

Esther Discusses "As Declarer to Draw or Not Draw Trump, That Is the Question!"

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 "**As Declarer to Draw or Not Draw Trump, That Is the Question!**" 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! I do understand that young girls can indeed be quite vicious to each other. Well, in any case, Esther, are there any preliminary comments you wish to make before you begin teaching your lesson?

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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. As I believe you are aware, conventional bridge wisdom is that when you are Declarer you should "draw" Trump as early as possible. Of course, bridge is if anything a game of CARDINAL BRIDGE PRINCIPLES but also of exceptions.

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther, can you give us some idea about various bridge experts thoughts on this matter?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. **Marc Smith** is a Grand Master and has won most of the competitions on the English bridge calendar. He has also repeatedly represented England or Great Britain in various European and World championships. He was a member of the British junior team that won the European Common Market title in 1985. He also has written more than 30 bridge books, including (with Barbara Seagram) the very influential 25 Bridge Conventions You Should Know, which won the "Best Bridge Book Award" from the American Bridge Teachers Association. He also writes a monthly column published in the ACBL Bridge Bulletin.

In a recent article, "Should I Draw Trumps?", in the May, 2025 ACBL Bridge Bulletin Smith wrote:

If you can count enough tricks to fulfill your contract by drawing trumps, that is usually what you should do... The longer you leave trumps outstanding, the greater the chance of your winners being ruffed. Many contracts have foundered on the rocks of unfriendly distribution in this way. (p. 50)

Bruce: Errr, well, that seems straightforward. It is *usually* best to "draw" Trump early.

Esther: Well, Bruce, not so fast! Let's also consider the views of **Marty Bergen**. Bergen is a 10-time National Bridge Champion. Bergen has written a column in the ACBL Bridge Bulletin since 1976. Two of his 69+ bridge books/booklets have won Best Bridge Book of the Year Awards from the American Bridge Teachers' Association. His 1996 book, Points Schmoints!, one of the best book award winners, has been especially influential. Bergen has invented quite a

few bridge conventions/ systems including DON'T, Bergen Limit Raises, and the "Rule of 20".

One of the best books about bridge is Marty Bergen's 2011 little "pocket book",² Pocket Posh: Tips for Bridge Players. This book is called a "pocket book" because the book is physically small enough to fit in a shirt or pants pocket! Here is some of what Bergen had to say in his 2011 "pocket book" about "drawing Trump".

The number one misconception in bridge is "Declarer should draw trumps ASAP." ...On most hands, is it correct to draw trumps ASAP? No way! The truth is, it is usually wrong. I estimate that the declarer should draw trumps first only about 40 percent of the time. It would be absurd to say that drawing trumps first is never correct. However, there are many reasons to not draw trumps ASAP. Here are a few of them:

- You need to ruff losers in dummy.
- You must preserve trump entries in order to develop a long suit or set up an endplay.
- You are eager to set up a side suit that will allow you to discard losers.

So, unless you are *positive*, don't draw trumps first. (p. 99, first 4 italics added)

Bruce: Errr, well, hmmm... Can you give us an example Board involving a Suit contract on which you should not "draw" Trump, or at least not all of the Trump cards.

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. The following Board is drawn from Smith's recent 2025 ACBL Bridge Bulletin article.³

² This book is called a "pocket book" because the book is literally small enough to fit in your shirt pocket or a pants pocket! This book can still be purchased on the internet.

³ Esther has altered some of the cards on this Board.

Dlr: **SOUTH**

Vul: **BOTH**

NORTH (5)

S: 9 8 5 3

H: 9 2

D: J 7 3

C: A 7 6 3

WEST (7)

S: Q 2

H: Q J 8

D: 9 6 4

C: Q 9 8 5 2

EAST (8)

S: K J T

H: K T 7 6

D: T 9 5 2

C: J T

SOUTH (20)

S: A 7 6 4

H: A 5 4 3

D: A K Q

C: K 4

Bidding

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
2NT	PASS	3C	PASS
3S	PASS	4S	PASS
PASS	PASS		

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther, are there any unusual features about the N/S holdings on this Board that I should consider?

Esther: Well, Bruce, yes indeed.

1. N/S hold exactly **8** Trump Spades. There is an "odd" number of Trump cards held by E/W: **5**. Therefore, the *most likely* Trump "split" is a *near-equal* 3-2 "split" (probability **67.8%**). Less likely are 4-1 (28.3%) and 5-0 (3.9%) "splits.
2. Declarer SOUTH is confronting an E/W Pair that together holds the Trump Spade K,Q,J,T!
3. Declarer SOUTH sees 1 NORTH Dummy Heart "loser". To "make" his contract Declarer SOUTH **must** ruff Heart "losers" using the Dummy. SOUTH can ill-afford using **2** N/S Trump cards at a time to "draw" Trump and thus exhaust the NORTH Dummy's ruffing power. Indeed, a smart Defense will defeat this contract by themselves leading Spades.

Bruce: Oh, my, Goodness, Esther. On Trick #1 WEST led his Heart Queen from his Q,J,x "touching" Honor sequence. What should Declarer SOUTH do to avoid a dire fate?

Esther: Well, Bruce, on Trick #1 Declarer SOUTH should "duck" in his "closed" (hidden) Hand. SOUTH sees 2 Heart cards in the Dummy and knows that WEST will lead his Heart Jack on Trick #2 thus setting up Heart ruffing opportunities in the NORTH Dummy. On Trick #2 when WEST leads his Heart Jack Declarer SOUTH should play his Heart Ace and thereafter on Tricks #3 and #4 play exactly 2 Rounds of Trump Spades. As Smith noted:

Even when trumps split 3-2, you need to manage the suit correctly. This is a Goldilocks suit: You must play *exactly* the right number of rounds, neither *too few*, nor *too many*. ...[It is] important to play *exactly* two rounds of trump.
(p. 50, italics added)