

Esther Comments About Unblocking Long Suits Against No Trump Contracts

Bruce Thompson

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

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 finer, important points about **unblocking long suits when defending against NT contracts**. Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, 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 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? They would encircle me 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, today's discussion focuses on the following Board:

Board

499er

Dealer: EAST

Vul: NONE

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

Bidding

EAST: 1**D** SOUTH: 1**S** WEST: 3**NT** NORTH: PASS
EAST: PASS SOUTH: PASS

Bruce: Well, Esther, first, do you agree that both the first 2 bids are reasonable bids that you yourself would make?

Esther: Well, EAST holds 12 HCPs, plus more than meets the requirements of the "Rule of 20". So, yes, EAST must open. Because EAST holds 5-5 in the Minors, I would be inclined to instead bid 1**C**, to see if WEST bids Diamonds, or supports my Clubs. But EAST's bid is not unreasonable. And I would make the same overcall bid made by SOUTH. SOUTH has an opening hand, and 5 of the King of Suits: Spades. So, I would make the same bid, even though SOUTH only holds the J,T,x,x,x of Spades. But SOUTH also has some beef in holding the sequence 8,7,6, as opposed to 3 small Spades.

Bruce: OK, so do you agree with WEST's 3NT response bid?

Esther: Well, I think WEST's bid is extremely gutsy, and possibly reckless. WEST knows that E/W may hold only 11-13 HCPs in Opener's hand plus ~12 HCPs in Responder's hand, for a possible total of 23-25 HCPs. And we must remember that, as Yoda teaches, "Points are for No Trump." This bid seems to be really pushing it. And while WEST does have the Spade Ace stopper, because SOUTH's bid 1S shows 5+ Spades and enough points to overcall, I would say that WEST has more brass than I do. And, as you may be aware, because I am a Quintuple Gold Emerald Life Master (20 Million+ ACBL MasterPoints), I have quite a lot of brass!

Bruce: Well, let's accept the contract for what it is, and talk about the defense by N/S. You know they say that, "Defense is the hardest part of bridge!"

Esther: Yes, my bodacious bobblehead. *Defense is the hardest part of bridge.* Defense is harder, even for experienced players such as *moi*, than both (1) bidding and (2) the play of the hand as Declarer.

Bruce: Now NORTH is on lead. NORTH actually led the Spade 3. Do you agree with this lead?

Esther: Well, of course NORTH must lead a Spade having "listened to the auction." Think about what NORTH knows that *no one else* knows. NORTH knows that (1) N/S hold 9+ of the 13 Spades, including Spade honors in both hands, and (2) SOUTH has points, and so SOUTH is EXTREMELY likely to get in later than to keep attacking Spades. So it looks like this contract should go down in flames. [Indeed, in this competition only 2 of 17 E/W pairs bid and made a 3NT contract!] But I probably would have been inclined to lead the Spade Queen, to try to knock out WEST's stopper. This way SOUTH can later "romp around" [a technical bridge term known only to Quintuple Gold Emerald Life Masters (20 Million+ ACBL MasterPoints!)] in Spade winners.

Bruce: Well, OK, once the Board comes down, what does NORTH now know?

Esther: Well, NORTH now knows that since the Spade King in in the Dummy, WEST must also hold the Spade Ace, and probably 3 Spades in total (albeit maybe 2). Of course, SOUTH will also now know that WEST holds the Spade Ace, but SOUTH will not yet know that N/S together hold 9 of the 13 Spades.

Bruce: OK. Let's talk through the line of play as it actually occurred in this competition. Here is what was played in the first few tricks, with the winning card underlined, and the trick count also summarized.

					<u>Tricks</u>	
					E/W	N/S
1	N: S 3	<u>E: S K</u>	S: S 6	W: S 3	1	0
2	E: C 3	S: C 8	<u>W: C Q</u>	N: C 5	2	0
3	W: D 5	N: D 6	E: D K	<u>S: D A</u>	2	1
4	<u>S: S 7</u>	W: S 5	N: S 4	E: D 2	2	2
5	S: S T	<u>W: S A</u>	N: ???			

