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**Esther Discusses "Play as Declarer of a Suit Contract When (1) You Are Certain or Very Likely to Lose the Lead in Trumps, and (2) You and Dummy Both Hold Winners in the Same 'Short' Side Suit"**

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

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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 "**Play as Declarer of a Suit Contract When (1) You are Certain or Very Likely to Lose the Lead in Trumps, and (2) You and Dummy Both Hold Winners in the Same 'Short' Side Suit**". 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 a "warm and caring" person!

**Bruce:** Errr, well, sorry about that, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther.

**Esther:** Well, my *gracious giver*, don't worry too much about it! As you know, I am a very patient bridge teacher! Now, Bruce, at the outset I feel obligated to note that the present discussion is drawn from **Tip #61** (pp. 94-95) from

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<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**.

Ron Klinger's 2003 book, 100 WINNING BRIDGE TIPS for the Improving Player.

**Bruce:** Errr, well, Esther... Ummm... Err... First, I am not sure I believe this, but are you again *actually being nice to me?*

**Esther:** Well, my *handsome hero*, certainly, I am being nice to you. Occasionally, I like to "change things up!"

**Bruce:** Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther. Who is this Mr. Klinger fellow? Could you tell us a little about him, please?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, of course. **Ron Klinger** (1941- ) is an Australian contract bridge player who has written more than **70** bridge books including his 1990 book, Guide to Better Card Play, which won the "American Bridge Teachers' Association (ABTA) Bridge Book of the Year Award." His book, Right Through the Pack Again, won the 2010 "International Bridge Press Association Book of the Year Award." He was Editor of Australian Bridge for 13 years (1972-1985). For many years he has written, and still currently writes, a weekly bridge column for both the Sydney Morning Herald and The Sun-Herald.

Klinger is also the inventor of the Ron Klinger "**Suit Quality Test ('SQT') Score**". The "**SQT Score**" is computed by adding together (1) the number of cards you hold in a Suit plus (2) the number of Honors (including the Ten) that you hold in the Suit. *Suit contracts* set no higher than "**SQT Score**" - 6 are generally pretty "safe".

**Bruce:** Errr, well, Esther... Ummm... Well, thank you *very much* indeed for that review. Now Esther, can we look at some Boards as part of your discussion so that your instruction is more concrete?

**Esther:** Well, my *inquisitive interlocutor*, I would be happy to help you! The following Board is from the 1996 Australian Women's Teams competition. The bidding is invented by Esther.

NORTH (9)  
**S:** K T 9 5 4  
**H:** A 7  
**D:** Q T 9 5  
**C:** 6 2

<p style="text-align: center;">WEST (17)  <b>S:</b> A Q 7  <b>H:</b> Q 8 6 2  <b>D:</b> A 7 3  <b>C:</b> K Q 3</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">EAST (6)  <b>S:</b> 8 3  <b>H:</b> K T 9 5 4 3  <b>D:</b> K 8  <b>C:</b> 9 8 7</p>
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SOUTH (8)  
**S:** J 6 2  
**H:** J  
**D:** J 6 4 2  
**C:** A J T 5 4

**Bidding**

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1 <b>NT</b>	PASS	2 <b>D!</b>	PASS
3 <b>H</b>	PASS	4 <b>H</b>	PASS
PASS	PASS		

**Bruce:** Well, Esther, what can we discern from this auction?

**Esther:** Well, my *fortuitous friend*, we know that:

1. **WEST** holds (1) **15-17 HCPs**, (2) a "balanced" Hand with no voids or singletons, (3) no more than 1 doubleton, and (4) *may* hold a **5**-card Major
2. **EAST** holds (1) **5+** Hearts including some Honors and (2) may hold as few as **0** HCPs.

**Bruce:** Well, Esther, "on lead" NORTH played his Club 6, from the EAST Dummy Declarer WEST played the Club 7. Shouldn't SOUTH play his Club Ace, and then return a Club to Partner NORTH?

SOUTH holds **5** Clubs and Dummy holds **3** Clubs. WEST who opened **1NT** holds at least **2** Clubs and likely some Club Honors. Because  $5 + 3 + \sim 2 = \sim 10$ , likely either WEST holds **2** Clubs and NORTH holds **3** Clubs, or *vice versa*. Because NORTH led Clubs it is *more likely* that NORTH holds **2** Clubs while Declarer WEST holds **3**.

**Esther:** Well, my *sentimental sensei*, all true! In this case SOUTH should not play his Club Ace. Instead, he should play his Club Ten, later take the Ace club "winner" and then at that point return a Club toward NORTH for a likely ruff. In

this actual competition SOUTH indeed played his Club Ten.  
WEST won Trick #1 with his Club King.

