

"As Declarer, When to Not 'Draw' Trump, and It's the Trump Cards in the Hand 'Short' in Trump Cards that Count, Stupid!"

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, When to Not 'Draw' Trump, and It's the Trump Cards in the Hand 'Short' in Trump Cards that Count, Stupid!"**. 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, very sorry about that, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen. Well, would you first talk us through the **Cardinal Bridge Principles** underlying this "Esther Bridge Lessons"?

Esther: Well, Bruce, of course I will try to help you! There are 2 **Cardinal Bridge Principles** addressed in the present "Esther Bridge Lesson". **First**, although it is usually wise as Declarer in a Suit contract to "draw" either (1) all or (2) all but 1 of your Opponents' Trump cards, **there are certain cases in which "drawing" (1) all or (2) all but 1 of your Opponents' Trump cards is unwise and will lead to a**

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¹As 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**.

"bottom" Board Score.

Second, ruffing in the Hand of the Declarer's Partnership holder *more* Trump cards does not create "new" or "extra" Tricks. Usually² the Declarer in a Suit contract will hold more Trump cards than the Dummy and those Trump cards will include Honors and have a favorable Ron Klinger **"Suit Quality Test ('SQT') Score"**.³ In such cases ruffing in the Declarer's Hand does not create *any* "new" or "extra" Tricks because you are going to win all these cards in any case no matter how these Trump cards are played.

Third, **in duplicate bridge MatchPoint scoring it not relevant whether you make or do not make your contract as Declarer.** Instead, what matters is whether, irrespective of whether you "make" or do not "make" your contract, you do or do not take more Tricks than your Opponents, who are not the Pair sitting opposite you at the Table, and instead are all the Pairs sitting in the *same* direction as you on a given Board.

Bruce: Errr, well, Esther, ...err, I mean Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, could you please use a specific Board in order to make this discussion concrete?

Esther: Bruce, I will try to help you. The present example and the ideas presented here are elaborations of ideas presented by Larry Cohen in his excellent article, "The Real Deal: For the *Millionth* Time", presented in the January, 2025 issue of the ACBL Bridge Bulletin (p. 57).⁴

²Of course, fairly often Declarer and Dummy will hold an **equal** number of Trump cards. But sometimes the Declarer will hold fewer Trump cards than the Dummy. For example, if the Opponents support each other in a bidding a Major, and Partner Overcalls "Unusual 2NT" because Partner holds 2 "strong" and "long" Minors, you as a Responder will bid your "longest and strongest" Minor, and if the contract is set in a Minor you as a Declarer likely will hold "fewer" Trump cards than the Dummy.

³The Ron Klinger **"Suit Quality Test ('SQT') Score"** is computed by summing together (1) the number of cards held in the Trump Suit and (2) the number of Honors you hold in the Trump Suit. A bid at or below the **"SQT Score"** – 6 will usually be safe.

⁴Note. Esther has altered the placement of some of the cards in the presented Board.

Dealer: **SOUTH**
Vulnerability: **NONE**

NORTH (16)
S: K J 6 4
H: A 6 5 4
D: A 5 2
C: A 4

SOUTH (8)
S: 8 5
H: K Q J 8 3 2
D: Q
C: T 7 5 2

Bidding

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

WEST leads his Club King from the top of his 3-card "touching Honor" Club sequence.

Bruce: Errr, well, Esther, ..err, I mean Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen. Do you agree with SOUTH's opening bid of 2**H**?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I certainly do! Preemptive 2-level opening bids (1) tell Partner your exact card count, (2) are "lead directing", and (3) disturb Opponents' bidding by eating up Opponents' "bidding space". By Partnership Agreement, this N/S Pair *only* open 2-level preempt bids iff ("if, and only if") Partner holds *both* (1) **6** cards with good "Suit Quality" (i.e., either **2** of the "top" **3** or **3** of the "top" **5** Honors) and (2) not enough HCPs to open at the 1 level.

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, do you also agree with NORTH's decision to set a 4**H** Game contract?

Esther: Well, yes, I do! Some Responders decide how to respond to Partner's opening preempt bid by invoking the "Rule of 17".⁵ I very much like *many* of the 40 or so "Rules of

⁵The "Rule of 17" says, "Add together (1) the number of HCPs you hold and (2) the number of cards you hold in Trump Suit and bid Game *iff* that number is **17** or more."

Bridge”,⁶ such as the very important “**Rule of 5**”, “**Rule of 11**”, and “**Rule of 15**”, but as regards the “**Rule of 17**”, not so much, for reasons I detail in the *most frequently read* posting within the “**Esther Bridge Lessons**”.⁷

But on this Board NORTH expects SOUTH to have at least **7-12** HCPs along with **6** Trump cards, and NORTH himself holds **16** HCPs. Much more importantly, NORTH holds **4** Hearts and knows that N/S together hold $6 + 4 = \mathbf{10}$ Trump Hearts. The “**Law of Total Tricks**”, popularized by Larry Cohen in his 1992 award-winning bridge book, To Bid or Not to Bid: The LAW of Total Tricks, says that you will *almost always* make a Suit contract set no higher than the number of Trump cards your Partnership holds - 6.⁸

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, may we now turn to discussing Declarer SOUTH’s optimal “Line of Play”?

