

Esther Discusses

**"In a Small Slam Contract as Declarer
Playing With a 'Pessimistic Mindset' Assuming a
4-0 Trump 'Split' Can Be Very Helpful,
As Can a 'Trump Elimination Endplay' "**

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 **"In a Small Slam Contract as Declarer Playing With a 'Pessimistic Mindset' Assuming a 4-0 Trump 'Split' Can Be Very Helpful"**. 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 such a "warm and caring" person!

Bruce: Errr, well, in any case, Esther, would you begin first by telling us what you mean by a **"Pessimistic Mindset"**?

Esther: Well, my *inquisitive interlocutor*, I will certainly try to help you.

Bruce: Errr, well, Esther... Are you actually being *nice* to me?

Esther: Well, my *studious salamander*, of course I am being "nice" to you! Why wouldn't I be "nice" to you?

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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.

Well, in any case, many newer bridge players intently study the probabilities/statistics of bridge. For example, they learn that when there is an "odd" number of cards "missing" in a Suit the most likely "split" is the *nearly-equal* "split". And when there is an "even" number of cards "missing" in a Suit the *equal* "split" is not the most likely "split". For example, when there are **4** cards "missing" (held by your Opponents) the probability of a 3-1 "split" is **49.7%**, the probability of a 2-2 "split" is **40.7%**, and the probability of a 4-0 "split" is **9.5%**.²

And these newer players tend to play assuming that the *most-likely* "split" is always the *actual* "split" they are facing. But often Declarers should play in an exactly *opposite* way. Sometimes it is best to play *safely* with a "**Pessimistic Mindset**" that assumes the most *unlikely* and potentially *most unfavorable* "split" has occurred. Indeed, playing this way may cost you an Overtrick but at the same time may guarantee your contract!³

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther. Well, could you give us an example of playing with a "**Pessimistic Mindset**"?

Esther: Well, my *gracious giver*, I will certainly try to help you! As you may know 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. Here I am going to use as an

² 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

³ Within the "**Esther Bridge Lessons**" see "Esther Bridge Dialogue Lesson #91: "**Bridge 'Distribution Safety Play': As Declarer Is It Better to Play the *Most Likely* Split as *Certain*, or to Play the *Least Likely* Split as *Possible*?**":

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

example Board the Board used in the **Bridge Master** Level 5 Lesson **B-02**. I may have altered some cards in some Hands.

BBO Bridge Master Level 5 **Lesson B-02**

Dealer: **SOUTH**

NORTH (11)

S: 4 2
H: A T 8 7
D: A K 3
C: 5 4 3 2

SOUTH (21)

S: A K Q
H: K 6 4 3 2
D: 4 2
C: A K Q

Bidding

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
2 NT	PASS	3 C	PASS
3 H	PASS	5 H*	PASS
6 H	PASS	PASS	PASS

*This bid invites to 6**H**.

WEST leads the thus Spade Jack thus "promising" "touching" Spade Honors.

Bruce: Errr, well, Esther... Ummm... Once the NORTH Dummy is exposed what "losers" should Declarer SOUTH see?

Esther: Well, my *studly Studebaker*, it looks like the only E/W danger SOUTH faces involves the "missing" Trump Heart Q,J,9,5. And Declarer SOUTH should play with a "**Pessimistic Mindset**" and assume that a *single* Opponent holds the "missing" Trump Heart Q,J,9,5 until the "Play of the Hand" proves otherwise.

If WEST holds all 4 Trump Hearts the 6**H** contract can be successfully "made" unless SOUTH plays the NORTH Dummy Heart Ace on the 1st Round of "drawing" Trump. If, on the other hand, EAST holds all 4 Trump Hearts the 1st Round of "drawing" Trump will need to start in the Dummy and a "**Trump Elimination Endplay**"⁴ will be needed.

⁴ Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons" see "Esther Bridge Dialogue Lesson #152: When Playing a Difficult Contract as Declarer, the 'Trump Squeeze Play' Can Be Very Helpful":

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

Bruce: Errr, well, Esther... Thank you very much. So, shouldn't Declarer SOUTH delay "drawing" Trump? Neither Opponent bid during the auction and so Declarer SOUTH has exactly zero *information* about which Opponent may hold "long" Trump Hearts. A little further play may shed further light on the matter.

