

## **"Running a 'Dummy Reversal' When Playing a Suit Contract as Declarer: An Exception to the General Rule About Playing Trump Cards"**

**Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen<sup>1</sup>**

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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 discuss **"Running a 'Dummy Reversal' When Playing a Suit Contract as Declarer: An Exception to the General Rule About Playing Trump Cards"**. 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, at the start would you tell us what is meant by a **"Dummy Reversal"** play?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. Jeff Tang explained the basic concepts of the **"Dummy Reversal"** play in his posting, aptly named "Dummy Reversal", on his excellent "Bridge Bum" website:

"normally when a [D]eclarer holds a long [T]rump [S]uit in hand, he uses the short [T]rump [S]uit in [D]ummy to ruff losers. A [D]ummy reversal flips this concept around so that [D]eclarer's long

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<sup>1</sup> 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](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.

[T]rumps are used for ruffs, and [D]ummy's [Trump] {S}uit is used to draw [T]rumps."<sup>2</sup>

In a similar vein Steve Becker wrote in his web article, "Recognizing a Dummy Reversal"<sup>3</sup>, that:

"Probably the most difficult play in bridge to recognize is the [D]ummy [R]eversal. This is primarily because it involves doing the *direct opposite* of what a [D]eclarer *normally* does during the play of a [S]uit contract" which is to prefer ruffing the Partnership's Hand that is "shortest" in Trump cards. [italics added]

**Bruce:** Errr, well... Err, I mean... Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, I am *completely, utterly blown away* by the whole idea of the "**Dummy Reversal**" play. You have previously *pounded* the table *vociferously* emphasizing that ruffing in the Declarer's own "closed" (hidden" Hand does not, not create any "new" Tricks. For example, in "Esther Bridge Lesson #108: As Declarer, When to Not 'Draw' Trump, and It's the Trump Cards in the Hand 'Short' in Trump Cards that Count, *Stupid!*"

"...ruffing in the Hand of the Declarer's Partnership holding *more* Trump cards does not create "new" or "extra" Tricks. Usually<sup>4</sup> the Declarer in a Suit contract will hold more Trump cards than the Dummy and those Trump cards will include Honors and have a favorable Ron Klinger "**Suit Quality Test ('SQT') Score**".<sup>5</sup> In such cases ruffing in the Declarer's Hand does not create any "new" or "extra" Tricks because you are going to win all these cards in any case no matter how these Trump cards are played."

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<sup>2</sup> See: [https://www.bridgebum.com/dummy\\_reversal.php](https://www.bridgebum.com/dummy_reversal.php)

<sup>3</sup> See: <http://youth.worldbridge.org/recognizing-a-dummy-reversal-by-steve-becker/>

<sup>4</sup> Of course, fairly often Declarer and Dummy will hold an **equal** number of Trump cards. But sometimes the Declarer will hold fewer Trump cards than the Dummy. For example, if the Opponents support each other in a bidding a Major, and Partner Overcalls "Unusual 2NT" because Partner holds 2 "strong" and "long" Minors, you as a Responder will bid your "longest and strongest" Minor, and if the contract is set in a Minor you as a Declarer likely will hold "fewer" Trump cards than the Dummy.

<sup>5</sup> The Ron Klinger "**Suit Quality Test ('SQT') Score**" is computed by summing together (1) the number of cards held in the Trump Suit and (2) the number of Honors you hold in the Trump Suit. A bid at or below the "**SQT Score**" – 6 will usually be safe.

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, I will try to help you. Yes, that is indeed a Cardinal Bridge Principle. *Usually*, your Partnership will hold **8+** Trump cards and the Declarer usually holds *more* Trump cards than the Dummy or the Declarer and the Dummy both hold an *equal* number of Trump cards. And your Partnership will usually hold most or all of the "top" Trump Honors. So, consequently your Partnership will "win" a number of Trump Tricks approximately equal to the number of Trump cards the Declarer holds. But sadly, Bruce, I must belatedly inform you that bridge is a game of Cardinal Bridge Principles but also a game of exceptions to Cardinal Principles. That is what makes bridge *hard*, but also *fun*!

**Bruce:** Errr, well... Err, I mean... Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, I think I am going to have a heart attack! While I try to recover would you briefly explain the *unusual* conditions when a "**Dummy Reversal**" play may yield "extra" Tricks?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you.

Paraphrasing from the "The Dummy Reversal" 2021 article<sup>6</sup> posted on the Southwest Virginia Bridge Clubs website:

How does one know when s/he should play the hand as a dummy reversal? ...Some indicators that a hand may lend itself to a "Dummy Reversal" are:

1. There is "shortness" (singleton or void) in the Declarer's Hand in a non-Trump Suit with "length" in the same "side" Suit in the Dummy.
2. The Declarer's Hand holds "losers" that cannot be ruffed or discarded on a "side" Suit.
3. The Dummy's Trump cards have adequate "strength and length" (typically a three or four card Trump Suit with at least 1 or 2 Honors for drawing the final Trump card(s)).
4. The Dummy holds "side" Suit entries outside of the Trump Suit.