Esther: Well, on Trick **#1** Declarer SOUTH wins the Trick with the NORTH Dummy Club Ace. Once the NORTH Dummy comes down Declarer SOUTH sees that N/S together hold **10** Trump Hearts, so E/W together hold the **3** missing Heart Trump cards. When there is an “*odd*” number of Trump cards missing, the most likely “split” is the “*nearest-possible-equal*” “split”.⁹ The probabilities of the **2** possible “splits” involving **3** “missing” Trump cards are: (1) 3-0, **22.0%** probability, or (2) 2-1, **78.0%** probability. Thus, a 2-1 “split” is **3.5** times more likely than a 3-0 “split”. However, 22.0% *ain’t* nothin’ and, as ACBL Bridge LifeMaster Walt Disney was so fond of endlessly preaching, “*Miracles happen every day!*”

⁶Within the “Esther Bridge Lessons”, see “Some of the 40 or So Bridge Bidding/Play ‘Rules’”:
<https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/rules.pdf>

⁷Within the “Esther Bridge Lessons”, see “Beware of the ‘Rule of 17’ When Responding to Partner’s ‘Weak 2’ Preemptive Opening Bid”:
https://www.esther-bridge.com/pdf/Rule_17.pdf

⁸Within the “Esther Bridge Lessons”, see “(1) Does the ‘Law of Total Tricks’ (‘LOTT’) Really Work, and (2) Is the ‘LOTT’ Magic?”:
https://www.esther-bridge.com/pdf/LOTT_bad.pdf

⁹Within the “Esther Bridge Lessons”, see “Card Split Probabilities for Even vs Odd Splits”:
<https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/probabil.pdf>

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, what should Declarer SOUTH do on Trick #2?

Esther: Well, Bruce, "drawing" a *single* Round of Trump Hearts is appropriate. Declarer SOUTH will probably lead toward his own Trump Heart King, so that on Trick #3 he can then lead his Diamond singleton Queen for a finesse. It can't hurt, and it may yield an "extra" Trick.

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, once Declarer SOUTH sees that the Heart Trump "split" is 3-0, should Declarer SOUTH continue to "draw" Heart Trump?

Esther: Well, leading 2 more Rounds of Trump to "drop" the last 2 Trump Hearts held by WEST seems unappealing. Declarer SOUTH on each of 2 Tricks will be "spending" 2 N/S Trump Hearts to capture 1 of WEST's Trump Heart cards.¹⁰

Bruce: OK, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen. What Tricks will E/W certainly lose?

Dealer: **SOUTH**

Vulnerability: **NONE**

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

Bidding

SOUTH

2H

WEST

PASS

NORTH

4H

EAST

ALL PASS

¹⁰In a similar vein, when an Opponent holds 1 Trump card, and that Trump card is *higher* than all of your Partnership's remaining Trump cards, do not then lead Trump to "drop" the Opponent's remaining Trump card on a Trick that you are *certain* to lose, unless doing so will allow you to later regain control and "run" other Suits.

Esther: Well, Bruce, WEST will *certainly* "win" 1 Club, and because Dummy NORTH's Spade K, J, x, x EAST sit "behind" EAST's Spade A, Q, x, x, x, EAST will "win" 2 Spade Tricks.

Bruce: OK, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen. If Declarer SOUTH should not "draw" more than 1 Round of Heart Trump cards, what should instead be Declarer SOUTH's "best" "Line of Play"?

Esther: Well, Bruce, Declarer SOUTH's "better" "Line of Play" is to lead a small Club, and play a "loser on a loser", thus creating 2 later Rounds of ruffing opportunities in the North Dummy.

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, remember that this Board is a "Real Deal" that Larry Cohen *actually* played. What (1) Bridge Score and (2) MatchPoint Percentage did Cohen and his Partner playing as the SOUTH Declarer achieve on this "Real Deal"?

Esther: Well, Bruce, Cohen's Partner, SOUTH, actually went "down" 1 Trick for a N/S Bridge Score of -50. But the N/S MatchPoint was not a "bottom" Board! This is because some E/W Pairs bid 5D **DOUBLED** and then actually made their contract for a N/S Bridge Score of -550! Of course, -50 is a higher Bridge Score than -550! Remember: even though your overall result will *generally* be better when all your Bridge Scores are "positive" rather than "negative", duplicate MatchPoint bridge is not about whether your Bridge Scores are "positive" or "negative", but instead is about how your N/S Board Bridge Score compares with the Board Bridge Scores of the other N/S Pairs playing in the competition.