

**"As Declarer You Are Playing a 6H Contract, You
'Lose' Trick #1, and You Are Missing the Trump
Heart Q,7,6,5: How Can You Best Avoid
'Losing' to the Opponents' Trump Queen and,
MORE IMPORTANTLY, WHY Does the
'8 Ever, 9 Never' Rule Work?"**

Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen¹

To return to the "Esther Bridge Lessons," CLICK:

<https://esther-bridge.com/index.html>

To return to the "Esther Bridge 'Pop' Quizzes", CLICK:

<https://esther-bridge.com/quiz.html>

Bruce: Today, we are honored to have with us Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, Quintuple Gold Emerald Life Master (20 Million+ ACBL MasterPoints), who will discuss **"As Declarer You Are Playing a 6H Contract, You 'Lose' Trick #1, and You Are Missing the Trump Heart Q,7,6,5: How Can You Best Avoid 'Losing' to the Opponents' Trump Queen and, MORE IMPORTANTLY, WHY Does This Strategy Work?"**. 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, well, Est... err, I mean Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, sorry about that. Well, so that this conversation is less abstract and more concrete, would you talk us through your message by using a concrete bridge Board?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. On my **"Esther Bridge Lessons"** website I have previously

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¹ 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.

recommended the "BBO Bridge Master" website:

<https://www.bridgebase.com/v3/anon/bridgemaster>

The "BBO Bridge Master" website allows you to declare your skill level, then shows a series of Hands and announces the final contract, each of which you then play as Declarer. At the end of play you can then request a solution in which the optimal "Line of Play" is discussed step by step. Here as an illustration I will use the free "BBO Bridge Master" Level-1 **Lesson A-05** which gives you the opportunity to see and *repeatedly practice* for free playing a given bridge Board. I have altered a few of the cards in these Hands from the Board.

BBO Bridge Master Level 1 Lesson A-05

Dealer: **NORTH**

	NORTH (12)		
	S: K Q		
	H: J T 9 8		
	D: K 9 8 7		
	C: K 4 3		
WEST (5)		EAST (5)	
S: J T 9 8 7 6		S: A 5 4	
H: Q 5		H: 7 6	
D: 5 4 3 2		D: 6	
C: Q		C: J T 9 8 7 6 5	
	SOUTH (18)		
	S: 3 2		
	H: A K 4 3 2		
	D: A Q J T		
	C: A 2		

Bidding*

NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	WEST
1 D	PASS	2 H^A	PASS
4 H	PASS	4 NT	PASS
5 C^B	PASS	6 H	PASS
PASS			

*Bidding by Esther.

^AThis "jump bid" by SOUTH shows a "giant" Hand.

^BN/S are playing the "Roman 'Key' Card 1430"² convention and NORTH's 5**C** response says, "Partner, I hold either 1 or 4 of the 5 "key" Cards from among the 4 Aces and the Heart King."

² Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons" see "Esther Convention Lesson #3: Roman 'Key' Card 1430": https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/RKC_1430.pdf

Bruce: Errr, well... Err, I mean... Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, ummm... Well, on Trick #1 WEST leads his Spade Jack as the "top" of a "touching" Honor sequence and EAST "wins" with his Spade Ace. Now N/S cannot "lose" another Trick or the N/S 6H contract will fail. On Trick #2 EAST returns another Spade because E/W are going to inevitably "lose" to the NORTH Dummy "promoted" Spade King anyway.

Now here is the *big question*: Should Declarer on Trick #3 SOUTH lead a NORTH Dummy Heart to his own Trump Heart Ace, and when the Trump Heart Queen does not "drop" on Trick #4 return to the NORTH Dummy and on Trick #5 run a Heart finesse against EAST under an assumption that EAST holds the "missing" Trump Heart Queen? Recall, of course, that because E/W were silent throughout the auction and so the probability of a successful finesse is exactly 50%!

Or, on Trick #4 should Declarer SOUTH instead lead his Trump Heart King? In other words, should Declarer SOUTH play for the E/W Trump Heart Queen to "drop" on SOUTH's Trump Heart King?

Esther: Well, Bruce, there is an old **Cardinal Bridge Principle** that may guide you when you are playing a Suit contract but you are missing several Trump cards including the Trump Queen:

"8 Ever, 9 Never"

When you and Dummy hold 8 cards in a Suit you generally should finesse ("ever"), but when you and Dummy hold 9 cards in the Suit generally you should play for the "drop".

This admonition applies especially when your Opponents were silent throughout the auction and so you have no information about where the "missing" Trump Queen likely lies.

Bruce: Errr, well... Err, I mean... Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, of course I could memorize the **Cardinal Bridge Principle** and *mindlessly* follow this guideline. But I do not like *blindly* following bridge admonitions. Instead, I prefer to understand **WHY** the admonition is correct!

Esther: Well, Bruce, I find that very touching! I am very impressed! I will certainly try to help you. To grasp the rationale behind this **Cardinal Bridge Principle** you have to enumerate *all* the possible "splits" when the Opponents hold 4 Trump cards, the Q, 7, 6, 5.

