

**"Discarding 'Losers' as Declarer
Playing a Suit Contract: (1) You Can *Sluff*,
(2) You Can *Ruff*, or
(3) You Can Both *Ruff* and *Sluff*:
An Example Board Involving *Both*"**

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 **"Discarding 'Losers' as Declarer Playing a Suit Contract: (1) You Can *Sluff*, (2) You Can *Ruff*, or (3) You Can Both *Ruff* and *Sluff*: An Example Board Involving *Both*"**. 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, is there anything you wish to say initially before you talk us through "2 ways to 'dump' your 'losers' when playing a Suit contract as Declarer?"

Esther: Well, Bruce, yes indeed. At the outset I would like to emphasize that when you play a Suit contract as Declarer once the Dummy comes down your first task is to (1) identify your "losers" and (2) formulate a "Line of Play" that allows you to "dump" your "losers".

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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.

There are **2** ways that Declarers playing a Suit contract can "dump" "losers":

1. *Sluff* "losers" (a) on a Trick that you will "win" in either the Dummy or in your own "closed" (hidden) Hand, or (b) on a Trick that the Opponents will inevitably win anyway.
2. *Ruff* "losers" that you would otherwise "lose" absent ruffing especially if you can do so in the Hand holding *fewer* Trump cards.

Bruce: Errr, well, Est..., err, I mean Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, would you please present a Board as a concrete example of using these strategies to "dump" "losers"?

Esther: Well, Bruce, of course I will try to help you. I will use as an example a Board drawn from the BBO Bridge Master bridge instructional website.

I, Esther, on my "**Esther Bridge Lessons**" website have previously recommended the "**BBO Bridge Master**" website:

<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. The present "Esther Bridge 'Pop' Quiz" question is drawn from "**BBO Bridge Master**" Level-2 **Lesson B-15**. Note that across repeated play "**BBO Bridge Master**" may change some Hands in given lessons. I, Esther, may have altered some cards in some Hands.

BBO Bridge Master Level 2 Lesson B-15

Dealer: **EAST**

NORTH (7)

S: A 2
H: Q J T 9 8 7 2
D: 5 4 3
C: 2

WEST (12)

S: K Q 5 4 3
H: A
D: 7
C: Q J T 9 8 6

EAST (6)

S: 7 6
H: --
D: K Q J T 9 8 6
C: 7 5 4 3

SOUTH (15)

S: J T 9 8
H: K 6 5 4 3
D: A 2
C: A K

Bidding

EAST	SOUTH	WEST	NORTH
3 D *	3 H	PASS	6 H **
PASS	PASS	PASS	

*EAST's opening bid promises Partner (1) 7 Diamonds and (2) at least (a) 2 of the "top" 3 Diamonds or (b) 3 of the "top" 5 Diamonds. Here EAST's Diamonds have a Ron Klinger "**Suit Quality Test ('SQT') Score**" of (1) 7 cards plus (2) 4 Honors (including the Ten), or 7 + 4 = 11. A Ron Klinger "**SQT Score**" of 11 will generally support a Suit contract bid up to the 11 - 6 = 5 level.

NORTH knows that SOUTH has shown 5 Hearts and that EAST's opening preemptive bid of 3D** was "weak", and NORTH knows that N/S together hold 5 + 7 = 12 Trump Heart cards. The "**Law of Total Tricks**", popularized by Larry Cohen in his award-winning 1992 bridge book, To Bid or Not to Bid: The LAW of Total Tricks, says that generally you can make a Suit contract if the contract is set no higher than the number of Trump cards your Partnership holds - 6. Empirical bridge research suggests that the "**Law of Total Tricks**" generally works.²

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

Can you make a slam contract holding only $15 + 7 = 22$ HCPs? Of course! This was demonstrated in the ACBL Documentary Bridge film, "Moonraker", in which ACBL LifeMaster **James Bond, 007**, bid and made a **7C DOUBLED REDOUBLED** contract when his Partnership together held only **8 HCPs**.³

On Trick **#1** WEST leads the Spade King from the "top" of "touching" Honors in a Suit that neither Partnership bid and with EAST not having bid during the auction.

Bruce: Errr, well, hmmm... Well, would you now talk us through Declarer SOUTH's play of this Board?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. The 1st thing Declarer SOUTH must do once the Dummy comes down is identify his "losers". Declarer SOUTH will certainly lose **1** Trick to the E/W Trump Heart holdings. E/W together hold only 1 Trump Heart, but it happens to be Heart Ace. N/S may also lose **1** Spade Trick in the form of the NORTH Dummy Spade 2, and **1** Diamond Trick in the form of the SOUTH Declarer's Diamond 2.

Bruce: Errr, well, Esther, ...err, I mean Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen. What card should Declarer SOUTH's play on Trick **#1** from the NORTH Dummy?

Esther: Well, Bruce, obviously Declarer SOUTH must play the Dummy's Spade Ace because otherwise the N/S contract will be set "off the top" once E/W "cash" their Trump Heart Ace.

Bruce: Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, would you now talk us through the remaining play of the Hand?

Esther: Well, Bruce, after "winning" Trick **#1** with the NORTH Dummy Spade Ace, Declarer SOUTH should:

1. On Trick **#2** lead the NORTH Dummy Club 2 singleton to the Club Ace in his own "closed" Hand.
2. On Trick **#3** lead the Club King from his own "closed" Hand and sluff the NORTH Dummy Spade 2 "loser". This **sluff** on his own "winner" eliminates **1** of the 2 "losers"

³ Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons" see:

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

that Declarer SOUTH saw when he initially formulated his "Line of Play".

3. On Trick #4 Declarer SOUTH can now run a finesse through WEST by leading a Spade from the "touching" Spade J,T,9 sequence with the threat of ruffing in the NORTH Dummy if WEST "covers". Because (1) both Opponents were silent throughout the auction and (2) it is early in play there is *no information* available to improve the odds of the finesse succeeding and the odds of success thus are only 50-50. However, the *only* way for Declarer SOUTH to make his 6H contract is for (1) Declarer SOUTH to run this finesse and (2) for this finesse to be successful. Therefore, Declarer SOUTH must finesse in Spades on Trick #4!

- a. If WEST "covers" with his Spade Queen, Declarer SOUTH ruffs in the NORTH Dummy and will "win" all the remaining Tricks and exactly make his 6H contract even while his Partnership holds only 22 HCPs.
- b. If WEST "ducks" on Trick #4 Declarer SOUTH on Trick #5 can lead a "low" Diamond to return to his own "closed" Hand.

Then on Trick #6 can repeat the finesse and either "win" in his "closed" Hand or if WEST "covers" ruff in the NORTH Dummy. If WEST "ducks" 3 times Declarer SOUTH will have "won" 3 Spade Tricks with his own Hand and thus will have sluffed all 3 Diamond "losers" in the NORTH Dummy and can then lead his own Diamond 2 for a ruff in the NORTH Dummy. The Board is now "good".

Bruce: WOW, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, Declarer SOUTH made a 6H small slam contract with his Partnership holding only 22 HCPs by dumping "losers" by using 2 strategies: *sluffing* and *ruffing*. Sluffing and ruffing seem to sometimes play very well together!!!

Esther: Well, Bruce, BINGO!