

"Using the 'BBO Bridge Master' Website to Repeatedly Practice the 'Marked Finesse'"

Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen¹

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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 talk us through **"Using the 'BBO Bridge Master' Website to Repeatedly Practice the 'Marked Finesse'"**. Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, thanks for taking the 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, because I am so "warm and caring"!

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?

Bruce: Well, yes, sorry again, Esther! Well, Esther, you have previously taught us about the "Simple Finesse" play by Declarer in your "Esther Bridge Dialogue Lesson **#41: The Art of the Bridge Finesse**":

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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**.

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

and in your "Esther Bridge Dialogue Lesson #117: *The Art of the Finesse: As Declarer, When Should You Finesse, How Many Times, and in What Card Play Sequence?*":

https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/art_fin.pdf

You have even discussed *special* finesses, such as the "Ruffing Finesse", in your "Esther Bridge Lessons":

https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/ruff_fin.pdf

Esther, I take it that the "**Marked Finesse**" is another specialized finesse. Would you begin by defining what you mean by a "**Marked Finesse**"?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. The Wikipedia "Glossary of Bridge Terms" defines a "**Marked Finesse**" as "A finesse for a card that evidently lies with a particular [O]pponent" as known by the Declarer from either the auction or the play of the Hand.

Bruce: Well, Esther, would you give us a concrete example of a board on which the Declarer executed a "**Marked Finesse**"?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will try to help you. Here is an example of a Board involving a "**Marked Finesse**" drawn from Jeff Tang's excellent "BridgeBum" website posting, "Marked Finesse":²

https://www.bridgebum.com/marked_finesse.php

² Esther may have altered some of the cards in this example.

Dummy
 NORTH (8)
S: A T 4
H: 9 5 4 3
D: Q J 2
C: J T 5

YOU
 SOUTH (17)
S: K J 5
H: A T
D: A K T 4 3
C: Q 7 4

Bidding

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
2 S	PASS	PASS	2 NT
PASS	3 NT	PASS	PASS
PASS			

WEST the Heart King thus “promising” at least 3
 “touching” Heart Honors.

Once the NORTH Dummy is exposed Declarer SOUTH can see as
 “certain” “winners” 2 Spades, the Spade A,K, 1 Heart, the
 Heart Ace, and 5 Diamonds, the Diamond A,K,Q,J,T, for a
 total of 2 + 1 + 5 = 8 Tricks.

Bruce: Well, Esther, it appears that Declarer SOUTH can try to
 “win” an “extra” Trick by “promoting” 1 Club “winner” or by
 running a successful finesse in Spades. Is it *better* to
 lead Clubs 2 times, if necessary, or to run the Spade
 finesse?

Esther: Well, Bruce, on this Board and given this auction it
 will be better for SOUTH to execute a “**Marked Finesse**” in
 Spades. Declarer SOUTH knows that WEST holds 6 Spades and
 N/S together hold 3 + 3 = 6 Spades, so therefore EAST holds
 a singleton Spade. On these cards WEST made his 2**S** pre-empt
 “weak” 2**S** bid holding the Spade Q,x,x,x,x,x.³

³ Esther would never make this bid! Esther only makes a 2**S** pre-empt bid holding 6 Spades and
 either (1) 2 of the “top” 3 Spades or (2) 3 of the “top” 5 Spades. This better “limits” the bidder’s
 Hand and allows the Responder to make more informed decisions about whether a Game
 contract in either Spades or **NT** is reasonable. Within the “**Esther Bridge Dialogue Lessons**”
 see: “**2-Level Preempt Opens and Responses Thereto**”:

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

Once "on lead" as Declarer SOUTH I would probably first "cash" my Spade King just in case WEST was extra crazy and bid 2S without holding any Honors and EAST held a singleton Spade Queen. Then I would run my "**Marked Finesse**" through WEST.

Bruce: Well, Esther, that seems pretty clear! But could you give us another example?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. I am going to use as another example the Board used in the "**BBO Bridge Master**" Level 4 Lesson **B-21**. On my "**Esther Bridge Lessons**" website I have previously recommended the "**BBO Bridge Master**" *free* lessons:

<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. Note that across repeated play "**BBO Bridge Master**" may change some Hands in given lessons. Also, here I may have altered some cards in some of these Hands.

BBO Bridge Master Level 4 Lesson B-21

Dealer: **WEST**

NORTH (18)

S: A Q 4 2
H: 5 2
D: A K Q
C: Q J 7 6

WEST (11)

S: 8 7
H: K Q J T 9
D: J T
C: A T 8 5

EAST (1)

S: J 6 5 3
H: 8 7 6 4
D: 9 8 7 6 4
C: --

SOUTH (10)

S: K T 9
H: A 3
D: 5 3 2
C: K 9 4 3 2

Bidding

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1H	DBL*	2H	4C
PASS	5C	PASS	PASS
PASS			

*NORTH's 1st bid is a "Takeout/DEMAND DOUBLE"⁴ showing 13+ HCPs, "shortness" in the Opponents' bid Hearts, and no biddable 5-card Suit.