Bruce when you are "missing" 4 cards there are 3 possible "splits" that your Opponents can hold: 2-2, 3-1, or 4-0. When you are "missing" an "even" number of cards the equal 2-2 "split" is not the most-likely "split". The *most-likely* "split" is the *nearly-equal* 3-1 "split". To be specific, the probability of a 3-1 "split" is **49.7%**, the probability of a 2-2 "split" is **40.7%**, and the probability of a 4-0 "split" is **9.5%**.³

There are 4 possible "splits" for the *most-likely* 3-1 "splits", 6 possible "splits" for the somewhat less likely 2-2 "splits", and 1 4-0 "split". For this situation involving 4 "missing" cards the 2-2 "split" is 4 times more likely than the 4-0 "split" and for which the alternative 3-1 "split" is 5 times more likely than the 4-0 "split".

2-2 (p= 40.7%) ⁴	3-1 (p= 49.7%)	4-0 (p= 9.5%)
1. Q 7 6 5 ^A	1. Q 7 6 5 ^B	1. Q 7 6 5
2. Q 6 7 5	2. Q 7 5 6	
3. Q 5 7 6	3. Q 6 5 7	
4. 7 6 Q 5	4. 7 6 5 Q	
5. 7 5 Q 6		
6. 6 5 Q 7		

$$\begin{aligned}
 & \text{A } 4! / [2! / (4 - 2)!] \\
 & (4 \times 3 \times 2 \times 1) / [(2 \times 1) / 2!] \\
 & (4 \times 3 \times 2 \times 1) / [(2 \times 1) / (2 \times 1)] \\
 & 24 / [2 \times 2] \\
 & 24 / 4 = \mathbf{6 \text{ combinations}}
 \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned}
 & \text{B } 4! / [3! / (4 - 3)!] \\
 & (4 \times 3 \times 2 \times 1) / [(3 \times 2 \times 1) / 1] \\
 & 24 / 6 = \mathbf{4 \text{ combinations}}
 \end{aligned}$$

Note. "Splits" in which the Queen will drop if the A,K are successively played have the Queen **bolded**.

Each of the 6 2-2 "splits" has a probability of 40.7% / 6 = **6.8%**. Each of the 4 3-1 "splits" has a probability of 49.7% / 4 = **12.4%**. The 1 4-0 "split" has a probability of **9.5%**. The cumulative probability of you "dropping" a missing Queen when Opponents hold 4 "missing" cards including the Queen equals:

³ Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons" see: "A Comprehensive List of 8 Different Categories of Bridge Probabilities, and How These May Help Guide Your Bidding and Play":

https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/8_probs.pdf

⁴ "p" = "probability"

1.	Q	7	6	5	6.8%
2.	Q	6	7	5	6.8%
3.	Q	5	7	6	6.8%
4.	7	6	Q	5	6.8%
5.	7	5	Q	6	6.8%
6.	6	5	Q	7	6.8%
10.	7	6	5	Q	<u>12.4%</u>
					53.2%

Bruce: Errr, well Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, this means that the "9 Never" bridge rule suggesting that you should play for the Queen "drop" when your Partnership (1) holds **9** cards in a Suit and (2) the Opponents hold the "missing" Queen and that under these circumstances the Queen will indeed "drop" *more often than not* but certainly not always! Put simply, 53.2% \neq 100%! But 53.2% $>$ 100% - 53.2% 46.8%, which is the probability of not "dropping" the "missing" Queen!

Esther: Well, Bruce, you are *exactly* correct!

Bruce: Errr, well Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, are there ever any times when your Partnership holds **9** cards and is "missing" the Queen that you should *ignore* the "8 Ever, 9 Never" rule and try a finesse???

Esther: Well, Bruce, yes, indeed! There are 2 situations when under these circumstances you should still finesse. *First*, if the Opponents were not *both* silent during the auction the Opponents bid(s) may provide enough information to inform how and whom to finesse. As discussed in "Esther Bridge Lesson #110: 1 of David Bird's 52 Great Bridge Tips on Declarer Play: 'Eight Ever, Nine Never', Maybe Not Always":
https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/8_ever.pdf,
 (1) the Opponent who bid bid the Suit in which you wish to finesse then finesse through that Opponent, and (2) if the Opponent who bid bid a Suit other than the Suit in which you wish to finesse then finesse through the Partner of the Opponent who bid.

Second, sometimes even when both Opponents were silent throughout the auction nevertheless the Opponents play of the Hand may inform your decisions about trying to finesse. This is discussed in "Esther Bridge Lesson #112: **Esther Discusses 'The 'Principle of Restricted Choice': Another**

Exception to the '8 Ever, 9 Never Bridge Rule for Declarer Play':
https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/8_ever_2.pdf



Esther says:

“Why not proceed *immediately* to ‘**Bridge Base Online Bridge Master**’ Level-1 Lesson #**A-05** to practice playing the “**8 Ever, 9 Never**” rule about when to finesse or not finesse? Search ‘BBO’, then Click ‘Bridge Master’, then Click ‘Play’, then Click ‘Level 1’, then Click ‘A-05’. You can play this Board *repeatedly* in Bridge Master for *free!*”

Esther also says:

“I have now prepared a ‘Map’ of all the ‘**Esther Bridge ‘Pop’ Quizzes**’ that use ‘BBO Bridge Master’ lessons to teach the ‘*Squeeze Play*’, the ‘*Elimination Endplay*’, the ‘*Loser-on-Loser Play*’, the ‘*Unblocking Play*’, and the ‘*Dummy Reversal Play*’”:

<https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/MAP.pdf>