

**"Esther 'Pounds the Table'¹ About
Correct Hand Evaluation During an Auction
Involving *Suit Contract Bids!*"**

Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen²

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

Esther: Today, we are honored to have with us Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, Quintuple Gold Emerald Life Master (20 Million+ ACBL MasterPoints), who will discuss "**Correct Hand Evaluation During an Auction Involving *Suit Contract Bids!***"

Bruce: Well, Esther, thank you for talking to 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, very sorry about that, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen. Why don't we talk a bit about the bidding on the following Board? First, do you agree with WEST's opening bid of **1S**? Here WEST opened with only **11** HCPs. Is that really reasonable?

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¹ In investing circles, when an Investment Advisor "**pounds the table**", this means that the Advisor feels *QUITE STRONGLY* about the Investment Advisor's investment recommendations.

² As noted in an article in the Winter/Spring, 2024 article in The American Bridge Teachers' Association (ABTA) Journal, https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/ABTA_1_24.pdf, Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen in fact is a hypothetical, and not a real person! So this article was really, really written by **Bruce Thompson**.

499er 05/02/24 Brd #8

Dealer: WEST

Vul: NONE

NORTH (9)

S: --
H: Q T 4 2
D: A T 6 5 2
C: Q J 5 4

WEST (11)

S: A J 8 4 3
H: K 7 3
D: 9 3
C: K T 9

EAST (2)

S: Q T 9 6 5 2
H: 9 6
D: 8 7
C: 8 6 2

SOUTH (18)

S: K 7
H: A J 8 5
D: K Q J 4
C: A 7 3

Bidding

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1S	DBL	2S	4H
PASS	PASS	PASS	

Esther: Well, my *Simpering Simpleton*, yes indeed I would open this Hand as Dealer by bidding 1S. WEST holds 5 cards in the "King of Suits": Spades. Spades is the "King" Suit because a Pair bidding Spades can usually control the auction, and Spades as a Major yields higher bridge scores per Trick than a contract in a Minor. And because Suit contracts are not primarily about HCPs, Marty Bergen invented his highly-regarded "Rule of 20" which says, "If the sum of (1) your HCPs and (2) the number of cards in your longest 2 Suits equals 20, bid a Suit even if you hold fewer than 13 HCPs!" Here WEST holds 11 HCPs + 8 cards in his longest 2 Suits = 19, which ain't quite 20, but it's close! And WEST's Spade Ron Klinger "Suit Quality Test ('SQT') Score" = 5 cards + 2 Honors = 7, which will support a bid at the 7 - 6 = 1 level.

Bruce: Well, Esther, errrr, I mean, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, then do you agree with NORTH's bid of DOUBLE?

Esther: Well, my *Beaudacious Bupkus*, yes indeed, I also agree with this bid! Although NORTH holds only 9 HCPs, NORTH is

void in Spades, but has 4+ cards in all 3 of the other Suits. Plus all 3 other Suits have reasonable "**SQT Scores**". Here NORTH could Overcall 2**D**, because NORTH holds 5 Diamonds, but NORTH's "**SQT Score**" of 5 + 2 Honors = 7, because 7 - 6 = 1 and not 2, suggests that a Diamond Overcall may be dicey. Of course, on the other hand a 2**D** Overcall also is "lead directing" for Partner! But the bid of DOUBLE better describes NORTH's Hand, and promises SOUTH that NORTH holds exactly 4 cards in the unbid Major, Hearts. Remember: Partners should make 2 to 4 "**Not for Penalty**" **DOUBLES**³ in every competition!

Bruce: Errr, well Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, for the moment why don't we skip discussion of EAST's 2**S** response bid, and instead next talk about SOUTH's jumping to a 4**H** bid? Do you agree that SOUTH's 4**H** bid is the best bid for SOUTH to make?

Esther: Well, my *Dandruff-ridden Dufus*, yes indeed, I also agree with this bid! SOUTH knows that the Partnership holds an 8-card fit in Hearts, and "shortness" in the Opponents' Spade Suit. And SOUTH expects NORTH to hold roughly an opening Hand, and so expects a Game contract to be makeable.

Bruce: OK, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, now let's return to discussion of EAST's 2**S** response bid. Do you agree that after WEST's 1**S** opening bid EAST's 2**S** response bid is the best bid for EAST to make?

