

**"What is a 'Crossruff' Board and
How as Declarer Do You
Play a 'Crossruff' Board
When You Are Playing a Suit Contract?:
Sometimes When Playing a Suit Contract
You Should Never 'Draw' Trump!"**

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 **"What is a 'Crossruff' Board and How as Declarer Do You Play a 'Crossruff' Board When You Are Playing a Suit Contract?: Sometimes When Playing a Suit Contract You Should Never 'Draw' Trump!"** 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

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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**.

relentlessly, endlessly tormented me about my last name, Klinktoast-Houstonhousen?

Bruce: Well, yes, sorry again, Esther! Well, at the start would you define what you mean by a "**Crossruff Board**"?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. A "**Crossruff Board**" involves you as Declarer and the Dummy both holding (1) at least **1** "short" Suit and (2) several Trump cards such that you can *repeatedly* crossruff back and forth between your own Hand and the Dummy.

Bruce: Errr, well, sorry again about that, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther. Well, in what situation might it be advantageous for a Declarer to repeatedly "crossruff" between his own "closed" (hidden) Hand and the Dummy while playing a Suit contract?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will try to help you. In addition to you as Declarer and the Dummy both holding (1) at least **1** "short" Suit and (2) several Trump cards such that you can *repeatedly* crossruff back and forth between your own Hand and the Dummy, a "**Crossruff Board**" *also* usually involves (3) your Partnership holding *all or most* of the "top" Trump cards. This last **3rd** requirement occurs because repeated crossruffing when Opponents too hold some "top" Trump cards then your crossruffing may *inescapably* lead to Opponents having the opportunity to Overruff a Suit that you have repeatedly ruffed either in your Hand or the Dummy.²

Bruce: Well, Esther, would you walk us through the play of a "**Crossruff Board**" so that these concepts are more *concretely* illustrated?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. On my "**Esther Bridge Lessons**" website I have previously recommended the "**BBO Bridge Master**" website:
<https://www.bridgebase.com/v3/anon/bridgemaster>

² Of course, if an Opponent instead holds a "high" Trump repeated crossruffing can be used by a Declarer to present the Opponent holding the "high" Trump card with a Hobson's choice: either (a) Overruff "high" with your "high" Trump card, which results in you as Declarer "dropping" a "high" Opponent Trump card with only **1** of your Partnership's Trump cards rather than with **2** Trump cards, or (b) concede the ruff to the Declarer.

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. Here as an illustration I will use the *free* "BBO Bridge Master" Level-3 **Lesson A-23** which gives you the opportunity to see and *repeatedly practice* for *free* playing a given bridge Board. I have altered a few of the cards in these Hands from the Board.

BBO Bridge Master Level 3 Lesson A-23

Dealer: **SOUTH**

	NORTH (14)	
	S: K Q J T	
	H: A 6 4 3 2	
	D: A 4 2	
	C: 3	
WEST (6)		EAST (6)
S: 3		S: 6 5 4 2
H: K		H: Q J T 9 8 7
D: 8 7 6 5 3		D: T 9
C: Q J T 9 8 7		C: K
	SOUTH (14)	
	S: A 9 8 7	
	H: 5	
	D: K Q J	
	C: A 6 5 4 2	

Bidding

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1C	PASS	1H	PASS
1S	PASS	2D*	PASS
3D	PASS	6S	PASS
PASS	PASS		

*N/S are playing the "4th Suit Game Forcing" convention so SOUTH's 2nd bid shows (1) Diamonds but also (2) demands an eventual bid of at least Game.

WEST leads his Heart King singleton hoping that Partner EAST will later "return Partner's 1st lead".

Bruce: Well, Esther, does this Board meet all **3** of the requirements for this bridge Board to be a "**Crossruff Board**"?

Esther: Well, Bruce, yes, indeed!

1. **Both the Dummy and Declarer's Hand hold at least 1 "short" Suit.** Here the Dummy holds a Club singleton and the Declarer's Hand holds a Heart singleton.
2. **Both the Dummy and Declarer's Hand hold several Trump cards such that you can repeatedly crossruff back and forth between your own Hand and the Dummy.** Here both the Dummy and the Declarer's Hand hold **4** Trump Spade cards.
3. **Your Partnership holds all or most of the "top" Trump cards such that the Opponents are unable or less able to Overruff when your Partnership's ruffs.** On this Board N/S together hold all **8** of the "top" Trump Spade cards while E/W together hold all **5** of the "lowest" Trump Spade cards.

Bruce: Well, Esther, would you now talk us through Declarer's SOUTH's play of this "**Crossruff Board**"?

