

"As Declarer Playing a NT Contract Should You Always 'Attack' Your Partnership's 'Longest' Suit?"

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 discuss **"As Declarer Playing a NT Contract Should You Always 'Attack' Your Partnership's 'Longest' Suit?"**. 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, am I correct that you have previously strongly recommend Larry Cohen's 3-Step system for designing your "Line of Play" when you are playing **NT** contracts as the Declarer?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. Yes, indeed. I have repeatedly, *resoundingly* recommended Cohen's 3-Step system for designing your "Line of Play" when you are playing **NT** contracts as the Declarer:

https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/3Step_NT.pdf

The **3 steps** in Cohen's system for developing an initial "Line of Play" for a Declarer playing a **NT** contract are, *in order*:

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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.

1. Estimate how many "certain" Tricks you can "win" in your Hand or the Dummy.
2. Next, ask yourself "how might we get more?"
3. Finally, ask yourself, "What will happen if I lose the lead?"

Bruce: Errr, well... Err, I mean... Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, ummm... Isn't a critically important part of Step #2 is for you as Declarer to count the number of cards your Partnership holds in all 4 Suits and "attack" the Suit in which your Partnership holds the most cards? Isn't that exactly what you recommended in "**Esther Bridge Dialogue Lesson #3**"?

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

Esther: Well, Bruce, I certainly agree that this is usually the best strategy. Especially in **NT** even very "low" cards held in a "long" Suit can be "promoted" into "winners"! Of course, although bridge is a game of General Principles, bridge is also a game of exceptions. Today we will consider one of the bridge Boards presented by Richard Pavlicek in one of his newspaper bridge columns.

Bruce: Errr, well... Err, I mean... Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, who is this Richard Pavlicek fellow?

Esther: Well, Bruce, here is a brief description of Richard Pavlicek as a bridge player:

About Richard Pavlicek

Richard Pavlicek (1945-) has won **11** North American Bridge Championships, including a record-setting **3** straight wins in the Reisinger Board-a-Match Teams, 1982-84, and again in 1990. He won the 1973 inaugural Grand National Teams tournament and repeated a win there in 1997. He has written or co-authored several bridge books, including with co-author William S. Root their 1981 book, Modern Bridge Conventions. From 1984 until 1990 Pavlicek was the Bridge Columnist for the Fort Lauderdale News and Sun-Sentinel.

Today we will consider the bridge Board he presented in his 7/1/84 newspaper column, "Always Set Up Your Long Suit?":

<https://www.rpbridge.net/7b12.htm>

Dealer: **SOUTH**

Vul: **NONE**

		NORTH (8)	
		S: 7 6 5	
		H: 8 2	
		D: A K J 2	
		C: 9 8 7 6	
WEST (7)			EAST (9)
S: Q T 8 4			S: K J 2
H: A 9 7 6			H: K T 5 4
D: T 9 3			D: 8 7 5
C: J 2			C: Q 4 3
		SOUTH (16)	
		S: A 9 3	
		H: Q J 3	
		D: Q 6 4	
		C: A K T 5	

Bidding

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1NT	PASS	2NT	PASS
PASS	PASS		

On Trick #1 WEST leads the Spade 4, 4th from the "top" of a "long" Major Suit so that Partner EAST (and Declarer SOUTH) can invoke the "Rule of 11".² Notwithstanding the "Rule of 7",² Declarer SOUTH seeing that together N/S hold 3 + 3 = 6 Spades, and 7 - 6 = 1, SOUTH nevertheless decides to "duck" Spades twice.

Bruce: Errr, well... Err, I mean... Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, Declarer SOUTH sees that N/S together hold 1st Round "control" in Spades, 3rd Round "control" in Hearts, 1st through 4th Round "control" in Diamonds, and 1st and 2nd Round "control" in Clubs. N/S together hold 3 + 3 = 6 Spades, 2 + 3 = 5 Hearts, 4 + 3 = 7 Diamonds, and 4 + 4 = 8 Clubs. Does this mean that on this Board Declarer SOUTH should repeatedly, *relentlessly* "attack" Clubs?

Esther: Well, Bruce, as Pavlicek reported in his newspaper bridge column in this actual competition on this "Real Deal":

² Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons" see: "Some of the 40 or So Bridge Bidding/Play 'Rules'": <https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/rules.pdf>

“Declarer crossed to dummy with a diamond and led the club nine [‘attacking’ Clubs], ducking it around to West’s jack. After cashing the last spade, the defenders won their two top hearts to defeat the contract. Unlucky? Not at all. Our declarer took an inferior line of play and deserved his fate.”

Bruce: Errr, well Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, where did Declarer SOUTH go wrong?

Esther: Well, Bruce. It is indeed important for the Declarer to count the number of cards the Partnership holds in each Suit. And you do *usually* want to relentlessly “attack” the Suit in which your Partnership holds the most cards in order to “promote” “winners”.

But there is **1** thing that you always *immediately* do *first* as **NT** Declarer once the Dummy is exposed: *Count, your, “winners”!* As soon as the NORTH Dummy was exposed Declarer SOUTH should have seen as “certain” “winners” **1** Spade, his own Spade Ace, **1** Heart, his own Heart Queen, **4** Diamonds, the Diamond A,K,Q,J, and **2** Clubs, the Club A,K for a total of $1 + 4 + 2 = 7$ Tricks! The Heart Queen is also possibly a “winner”.

Once you see that you can *certainly* “make” your contract it is usually best to *immediately* “make” your contract. Do not try to “promote” extra Tricks that are unnecessary to “make” your **2NT** contract! *Run to the bank, and cash your check!*