Esther: Well, Bruce, no, I certainly, definitely do not agree with EAST's 2**S** bid!!! Sitting EAST with my Hand I know that we as E/W together hold 5 + 6 = 11 Trump Spades if the contract is set in Spades. And I am simply beside myself that I have to keep telling you, over, and over, and over about the "**Law of Total Tricks**", which was popularized by Larry Cohen in his 1992 book: To Bid or Not to Bid: The LAW of Total Tricks, which won the Intermediate/Advanced Best Book Award from the American Bridge Teachers' Association (ABTA). The "LAW" says, "In a Suit contract, you can generally take a number of Tricks not greater than the number of Trump cards that your Partnership holds." And 11 > than the 10 Tricks required to make a 4**S** contract! If I

³ Within the "**Esther Bridge Lessons**", see: "**Convention #14: 6 'Not-for-Penalty' Doubles**".

was sitting EAST not Vulnerable, with this Hand I would have "jumped" to a "drop dead" 4S bid!

Bruce: But Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, can E/W really possibly make a 4S contract with the Partnership holding only ~13 + 2 = ~15 HCPs???

Esther: Well, Bruce, 2 points. **First**, yes, you can indeed make a Game contract with *very few* HCPs, **iff** (if and only if) you hold a "boatload" of Trump cards paired with trumping opportunities in other Suits. Think about the James Bond "Moonraker" Board on which ACBL Grand LifeMaster James Bond made a 7C DOUBLED-REDOUBLED bid holding only 8 HCPs within his Partnership!!!⁴ Or, **second**, think about the Hand you will randomly be dealt on average once every 60,000 years: a *one-Suited* Hand with all 13 cards you hold being from a single Suit!⁵ (Although this happens on average once every 60,000 years, it could happen to YOU tomorrow!!!) This hand will likely make a Grand Slam 7-level contract even holding only a total of 4 + 3 + 2 + 1 = **10** HCPs!!!!

Bruce: But Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, does this "**Law of Total Tricks**" stuff *really* work???

Esther: Well, Bruce, various bridge **computer simulations** have been conducted to examine *empirically* how well the "**Law of Total Tricks**" really works. Matthew Ginsberg conducted just such a computer simulation⁶ involving 1,000 deals in which both Pairs between them held between 14 and 24 cards in their respective 2 Trump Suits. Ginsberg concluded:

...the probabilities are similar whenever the [S]uit lengths combine to **20** cards or fewer [across the 2 Pairs], which they will **99%** of the time. So here's the straight story on the Law: Provided that the [T]rump lengths combine to 20

⁴ For discussion of ACBL Grand LifeMaster James Bond's "Moonraker" Hand, go to <https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/moonraker.pdf>

⁵ Within the "**Esther Bridge Lessons**", see the "**Some Very Important Bridge Probabilities**" Section.

⁶ See: <https://bocosan.tripod.com/ginsberg/total.HTML>

cards or fewer, the Law of Total Tricks will lead you to correct decisions approximately **70%** of the time.

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, I know that you are a Quintuple Gold Emerald Life Master with *20 Million+* ACBL MasterPoints. But does *anybody else* agree with your emphasis on card counts as against HCPs when bidding Suit contracts???

Esther: Well, Bruce, yes, there are a few fellow bridge experts who advocate similar views. For example, in Savannah there is a Grand LifeMaster, Marla Chaiken, whom some players call "Yoda", who teaches at each and every possible opportunity, over and over, "**Points are for No Trump!!!**" By the way, this intrinsically also means that "**Points are not (very much) for Suit contracts!!!**"

And think about how Marty Bergen, a national bridge champion, and columnist in the ACB Bridge Bulletin since 1976, titled his 1996 book: Points Schmoints!: Bergen's Winning Bridge Secrets. Bergen's Points Schmoints! book won the ABTA Bridge Book of the Year Award. And think about how Bergen titled his 1999 book sequel: More Points Schmoints! Kinda seems like Bergen too thinks that bridge players bidding Suit contracts should focus much more on card counts than on HCP counts!

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, are there any other reasons why EAST should have bid **4S** rather than **2S**?

Esther: Well, Bruce, yes, there are 2 more reasons why a **4S** bid by EAST might be reasonable. **First**, EAST knows that E/W have *relatively few* HCPs, and that by process of elimination conversely N/S must hold a *lot* of HCPs, and may therefore be likely to be able to make a Game contract. Jumping to **4S** may cut off N/S communication and make it harder for N/S to find a Game contract bid! **Second**, with both WEST and EAST bidding, even if SOUTH suspects a N/S Diamond or Heart "fit", SOUTH may think that N/S holds only an 8-card Diamond "fit", and that E/W may have substantial points, and so SOUTH may well PASS a **4S** bid by EAST.

