

**"As Declarer Do Not 'Holdup'
or Use the 'Rule of 7'
When Your Partnership Is Weak in 2 Suits!"**

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 **"Do Not 'Holdup' or Use the 'Rule of 7' When You Are Weak in 2 Suits!"** 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, at the outset, would you remind us what the **"Rule of 7"** says and what the **"Holdup Play"** is?

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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**.

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. Well, when an Opponent leads and you could "win" the Trick, sometimes it is best for you as Declarer to "duck" and take your "winner" later rather than immediately. This may be especially useful when as Declarer you are playing a **NT** contract.

The "**Rule of 7**"² says when your LHO leads, count the number of cards that both you and the Dummy together hold from 7, and then "duck" the number of Rounds that you computed from this computation. Doing so typically will minimize the number of Tricks that you "lose" in the Suit.

Bruce: Errr, well, sorry again about that, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther. Well, I suppose you are going to tell us once that, "Bridge is a game of General Principles. But bridge is also a game of exceptions." Is that correct?

Esther: Well, Bruce, yes, indeed! In order to make this discussion concrete, I am going to discuss a specific bridge Board this is a "Real Deal" bridge Board played in the 1980s in a local Florida Swiss teams competition. This Board was discussed by Richard Pavlicek in a 5/26/85 newspaper article written by Richard Pavlicek:
<https://www.rpbridge.net/rpc0.htm>

Bruce: Well, Esther, would you tell us a little bit about who this Richard Pavlicek fellow is?

Esther: Well, Bruce, of course!

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.

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

Dealer: **SOUTH**

Vul: **BOTH**

NORTH (12)

S: T 4

H: A 7 6 2

D: A 9 4

C: K J 6 3

WEST (7)

S: K J 9 2

H: K 9 3

D: 6 5 3

C: T 9 4

EAST (8)

S: Q 7 6 3

H: Q J T 8

D: K 8 2

C: 7 5

SOUTH (13)

S: A 8 5

H: 5 4

D: Q J T 7

C: A Q 8 2

Bidding

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1 D	PASS	1 H	PASS
1 NT	PASS	3 NT	PASS

WEST leads his Spade 2 as **4th** from the "top" of his "longest and strongest" Suit.

Bruce: Well, Esther, OK. On this Board N/S together held $2 + 3 = 5$. Because $7 - 5 = 2$, the "**Rule of 7**" counsels that Declarer SOUTH should "holdup" when playing Spades for 2 Rounds. Is that correct?

Esther: Well, Bruce, yes, you are correct. But this was a Swiss teams competition. And the 2 Swiss teams pairs sitting N/S played differently at Trick **#1** on this Board. As Pavlicek (1985) noted:

"At table one declarer allowed East to win the opening lead with the spade queen. This tactic, known as the 'holdup play' is usually sound technique. Its purpose is to break up the enemy communication so, if a trick is lost, the opponent to gain the lead [the Partner of the Opponent on lead] may be exhausted of the dangerous suit" and so that Opponent cannot lead that Suit back toward his Partner.

Bruce: Oh, my goodness, Esther. Well, that makes sense. But what happened in this "Real Deal" Swiss teams competition when SOUTH "ducked" on Trick #1 and let EAST "win" Trick #1?

Esther: Well, Bruce, at the Swiss teams table where Declarer SOUTH "ducked" on Trick #1 EAST was very savvy and did not "return Partner's lead". Instead, EAST, realizing that E/W were "strong" in both Majors, and not just in Spades, and instead returned his Heart Queen as the "top" of his "touching" Honors. At this point the Declarer was without recourse and E/W ultimately "won" 3 Heart Tricks and 1 Diamond, the Diamond King, and 1 Spade, the Spade Queen "won" on Trick #1. So, N/S went down -1!

Bruce: Oh, my goodness, Esther. Well, what happened at the other Swiss teams table on this Board?

Esther: Well, Bruce, at the other table Declarer SOUTH "won" Trick #1 with his Spade Ace notwithstanding the generally useful counsel of the "Rule of 7". At the other table SOUTH reasoned that WEST was leading from a 4-card Suit and not from a 5-card Suit. Given that WEST's Spade 2 was so "low" it seemed more likely that the Spade 2 was drawn from a 4-card rather than a 5-card Suit. SOUTH therefore reasoned that even if a Diamond finesse failed E/W would "win" only 1 Diamond Trick and 3 Spade Tricks and not 4 Spade Tricks given that apparently *both* WEST and EAST initially held 4 Spades.

Bruce: Oh, my, Esther. Well, so what is the General Bridge Principle that Pavlicek was advancing here?

Esther: Well, Bruce, quite simply,

If you are playing a NT contract as Declarer, if you see that your Partnership is "weak" in 2 Suits, then generally do not use a "Holdup Play" / the "Rule of 7".