

"As Declarer Playing Contracts What are the 'Correct' Uses of the Dummy?: Never Ignore a Long 'Side' Suit in the Dummy!"

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 Playing Contracts What are the 'Correct' Uses of the Dummy?: Never Ignore a Long 'Side' Suit in the Dummy!"**. 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 outset why don't you tell us from where the ideas and example today's lesson come from?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. Today's ideas and example come from a bridge posting by Larry Cohen titled "How to Use Dummy":

<https://larryco.com/bridge-articles/how-to-use-dummy>

I may have altered some of the cards in the example bridge Board.

Bruce: Errr, well... Err, I mean... Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen,

© Copyright, Bruce Thompson, 2026. All rights reserved.

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.

ummm... Would you then tell us a little about this Larry Cohen fellow?

Esther: Well, Bruce, of course!

About Larry Cohen

By the age of 22, **Larry Cohen** had won his first two of **25** National Bridge Championships, the Blue Ribbon Pairs and the prestigious Spingold Teams. Between 1979 and 2008, Cohen won **57** first or second place finishes in national and world competitions. In 2002, the American Contract Bridge League (ACBL) named Cohen “Player of the Year”. Cohen is also listed on the ACBL’s “Top 10 Living Most Influential Bridge Personalities”. In 2020, in his first year of eligibility, Cohen was elected to the ACBL Hall of Fame. Cohen has had long-term bridge partnership with players such as Marty Bergen and David Berkowitz.

Cohen’s bridge writings have been massively influential. Cohen for many years has published a monthly column in the ACBL Bridge Bulletin. Cohen has authored numerous books including **6** books that have won the American Bridge Teachers’ Association (ABTA) “Bridge Book of the Year Award”:

Larry Teaches Modern Bidding Vol. I, II, and III (Self-Published 2020);

On The Other Hand (co-written with David Bird) (2019);

On The Other Hand - Defense (co-written with David Bird) (2020);

Tricks of the Trade (2018);

Larry Teaches Opening Leads (2014); and

To Bid or Not to Bid: The LAW of Total Tricks (1992).

Esther regards Cohen’s 1992 book on the “**Law of Total Tricks**” as probably being the *most important bridge book of all time*! This book is published in 6 different languages and was the best-selling bridge book of the 1990’s.

Bruce: Errr, well... Err, I mean... Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, why don’t you now list all the ways that a bridge Declarer can “use” the Dummy?

Esther: Well, Bruce, there are basically **3 ways** that a bridge Declarer can “use” his Dummy:

1. Ruffing our own "losers" in the Hand that we control that is shorter in Trump cards;
2. Leading toward our own Hand for finesses; and
3. Discarding our "losers" on a "long" Dummy Suit.

Bruce: Errr, well... Err, I mean... Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, the first 2 of these 3 "uses" seem rather straightforward. But the last Dummy "use", discarding "losers", seems more obscure. What if the Dummy is "weak" and holds few "top" cards?

Esther: Well, Bruce, perhaps Cohen's example Board will make this discussion more concrete for you:

Dealer: **SOUTH**

	NORTH (4)	
	S: 9 8	
	H: Q J 7	
	D: J 6 5 4 3	
	C: 6 4 2	
WEST (7)		EAST (7)
S: Q 7 6 4 2		S: K T 5 3
H: 5		H: 6 4 2
D: Q T 8 7		D: K 9
C: K 8 3		C: J T 9 7
	SOUTH (22)	
	S: A J	
	H: A K T 9 8 3	
	D: A 2	
	C: A Q 5	

Bidding

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
2C	PASS	2D	PASS
2H	PASS	4H	PASS
PASS	PASS		

Bruce: Errr, well... Err, I mean... Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, well, it seems that the NORTH Dummy is very "weak". Is this Dummy of any use whatsoever to Declarer SOUTH?

Esther: Well, Bruce, of course. First, the NORTH Dummy holds the 3 "promised" Trump Hearts. And these provide 3 "entries" into the NORTH Dummy. Second, the NORTH Dummy contains "long" Diamonds, a Diamond Suit containing 5 cards including the Diamond Jack Honor.

Bruce: Errr, well... Err, I mean... Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, maybe as you talk us through the play of the Hand the *obscure* usefulness of the NORTH Dummy will then become more apparent.

Esther: Well, Bruce, of course. As you know your 1st task as Declarer when a Dummy is "exposed" is to count your "losers". As Larry Cohen emphasized in his excellent article, "Trump Suit Contracts—Step 1" (p. 47), published in the January, 2026 issue of the ACBL Bridge Bulletin:

"The *key* to making the ['Line of Play'] plan is to calculate ['losers'] only from one side (the long-trump Hand)". (p. 47) [emphases added]

	NORTH (4)	
	S: 9 8	
	H: Q J 7	
	D: J 6 5 4 3	
	C: 6 4 2	
WEST (7)		EAST (7)
S: Q 7 6 4 2		S: K T 5 3
H: 5		H: 6 4 2
D: Q T 8 7		D: K 9
C: K 8 3		C: J T 9 7
	SOUTH (22)	
	S: A J	
	H: A K T 9 8 3	
	D: A 2	
	C: A Q 5	

On this Board Declarer SOUTH sees as "losers" **1** Spade, the Spade Jack, **0** Trump Hearts, **1** Diamond, the Diamond 2, and possibly **2** Clubs. So, because $1 + 0 + 1 + 2 = 4$ SOUTH's **4H** contract is in some peril.

