

## "Playing Bridge Contracts as Declarer When You and Dummy Hold '*Mirrored Hands*' "

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

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 "**Playing Bridge Contracts as Declarer When You and Dummy Hold '*Mirrored Hands*' "**. 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 you mean by "**Mirrored Hands**"?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. "**Mirrored Hands**" can refer to various situations. For example, "**Mirrored Hands**" can refer to 2 Partners holding Hands that have the same cards but in different Suits. In fact, both Partnerships sitting at the table may hold "**Mirrored Hands**".

**Bruce:** Errr, well... Err, I mean... Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, could you give us an example?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, sure. Here is an example of the ultimate

© Copyright, Bruce Thompson, 2025. All rights reserved.

---

<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.

"Mirrored Hands". This example is from Ted Muller's article, "Mirror Hands (3)" on his "Ted's Bridge World" website:

<https://tedmuller.us/Esotericz/MirrotHands-3.htm>

```

                NORTH (10)
                S: A 8 7 6 5 4 3 2
                H: K J
                D: Q T 9
                C: --

                WEST (10)
                S: K J
                H: Q T 9
                D: --
                C: A 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

                EAST (10)
                S: --
                H: A 8 7 6 5 4 3 2
                D: K J
                C: Q T 9

                SOUTH (10)
                S: Q T 9
                H: --
                D: A 8 7 6 5 4 3 2
                C: K J

```

This Board is quite unusual in that any of the 4 players can "make" (1) either 5C and 5H contracts or 5D and 5S contracts and (2) a 3NT contract even though every player holds only 10 HCPs! Here is a Double Dummy Analysis (DDA) of the Boards showing all "makeable" bridge contracts on the Board:

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	-	5	-	5	3
S	-	5	-	5	3
E	5	-	5	-	3
W	5	-	5	-	3

This DDA was performed using the "Bridge Solver" Double Dummy Analysis website:

[https://dds.bridgewebs.com/bridgesolver/upload\\_from\\_chrome.htm](https://dds.bridgewebs.com/bridgesolver/upload_from_chrome.htm)

**Bruce:** Errr, well... Err, I mean... Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, what other variations are there that still involve "Mirrored Hands"?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. More commonly perhaps only 1 Pair at the table holds "Mirrored Hands". And the "Mirrored Hands" may involve holding only the same or similar distributions. We will consider a "Mirrored Hands" Board presented in Eddie Kantar's posthumously published article, "Chalk Talk," from the December, 2025 issue of the ACBL Bridge Bulletin (p. 55).

**Bruce:** Oh, my, goodness, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen! That name, Eddie Kantar, sounds familiar. Can you tell us a little more about him?

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

### **About Eddie Kantar**

Edwin “Eddie” Kantar (1932 – 2022) was a prolific bridge book author who wrote more than 35 bridge books. Six of his books won the “Best Bridge Book of the Year Award” from the American Bridge Teachers’ Association. He won the Bermuda Bowl bridge competitions in 1977 and 1979. He won 17 North American Bridge Championships and 3 United State Bridge Championships. He also was a regular contributor to The Bridge World, Bridge Today, and the ACBL Bridge Bulletin.

**Bruce:** Ok, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, would you now present the Hands held by NORTH and SOUTH on this Board?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, I will try to help you. I may have altered some of the cards held in the 4 Hands:

Dealer: **SOUTH**

NORTH (7)  
**S:** K T 4 2  
**H:** J 4 2  
**D:** Q J 9 2  
**C:** 6 4

SOUTH (21)  
**S:** A J 5 3  
**H:** Q 7 6  
**D:** A K 8 3  
**C:** A K

### **Bidding**

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
2 <b>NT</b>	PASS	3 <b>C</b>	PASS
3 <b>S</b>	PASS	4 <b>S</b>	PASS
PASS	PASS		

**Bruce:** Oh, my, goodness, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen! *Both* NORTH and SOUTH hold **4-3-4-2** distributions. And in all Suits except Clubs *both* Hands hold Suit Honors!

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, indeed, that is true. NORTH and SOUTH indeed hold "**Mirrored Hands**". We will momentarily see how this should affect Declarer SOUTH's "Line of Play".

On Trick **#1** WEST leads his Club Queen thus "promising" EAST that WEST holds "touching" Club Honors in a "long" Suit, or a Q,x doubleton. Declarer SOUTH "wins" Trick **#1** with his Club Ace.

**Bruce:** Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, what "losers" should Declarer SOUTH see once the NORTH Dummy is exposed?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, N/S may have **4** "losers": **3** Hearts and **1** Spade. So, the N/S **4S** contract is in some danger. And SOUTH should see that he wants the Opponents (not himself) to lead Hearts to optimize his "winning" Tricks.