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther, on Trick #1 WEST leads the Heart King from the "top" of his "touching" Heart Honors. WEST's lead creates exactly 1 Heart "loser" for Declarer SOUTH. SOUTH also will certainly "lose" 1 more Trick to the E/W Club Ace. Declarer SOUTH "wins" Trick #1 with the Heart Ace in his own "closed" (hidden) Hand. Once the NORTH Dummy is exposed what can Declarer SOUTH see?

Esther: Well, SOUTH can see that N/S together hold 4 + 5 = 9 Trump Spades including the 3 of the "top" 4 Clubs! SOUTH's only concern is that one Opponent may hold all 4 Trump Clubs. However, when 4 cards are "missing" the probability

⁴ Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons" see "Esther Bridge Convention Lesson #14: 7 'Not-for-Penalty' DOUBLES": <https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/double.pdf>

of a 4-0 "split" is **9.5%**, the probability of a 2-2 "split" is **40.7%**, and the probability of a 3-1 "split" is **49.7%**.⁵

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther, doesn't WEST have to hold the Trump Club Ace in order for WEST to have held enough HCPs to make his opening **1H** bid?

Esther: Well, Bruce, yes indeed. This auction "marked" WEST as holding the Club Ace. On Trick **#2** after SOUTH "wins" Trick **#1** with his Heart Ace Declarer SOUTH should immediately lead his own Club King. There is no reason to delay. WEST "wins" with his Club Ace, but EAST shows "out" of Trump Clubs, so WEST now holds 3 more Clubs, the Club T,8,5. On Trick **#3** WEST "cashes" **1** Heart "winner". On Trick **#4** holding (1) **3** Trump Club cards and (2) only **2** Diamonds, both "certain" "losers", WEST exits in Diamonds, a "passive" defensive play.

Bruce: Well, Esther, once Declarer SOUTH "wins" Trick **#4** what should SOUTH then do?

Esther: Well, Bruce, after **4** Tricks the **9** cards held in the **4** Hands are:

	NORTH (18)	
	S: A Q 4 2	
	H:	
	D: A K	
	C: Q J 7	
WEST (11)		EAST (1)
S: 8 7		S: J 6 5 3
H: J T 9		H: 8
D: T		D: 9 8 7 6
C: T 8 5		C: --
	SOUTH (10)	
	S: K T 9	
	H:	
	D: 5 3	
	C: 9 4 3 2	

At this point Declarer SOUTH has the "spot" cards to finesse WEST out of the Trump Club T,8. However, this will require **2** "entries" into his own "closed" Hand to run these

⁵ 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

2 "Marked Finesses" through WEST. But the problem SOUTH has is that there is *only 1* "entry" into his "closed" Hand, the Spade King!

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther, you are literally killing me! Is there any solution to SOUTH's problem? Please tell me, I am begging you!

Esther: Well, Bruce, there is only one chance for Declarer SOUTH. SOUTH must "place" EAST as holding the Spade Jack. SOUTH on Trick **#5** must lead a "low" Spade from the NORTH Dummy and when EAST "ducks" play his own Spade Ten.

On Trick **#6** SOUTH leads a "low" Club from his "closed" Hand and WEST plays his Club 8. **1 down, 1 to go!** After Declarer SOUTH "wins" Trick **#6** in the NORTH Dummy with the Dummy's Club Jack, on Trick **#7** SOUTH leads a "low" Spade from the NORTH Dummy to his own Spade King.

So far N/S have "won" **5** Tricks and E/W have "won" **2** Tricks. After **7** Tricks the **6** cards held in the **4** Hands are:

	NORTH (18)	
	S: A Q	
	H:	
	D: A K	
	C: Q 7	
WEST (11)		EAST (1)
S:		S: J 6
H: J T 9		H: 8
D: T		D: 9 8 7
C: T 5		C: --
	SOUTH (10)	
	S: 9	
	H:	
	D: 5 3	
	C: 9 4 3	

Declarer SOUTH on Trick **#8** can run a 2nd Club through WEST. N/S will "win" this Trick no matter which Club WEST plays. On Trick **#9** SOUTH plays the remaining Trump Club in the Board to "drop" WEST's last Trump Club. After Trick **#9** the NORTH Dummy is "good" and N/S exactly make their **5C** contract!



Esther says:

Why not proceed *immediately* to “**Bridge Base Online Bridge Master**” Level-4 Lesson #**B-21** to practice playing this Board? Search “BBO”, then Click “Bridge Master”, then Click “Play”, then Click “Level 4”, then Click “B-21”. You can play this Board *repeatedly* in Bridge Master for *free*!