Bruce: Now, in the actual competition, NORTH then played the Spade 9. Do you agree with this play?

Esther: Well, at this point, NORTH now knows something that SOUTH still does not know: E/W now holds 0 remaining Spades, while N/S now holds 2 remaining Spade tricks, both of which are **potential** winners. After Trick #5 is completed, NORTH will hold *1 remaining Spade* (either the Spade Queen or the Spade 9), while SOUTH will hold 2 Spades! Here are the hands, as play comes up to NORTH, for NORTH's decision about what to play on Trick #5, with all played cards presented in (parentheses):

NORTH (3)

S: Q? 9? (4) (3)

H: T 7 2

D: J 8 7 (6)

C: 6 (5)

WEST (12)

S: (A) (5) (3)

H: A 6 5 3

D: Q 8 (5)

C: (Q) 7 2

EAST (12)

S: (K)

H: Q 8

D: (K) T 4 3 (2)

C: K J T 4 (3)

SOUTH (13)

S: J (T) 8 (7) (6)

H: K J 9 4

D: (A)

C: A 9 (8)

Bruce: OK, so should NORTH play the Spade Queen, or the Spade 9, on WEST's Spade Ace winner?

Esther: Bruce, NORTH must play the Queen of Spades on WEST's Ace winner, in order to **unblock** both of SOUTH's remaining 2 Spade winners. Here is what could (and did) happen if NORTH instead plays the Spade 9:

					<u>Tricks</u>		
					E/W	N/S	
1	N: S 3	<u>E: S K</u>	S: S 6	W: S 3	1	0	???
2	E: C 3	S: C 8	<u>W: C Q</u>	N: C 5	2	0	
3	W: D 5	N: D 6	E: D K	<u>S: D A</u>	2	1	
4	<u>S: S 7</u>	W: S 5	E: S 4	E: D 2	2	2	???
5	S: S T	<u>W: S A</u>	N: S 9	E: D 3	3	2	
6	W: C 2	N: C 6	E: C T	<u>S: C A</u>	3	3	
7	S: S J	W: H 3	<u>N: S Q</u>	E: D 4	3	4	
8	N: H 2	E: H Q	S: H K	<u>W: H A</u>	4	4	
9	W: C 7	N: H 7	<u>E: C K</u>	S: C 9	5	4	
0	<u>E: C J</u>	S: H 4	W: H 5	N: D 7	6	4	
1	<u>E: C 4</u>	S: H 9	W: H 6	N: D 8	7	4	
2	E: D T	S: S 8	<u>W: D Q</u>	N: D J	8	4	
3	W: D 8	N: H T	<u>E: H 8</u>	S: H J	9	4	

Bruce: Yikes! DOUBLE Yikes!!! So would have happened if *instead NORTH had played the Spade Queen on WEST's Spade Ace winner?*

Esther: Well, let's see:

5	S: S T	<u>W: S A</u>	N: S Q	E: D 3	3	2
6	W: C 2	N: C 6	E: C T	<u>S: C A</u>	3	3
7	<u>S: S J</u>	W: H 3	N: S 9	<u>E: D 4</u>	3	4
8	<u>S: S 8</u>				3	5

Bruce: And so, because no other hand has any Spades left on Trick #8, this Spade 8 sets the contract!!!

Esther: Yes, indeed!

Bruce: OK. What's the bottom line, most important lesson?

Esther: Well, I am now going to tell you the single most important stuff I have ever said to you:

Duplicate bridge ultimately is about avoiding mistakes. Specifically, about avoiding *zero or low Boards*. Focus there even more than on making top Boards. If you do, you will do well. Instead, do everything you can to allow your opponents every opportunity to make mistakes. You're human; you will inevitably make some mistakes; but do the very best you can to minimize them. That is the *ultimate* recipe for success in duplicate bridge.