fact that SOUTH has maneuvered into a 3-level contract holding only 6 trump cards in the 2 N/S hands!

**Esther:** Very well, my simpering simpleton.

**Bruce:** OK. On this Board WEST quite correctly lead the Spade 3 toward EAST's twice-bid Spade suit, because perhaps EAST can quickly take 2 tricks before SOUTH can pull trump, and then EAST can lead a Spade back to WEST so that WEST can trump in the third round. EAST played the Spade Jack, and SOUTH took the trick with the Queen. SOUTH then led Club 2 toward Dummy's Club Ace. Do you agree with this "line of play"?

**Esther:** Well, in point of fact, no I disagree with this "line of play". If I was going to play Clubs, I would instead play the Club King winner, then play the Club

2 toward Dummy's Club Ace, and then lead back a low Club for me as Declarer to trump.

**Bruce:** OK. Now on this actual Board, Declarer SOUTH took 5 tricks, ending up in his Hand, and in the first effort to draw trump on Trick 6 led the Ace of Hearts. Do you agree with this "line of play"?

**Esther:** No, I disagree. **First**, unless you hold 3 to 5 of the top cards in a suit, it is very, very, very important to ALWAYS ALWAYS ALWAYS lead "low to high," so that you can try to "kill" some of your opponents' potential winners. If I was going to start drawing trump, I might play my 3 of Hearts toward the Board. If WEST ducked the 9 of Hearts in Dummy, I would play the Heart 9, and otherwise I would play the Dummy Heart 6. But although drawing trump with trump losers by playing "a loser on a loser" may be smart, this particular "line of play" here is troubling!

**Bruce:** Why, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen?

**Esther:** Well, as a general situation (not necessarily on this Board), let's assume that the contract is "right-sided", meaning that Declarer holds more points than Dummy, and holds an equal number of trump cards as Dummy, or preferably more trump cards than Dummy. You must must must **think about drawing trump as "spending" trump cards in Dummy's and Declarer's hands to "capture" trump cards in the Opponents' hands.** Ideally, you would like to spend only 1 trump card to capture 2 of Opponents' trump cards, as would happen quickly if your trump split is 6-2, or 7-1, and very quickly if your trump split was 8-0 or 9-0!

**Bruce:** Well, OK. Anything else you need to think about with respect to trump cards in either Dummy or Declarer's hand?

**Esther:** Well, yes, my beaudacious bobblehead. It is VITALLY IMPORTANT for you to ALWAYS ALWAYS ALWAYS remember that **trumping non-trump suits using Declarer's trump, if the contract is "right-sided", gives Declarer ZERO new tricks,**

**because usually all of Declarer's trump tricks will take tricks either by drawing trump or by trumping non-trump suits.** But where Declarer *can create winners* is instead by trumping non-trump suits using Dummy's trump!!!

**Bruce:** Are you saying that Declarer should *never* trump using Declarer's trump cards????

**Esther:** No, I am not saying that! For example, Declarer may want to use Declarer's trump of cards led from Dummy for transportation purposes. Instead, I am just saying that *trumping using Declarer's trump cards should not be considered some coup that creates new winners.* Furthermore, I am also saying that *trumping from Dummy*, on the other hand, may well create more winning tricks, by conserving trump cards when possible, rather than spending 2 trump cards to capture 1 or 2 of Opponents' trump cards.

**Bruce:** So, what does all this imply about a better "line of play" on this Board?

**Esther:** Think about what SOUTH knows about WEST's Spade holding. Given that EAST opened 1S, EAST has at least 5 Spades. SOUTH holds 5 Spades. The Dummy holds 1 Spade. So, WEST holds either 1 or 2 Spades. [EAST probably does not have 7 Spades, or EAST probably would have jumped higher on his Spade re-bid.] Therefore, on the second trick, in Declarer's hand Declarer should lead the Spade Ace, thus creating a Spade void on the Board. Then play a low Spade so that Dummy can trump. If WEST shows out of Spades, WEST will either have to go up with a trump higher than the Dummy's 9 of trump, or allow the Dummy's small Heart trump to win the trick. If WEST has a Spade left at this point, the Declarer can win the trick with the Dummy's smaller Heart trump. And, if SOUTH wants to push things, then play the Club 6 toward Declarer's Club King, and then play another low Spade back toward Dummy's remaining last Heart trump! Then SOUTH when further playing Heart trump cards is now playing 1 card to capture 2 of Opponents' Heart trump cards, even if that includes SOUTH playing losing trump cards

on losing tricks that nevertheless drop 2 of  
Opponents' trump cards!