**Bruce:** Errr, well... Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, could you give us an example Board on which a "**Dummy Reversal**" play is made so that this discussion is more concrete?

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<sup>6</sup>See: <https://swvabridgeclubs.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/The-Dummy-Reversal-June-7-2021.pdf>

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, here is an example Board Larry Cohen used in his article, "Think in Reverse", on his bridge website:<sup>7</sup>

Dealer: **SOUTH**<sup>8</sup>

	NORTH (13)		
	S: 9 8 7 6		
	H: A T 2		
	D: K Q 2		
	C: A 4 2		
WEST (7)		EAST (5)	
S: A J T 3		S: K Q 4 2	
H: 8 7		H: 6 5 3	
D: J T 4		D: 7 6 5 3	
C: J 8 6 5		C: T 7	
	SOUTH (15)		
	S: 5		
	H: K Q J 9 4		
	D: A 9 8		
	C: K Q 9 3		

**Bidding**

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1 <b>H</b>	PASS	1 <b>S</b>	PASS
2 <b>C</b>	PASS	3 <b>D*</b>	PASS
2 <b>H</b>	PASS	4 <b>NT**</b>	PASS
5 <b>S***</b>	PASS	6 <b>H</b>	PASS
PASS	PASS		

\*N/S are playing "4<sup>th</sup> Suit Game Forcing".

\*\*N/S are playing "Roman Key Card 1430"<sup>9</sup> asking, "Partner, among the 5 'key cards' (the 4 Aces and the Trump King) how many 'key cards' do you hold?"

\*\*\*SOUTH's bid says, "Partner, I hold 2 of the 5 'key cards' and also the Trump Heart Queen."

**Bruce:** Errr, well, I mean Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, on Trick #1 WEST leads his Spade Ace and "wins". On Trick #2 WEST leads a "low" Spade, EAST plays his Spade King, and SOUTH ruffs. What is the "Line of Play" that Declarer SOUTH should then initially follow?

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<sup>7</sup> See: <https://new.larryco.com/bridge-articles/think-in-reverse>

<sup>8</sup> Esther has altered some of the cards on the example bridge Board.

<sup>9</sup> Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons" see: "Esther Bridge Conventions #3: Roman Key Card ('RKC') 1430":

[https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/RKC\\_1430.pdf](https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/RKC_1430.pdf)

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, once the NORTH Dummy has been exposed SOUTH sees that E/W together **5** Trump Hearts. Because **5** is an "odd" number the most likely "split" is the *nearly-equal* 3-2 "split" rather than a 4-1 "split". But you *must* test whether the Trump "split" is indeed what you suspect. So, on Trick **#3** you lead your Heart King and both WEST and EAST follow. On Trick **#4** you lead a Trump Heart to the NORTH Dummy Trump Heart Ace and again both Opponents follow. This means that the Trump "split" was indeed 3-2 and you can only now safely proceed with your "**Dummy Reversal**" play.

**Bruce:** Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, what's next?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, on Trick **#5** you lead a "low" Spade from Dummy and ruff in your own Hand. On Trick **#6** you cross to the NORTH Dummy using the Dummy Club Ace. On Trick **#7** you lead another Spade from the NORTH Dummy and ruff with your own last Trump Heart. After **7** Tricks the NORTH Dummy holds **1** Trump Heart and the Dummy can soon be used to draw the final E/S Trump Heart card vis the "**Dummy Reversal**" play. After **7** Tricks N/S have "won" **6** Tricks and E/W have "won" **1** Trick. The **6** cards now held in each of the **4** Hands are:

NORTH (13)		
	S:	
	H: T	
	D: K Q 2	
	C: 4 2	
WEST (7)		EAST (5)
S: J		S:
H:		H: 6
D: J T		D: 7 6 5 3
C: J 8 6		C: T
SOUTH (15)		
	S:	
	H:	
	D: A 9 8	
	C: K Q 9	

On Trick **#8** Declarer SOUTH will lead his "low" Diamond toward the NORTH Dummy Diamond King. On Trick **#9** Declarer SOUTH will "drop" the last E/W Trump Heart not from his own "closed" Hand, but instead from the NORTH Dummy that initially held only **3** Trump Hearts. The "**Dummy Reversal**" play has now been successfully completed. N/S will in the end "win" **12** Tricks and E/W with the Club Jack will "win" a

total of **1** Trick. As Cohen notes in his web posting with respect to this Board, "With this fairly normal layout, all plans fail other than the [D]ummy [R]eversal" (emphasis added).



Esther says...

I, Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, Quintuple Gold Emerald Life Master and holder of 20 Million+ ACBL MasterPoints, *strongly* recommend that you *immediately* proceed to the "**BBO Bridge Master**" website. Once there click on **SKILL LEVEL 4**. Next, click on **SELECT DEAL** and then click **A-07**. Then play that Board as Declarer. Play the Board at least 1 time and preferably 4 or 10 times to practice executing the "**Dummy Reversal**" play!