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, it sounds like you are saying there are **2** reasons why EAST should jump to a **4S** bid on this Board: (1) EAST knows that E/W hold **11** Trump Spade cards, and (2) EAST knows that N/S hold the

preponderance of HCPs, while instead E/W do not hold many HCPs. Bidding because Opponents hold *many* points, and because your Partnership does not, sounds a little like your argument that you should not let Opponents play a 2H or a 2S contract if you can possibly Overcall their bid.⁷ Is this correct?

Esther: Well, Bruce, yes, you are correct. With respect to not letting Opponents play 2H or 2S if, for example, the auction proceeds N: 1H, E: PASS, and S: 2H, and the contract is likely to be set at 2H N/S, the N/S Opponents hold both (1) 8+ Hearts and (2) ~13 + 8-10 = 21-23 HCPs. N/S are going to make their 2H contract and score at least +120 while you score -120. Based on the "**Law of Total Tricks**", and HCPs, unless you hold a "Trump stack", that is going to happen pretty much *every single* time. So if you can possibly avoid this train wreck, you should do so, even if you get set, as long as you either make your contract, or get set not more than 2 Tricks not Vulnerable, and 1 Trick Vulnerable, assuming your Opponents do not Double!

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, are there any other reasons why EAST should have bid 4S rather than 2S?

Esther: Well, Bruce, yes. It is *crucial* for EAST to remember an important implication of E/W holding an 11-card Spade "fit": As discussed in the "6: Reciprocal Fit Probabilities: Trump Fit Probabilities When You Have a Trump Fit, and *vice versa*", within "**Lesson #40: 8 Different Categories of Bridge Probabilities, and How These May Help Guide Your Bidding and Play**", when your Partnership holds an 11-card Trump "fit" there is (1) a **48.2%** probability that your Opponents hold 2 9-card "fits" in other Suits, and (2) a **32.1%** probability that your Opponents have a 10-card fit in a Suit other than your Spades! Thus, there is a **48.2% + 32.1% = 80.3%** probability of Opponents holding 9- or 10-card fit(s)!

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, on this Board E/W indeed hold an 11-card "fit" in Spades, but N/S have one 9-card "fit" in Diamonds and a second 8-card "fit" in Hearts.

⁷ Within the "**Esther Bridge Lessons**", see: "**Lesson #39: Esther Goes Berserk!!!: When You Are in the 'Balancing' Position, and Opponents Bid a 'Constructive Raise' to Either 2H or 2S, Do NOT Let Opponents Play This Contract!!!**"

Esther: Well, BINGO, Bruce-ster!

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, I guess you are saying that a 4**S** E/W contract may go down, but with (1) N/S holding the preponderance of the HCPs and (2) a strong likelihood of N/S having 1 or 2 "fits" in other Suits that are likely to involve makeable Game contracts, E/W would be wise to interfere with N/S finding their "fit(s)", even though an E/W 4**S** contract is likely to go down!

Esther: Right again, Bruce. It is true that in general you will do well in competitions in which *most* of your bridge scores are "positive", but getting a "negative" Bridge Score for being set can also still yield a "positive" Bridge Percentage. In this competition many N/S Pairs played and made 4**H**, while quite a number of others sitting N/S bid and made 5**D**, generally without E/W jumping to 4**S** and constraining the communication between the N/S Partners. A few E/W Pairs played a Spade contract, and went down 3. A 4**S** E/W contract UNDOUBLED set 3 yields an E/W bridge score of -150, while a N/S contract of 4**H** making 4 yields an E/W bridge score of -460 and a N/S contract of 5**D** making 5 yields an E/W bridge score of -400. Of course, the case for EAST "jumping" to 4**S** would have been "**crystal**"⁸ if, unlike the present situation where both Pairs were sitting not Vulnerable, instead E/W were sitting not Vulnerable while N/S were sitting Vulnerable!!!

⁸ "**Crystal**" refers to being "crystal clear". "**Crystal**" is an expression popularized by ACBL Triple-Double Grand LifeMaster, Tom Cruise, when in the bridge movie "A Few Good Men" he was discussing bridge with fellow ACBL Emerald/Diamond LifeMaster, Jack Nicholson.