**Bruce:** Well, Esther, what should the play on Trick #1 tell  
Declarer WEST about the Club holdings of NORTH and SOUTH?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, WEST now knows that:

1. SOUTH Holds the Club Ace, because NORTH should not have led low away from an Ace, and
2. NORTH must be "short" in Clubs and is trying to establish a Club ruff, and SOUTH is cooperating with NORTH by "ducking" Clubs 1 time so that SOUTH can later win with the Club Ace and then return a Club back to NORTH for NORTH to ruff.

**Bruce:** Well, Esther, how should Declarer WEST continue?  
Shouldn't WEST *immediately* turn to "drawing" the Heart  
Trump cards?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, that would *often* be correct! **But not**  
**always!** WEST knows that E/W inevitably will lose to the  
Heart Ace, so therefore "drawing" Trump will likely be  
interrupted. Is there another *better* alternative?

**Bruce:** Well, Esther, I do not know. Please tell us what Declarer  
WEST's *best* "Line of Play" is.

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, in the words of my close personal friend,  
Ron Klinger, the Australian who was born in Shanghai just  
before World War II completely blew up and shortly  
thereafter then emigrated with his family to Australia:

**"When a ruff is threatened and you are certain or  
likely to lose the lead in trumps, it can benefit you to  
[first] eliminate an irrelevant ['short'] side suit [held  
in both Declarer's Hand and the Dummy] before  
touching trumps. If the [Defender's] ruff eventuates,  
the [Defensive] player on lead may have no safe  
exit."** (p. 94, emphasis added)

In the actual competition Declarer WEST was Tina  
Zines. On Trick #2 she led the Diamond 3 in her Hand to the  
EAST Dummy's Diamond King. On Trick #3 she returned the

EAST Dummy Diamond 8 to her Hand's Diamond Ace. On Trick #4 she then led her Diamond 7 toward the EAST Dummy for a ruff. On Trick #5 from the EAST Dummy she led the Trump Heart 4, SOUTH played his Jack singleton, Declarer WEST "covered" with her Trump Heart Queen, which NORTH took with his Trump Heart Ace.

On Trick #6 NORTH led his Club 2 to SOUTH's Ace. On Trick #7 SOUTH led his Club 4 toward NORTH for a ruff. At Trick #8 NORTH found himself "end-played". He could lead only a Spade which then eliminated the EAST Dummy's 1 Spade "loser". Here are the 4 Hands after 7 Tricks had been played and each player had 6 cards remaining:

	NORTH (9)	
	S: K T 9 5 4	
	H: --	
	D: Q	
	C: --	
WEST (17)		EAST (6)
S: A Q 7		S: 8 3
H: 8 6 2		H: K T 9 5
D: --		D: --
C: --		C: --
	SOUTH (8)	
	S: J 6 2	
	H: --	
	D: J	
	C: J 5	

N/S "won" Tricks #5-#7, and Declarer WEST made her 4H contract.

**Bruce:** Well, Esther, that was quite interesting indeed. Can you give us a second "real-deal" example?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, here is a Board played in the 2002 New Zealand Open Teams competition:

NORTH (7)

S: 8 3  
H: A T  
D: T 9 7 3  
C: K 8 7 4 3

WEST (14) EAST (11)

S: A T 5 4 S: Q 7 6 2  
H: Q 8 7 4 2 H: K 9 6 5  
D: K 8 D: A 4  
C: A J C: Q 9 2

SOUTH (8)

S: K J 9  
H: J 3  
D: Q J 6 5 2  
C: T 6 5

**Bidding**

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1H	PASS	3H	PASS
4H	PASS	PASS	PASS

NORTH led the Spade 8, Declarer WEST played the EAST Dummy Spade 2, SOUTH played the Spade Jack, and WEST won Trick #1 with his Spade Ace.

**Bruce:** Well, Esther, should Declarer WEST immediately “draw” the Trump Hearts?

**Esther:** Well, my *fortuitous friend*, in the words of Ron Klinger:

“Those [Declarers] who played a trump [Heart] at trick 2 paid the price. North took the [Heart] ace, played a second spade and ruffed the spade return. North later scored a club trick and declarer was down one.

After taking the ♠A, declarer should cash the ♦A and ♦K and only then lead a trump. North can take the ♥A, play a spade and receive a spade ruff but is then *end-played*. A club or a diamond exit [by North] removes declarer’s [1] club loser.” (p. 95, emphasis added)