**Bruce:** Oh, my, goodness, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen! What card should SOUTH lead on Trick **#2**?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, SOUTH sees that E/W together hold **5** Trump Spade cards. With an "odd" number of Spades "missing" the most likely "split" is the nearly-equal 3-2 "split". To be specific, the probability of a 3-2 "split" is **67.8%**, the probability of a 4-1 "split" is **28.3%**, and the probability of a 5-0 "split" is **3.9%**.<sup>2</sup> So a 3-2 "split" is  $67.8\%/28.3\% = 2.4$  times more likely than a 4-1 "split".

N/S are "missing" **5** Trump Spade cards: Q,9,8,7,6.

There are **10** possible 3-2 "combinations":<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> 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)

<sup>3</sup> The number of possible "3-2" "splits" equals:

$$\begin{aligned} & 5! / [3! (5 - 3)!] = \\ & [5 \times 4 \times 3 \times 2 \times 1] / [(3 \times 2 \times 1)(2 \times 1)] = \\ & 120 / [6 \times 2] = \\ & 120 / 12 = \mathbf{10} \end{aligned}$$

1. Q 9 8 7 6
2. Q 9 7 8 6
3. Q 9 6 8 7
4. Q 8 7 9 6
5. Q 8 6 9 7
6. Q 7 6 9 8
7. 9 8 7 **Q 6**
8. 9 8 6 **Q 7**
9. 9 7 6 **Q 9**
10. 8 7 6 **Q 9**

Even if the *most-likely* 3-2 Trump Spade "split" occurs in only **4 / 10 = 40%** of the possible 3-2 "splits" will the Trump Spade Queen lie within a doubleton and therefore "drop" if Declarer SOUTH plays the Trump Spade A,K successively.

**Bruce:** Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, then what should Declarer lead on Trick **#2**?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, on Trick **#2** SOUTH should lead a Spade toward the NORTH Dummy's Trump Spade King. If both Opponents "follow" on Trick **#3** SOUTH should lead a "low" Trump Spade card from the Dummy. If EAST "follows" SOUTH plays his Trump Spade Ace. If the Trump Spade Queen "drops" the contract is safe. SOUTH should then "draw" the last Trump card, "cash" Minor Suit "winners", and then lead a Heart.

If the Trump Spade Queen does not "drop" on Trick **#3** Declarer SOUTH should "cash" the 2<sup>nd</sup> Round of Clubs and then "run" the Diamonds. If either Defender ruffs Diamonds it will be with the Trump Spade Queen and then the Opponents will either have to "break" Hearts, which costs them **1** Trick, or lead a Club giving the Declarer SOUTH both a ruff and a sluff with the same result.

If the Opponents stubbornly refuse to ruff with the Trump Spade Queen then "**endplay**" them by executing a "**throw-in**" play. A "**throw-in**" play involves playing an "Exit Card" to force the Opponents into the lead when this puts Opponents at a disadvantage. In this case the "**throw-in**" play involves Declarer leading a Trump Spade. Here is the full Board:

		NORTH (7)	
		<b>S:</b> K T 4 2	
		<b>H:</b> J 4 2	
		<b>D:</b> Q J 9 2	
		<b>C:</b> 6 4	
WEST (8)			EAST (4)
<b>S:</b> Q 9 7			<b>S:</b> 8 6
<b>H:</b> K 8 5 3			<b>H:</b> A T 9
<b>D:</b> T 5			<b>D:</b> 7 6 4
<b>C:</b> Q J T 2			<b>C:</b> 9 8 7 5 3
		SOUTH (21)	
		<b>S:</b> A J 5 3	
		<b>H:</b> Q 7 6	
		<b>D:</b> A K 8 3	
		<b>C:</b> A K	

**Bruce:** Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, are you saying what I think you are saying about "**Mirrored Hands**"?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, yes indeed, I am. In Kantars words:  
 "Hands that have '**mirrored**' distributions *lend themselves to throw-ins and endplays*. This deal is no exception." (p. 55, emphasis added)

**Bruce:** Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, is there anything else you want to emphasize about running "**Elimination Endplays**" against Opponents when you and the Dummy hold "**Mirrored Hands**"?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, yes indeed. Part of running an "**Elimination Endplay**" against Opponents is "*stripping*" the Opponents of many of their cards. Kantar emphasizes:

"When stripping a hand prior to throwing in an opponent who has a high [T]rump, strip the **short [S]uit** ([C]lubs) *before* the **long [S]uit** ([D]iamonds) to avoid an early [D]iamond ruff followed by a safe [C]lub exit." (p. 55, emphasis added)



### **Esther 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*’, the ‘**Distribution Safety Play**’, and the ‘*Dummy Reversal Play*’”:

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