Esther: Well, my *curious carnivore*, you are exactly correct! On Trick #2 Declarer SOUTH should "cross" to the NORTH Dummy via the Dummy's Diamonds. On Trick #3 SOUTH should lead the Dummy's Trump Heart 7 or 8. If EAST discards then SOUTH should "win" with his Trump Heart King and play through WEST holding all 4 Hearts and hold WEST who initially held 4 Trump Hearts to 1 Trump Trick.

If instead EAST "follows" with the Heart 5 Declarer SOUTH should "duck" and this time hold EAST who initially held 4 Trump Hearts to only 1 Trump Trick. If EAST "follows" with a "higher" Heart SOUTH should "win" with his Heart King and the "**Trump Elimination Endplay**" will then be executed.

Bruce: Errr, well, Esther... Let's assume here that EAST played his Trump Heart 9 on Trick #3 with SOUTH "winning" with his Trump Heart King. How does SOUTH run the "**Trump Squeeze Endplay**"?

	NORTH (11)	
	S: 4 2	
	H: A T 8 7	
	D: A K 3	
	C: 5 4 3 2	
S: J T 9 8 6		S: 7 5 3
H: --		H: Q J 9 5
D: T 9 8 7 6 5		D: Q J
C: 8 7		C: J T 9 6
	SOUTH (21)	
	S: A K Q	
	H: K 6 4 3 2	
	D: 4 2	
	C: A K Q	

Esther: Well, Bruce, Declarer SOUTH must first "cash" all his "side" Suit "winners" and ruff a NORTH Dummy Club in his "closed" (hidden) Hand. Doing this will "strip" EAST of 7

cards if EAST initially held at least 3 Spades, 2 Diamonds, and 3 Clubs.

On Tricks #4 through #6 SOUTH should "cash" his 3 Club "winners". On Trick #6 WEST discards a "low" Diamond. EAST "follows" on all 3 Club Tricks. Now EAST must have initially held a 3-4-2-4 distribution for SOUTH to succeed.

On Trick #7 Declarer SOUTH "crosses" to the NORTH Dummy's Diamond Ace. On Trick #8 SOUTH leads a Dummy Club and ruffs in his "closed" Hand.

On Tricks #9 and #10 SOUTH "cashes" his 2 Spade "winners". EAST "follows" on both Tricks. After 10 Tricks N/S have "won" 10 Tricks and E/W have "won" 0 Tricks. The 3 cards now held in the 4 Hands are:

NORTH (11)

S:
H: A T 8
D:
C:

S: T
H: --
D: T 9
C:

S:
H: Q J 5
D:
C:

SOUTH (21)

S:
H: 6 4 3
D:
C:

On Trick #11 Declarer SOUTH will play his Trump Heart 3 "Exit Card" to force EAST into the lead by EAST playing his Heart Jack. Now EAST is "squeezed" into making an *inescapably* unfavorable lead decision. If on Trick #12 EAST leads his Heart 5 SOUTH will "win" in the NORTH Dummy 10 and then "win" with his Trump Heart Ace. If on Trick #12 EAST leads his Heart Queen SOUTH will "win" in the NORTH Dummy Trump Heart Ace and then "win" with his Trump Heart Ten.



Esther says:

“An ‘**Elimination Endplay**’ can be very helpful to you as Declarer when:

1. 1 Opponent holds *all or most of the Opponents’ HCPs*, or
2. 1 Opponent holds a ‘*Trump Stack*’ against your Suit Contract!”

And Esther says...

“Why not proceed *immediately* to ‘**Bridge Base Online Bridge Master**’ Level-5 Lesson #**B-02** to practice executing a ‘**Trump Elimination Endplay**’? Search ‘BBO’, then Click ‘Bridge Master’, then Click ‘Play’, then Click ‘Level 5’, then Click ‘B-02’. You can play this Board *repeatedly* in Bridge Master for *free!*”

Esther also 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*’, and the ‘*Dummy Reversal Play*’”:

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