Bruce: Errr, well... Err, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, how can the NORTH Dummy's **5** Diamonds possibly be helpful to Declarer SOUTH?

Esther: Well, Bruce, many Declarer sitting SOUTH on this Board would "enter" the NORTH Dummy and then try a "deep" finesse by leading the NORTH Dummy Jack toward his own Diamond Ace. But that is not the "correct" "Line of Play" on this Board.

Remember: Declarer's primary job in a Suit contract is "dumping" his own "losers"! But on this Board the NORTH Dummy does not hold a "short" Suit in which Declarer could

lead his own "loser" and then ruff his "loser" in the NORTH Dummy.

Bruce: Errr, well... Err, I mean... Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, could the NORTH Dummy's long 5 Diamond cards be useful for "dumping" 1 or 2 of Declarer SOUTH's "losers"?

Esther: Well, Bruce, BINGO!

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

WEST (7)	SOUTH (22)
S: Q 7 6 4 2	S: A J
H: 5	H: A K T 9 8 3
D: Q T 8 7	D: A 2
C: K 8 3	C: A Q 5

On Trick #1 WEST led 4th from the "top" of his Spade Suit by leading the Spade 4. EAST "covered" with his Spade King and Declarer SOUTH "won" with his Spade Ace.

Now Declarer SOUTH sees that N/S together hold 5 + 2 = 7 Diamond cards. This means that E/W together hold 13 - 7 = 6 Diamond cards. If the E/W 6 Diamonds "split" 3-3 then 2 of the NORTH Dummy Diamonds can be "promoted" into "winners" on which SOUTH can discard 2 "losers". Even if the E/W 6 Diamonds "split" 4-2 then 1 of the NORTH Dummy Diamonds can be "promoted" into "winners" on which SOUTH can discard 1 "losers".

However, when the number of "missing" cards is "even", such as 6, the most-likely "split" is not the equal 3-3 "split". Specifically, the probability of a 4-2 "split" is 48.4%, the probability of a 3-3 "split" is 35.5%, the probability of a 5-1 "split" is 14.5%, and the probability of a 6-0 "split" is 1.5%.²

² 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)":
https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/8_probs.pdf

	NORTH (4)	
	S: 9 8	
	H: Q J 7	
	D: J 6 5 4 3	
	C: 6 4 2	
WEST (7)		EAST (7)
S: Q 7 6 4 2		S: K T 5 3
H: 5		H: 6 4 2
D: Q T 8 7		D: K 9
C: K 8 3		C: J T 9 7
	SOUTH (22)	
	S: A J	
	H: A K T 9 8 3	
	D: A 2	
	C: A Q 5	

On Trick #2 Declarer SOUTH "cashed" his own Diamond Ace. Both WEST and EAST "followed". On Trick #3 Declarer SOUTH led his 2nd and last Diamond, the Diamond 2, WEST "followed" "2nd Hand low", and EAST "won" with the Diamond King. On Trick #4 EAST led a "low" Spade to "return Partner's lead", Declarer SOUTH played his Spade Jack, and WEST "won" with his Spade Queen.

On Trick #5 Declarer SOUTH can "win" any return. On Trick #5 WEST leads the Diamond Ten, EAST discards a Club, and Declarer SOUTH "wins" with his Trump Heart Ten in order to preserve Trump Heart "entries" into the NORTH Dummy. On Tricks #6 and #7 Declarer first plays his own Trump Heart 3 to the NORTH Dummy Heart 7 and then leads a "low" Diamond from the Dummy for a ruff from his "closed" (hidden) Hand. The NORTH Dummy's last 5th Diamond, the Diamond 6, has now been "promoted" into being a "winner".

After Trick #7 N/S have "won" 5 Tricks and E/W have "won" 2 Tricks. The 6 cards now held in the 4 Hands are:

	NORTH (4)	
	S:	
	H: Q J	
	D: 6	
	C: 6 4 2	
WEST (7)		EAST (7)
S: 7 6 2		S: T
H:		H: 6 4
D:		D:
C: K 8 3		C: J T 9
	SOUTH (22)	
	S:	
	H: A K 9	
	D:	
	C: A Q 5	

On Tricks #8 Declarer SOUTH "cashes: his Trump Heart Ace. On Trick #9 Declarer SOUTH leads his Trump Heart 9 to the NORTH Dummy's Heart Queen thus (1) "dropping" the last E/W Trump Heart and (2) gaining "entry" to the NORH Dummy. On Trick #10 Declarer SOUTH "cashes" the NORTH Dummy's "promoted" Diamond 6 "winner and discards the Club 5 "loser" from his own Hand. On Trick #11 Declarer SOUTH can lead a NORTH Dummy Club and try for a finesse Overtrick by playing his own Club Queen, but in any case Declarer SOUTH will at the least "make" his 4H contract.

As Cohen observed, the NORTH Dummy initially looked "useless". However, as Cohen noted in his web posting, "How to Use the Dummy",

<https://larryco.com/bridge-articles/how-to-use-dummy>

"you should never underestimate the value of a long suit. Marty Bergen likes to say, 'I never met a five-card suit I didn't like'." (italics added)