Esther: Well, Bruce, Declarer SOUTH "wins" Trick **#1** with the NORTH Dummy's Heart Ace. Once the NORTH Dummy is exposed Declarer SOUTH sees that he holds **3** Diamond "winners", the Diamond A,K,Q, **1** Heart "winner", the Heart Ace, and **1** Club "winner", the Club Ace. SOUTH will also "win" **4** Trump Spade Tricks for a total of $1 + 3 + 1 + 4 = 9$ Tricks. But Declarer SOUTH can also crossruff *both* Hearts and Clubs!

Bruce: Well, Esther, beginning with Trick **#2** should Declarer SOUTH then immediately "draw" the Opponents' Trump Spade cards?

Esther: Well, Bruce, no! Also, *NO!* And *NO, NO, NO!!!* When you are playing a "**Crossruff Board**" as Declarer you do not immediately "draw" Trump! Instead, you will first do some serious, *repeated* crossruffing before "drawing" Trump! And sometimes, as on this "**Crossruff Board**", you should never "draw" Trump!

Bruce: OK, Esther, well, what should Declarer do after "winning" Trick **#1**?

Esther: Well, Bruce, on Tricks **#2** and **#3** SOUTH should "cash" **2** Diamond Tricks ending in the NORTH Dummy. There is no need to *risk* playing a **3rd** Round of Diamonds prior to beginning the crossruff onslaught. If an Opponent initially held a Diamond doubleton the E/W Opponent "winning" Trick **#4** by ruffing if Diamonds are led a **3rd** time then on Trick **#5** the "winning" Opponent will next lead a Trump Spade thus *fatally* reducing the N/S ability to crossruff by reducing

the number of Trump cards in *both* Declarer's Hand and the Dummy!

Cardinal Bridge Principle

When you as Declarer are playing a “**Crossruff Board**” and your Partnership holds *few* Trump cards (e.g., $4 + 4 = 8$ Trump cards when you are playing a game or slam contract) and you can make your contract by never ruffing you should anticipate that the Opponents see that if they lead Trump your contract will be *profoundly* endangered! Thus, “**Crossruff Boards**” yield the “*good news*” that you may be able to “make” your contract *only* by crossruffing and never drawing Trump, but also the “*bad news*” that your contract on a “**Crossruff Board**” will be endangered if the Opponents lead Trump! So, on a “**Crossruff Board**” as Declarer do *everything* you can to not lose the lead!

Bruce: Wow, Esther, what then should Declarer SOUTH do on Trick #4?

Esther: Well, Bruce, on Trick #4 Declarer SOUTH should “cash” his own Club Ace. The next, *you guessed it*, 8 Tricks can be “won” by Declarer SOUTH crossruffing Hearts 4 times and Clubs 4 times! SOUTH's 6S contract is “made” and the Declarer never “drew” Trump!

“Law of Total Tricks” (“LOTT”)

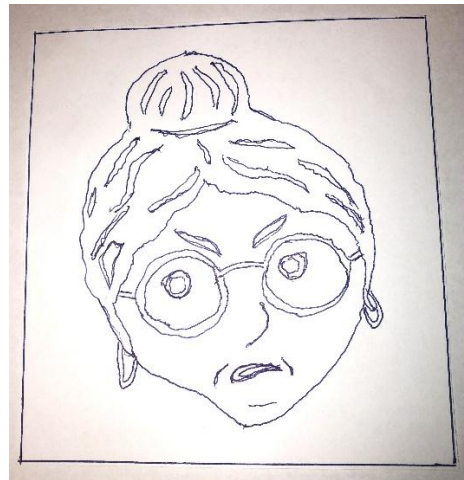
In 1992 Larry Cohen published his hugely influential and award-winning bridge book, To Bid or Not to Bid: The LAW of Total Tricks. Cohen argued that when bidding and playing Suit contracts you can usually “make” a Suit contract set no higher than the number of Trump cards held by your Partnership – 6. Trump card counts, and not HCPs, are what primarily matter when playing Suit contracts. The power of the “LOTT” was illustrated by the Board that ACBL LifeMaster James Bond, 007, played and made a 7C **DOUBLED** contract when his Partnership *together* held only 8 HCPs.³ The power of the “LOTT” was also illustrated in the “**Doubly Mirrored Board**”⁴ on which all 4 players held (1) exactly 10 HCPs, (2) 8 cards in 1 Suit, 3 cards in a Suit, 2 cards in a Suit, and 1 void, and (3) both EAST or

³ Within the “Esther Bridge Lessons” see:
<https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/moonraker.pdf>

⁴ Within the “Esther Bridge Lessons” see:
https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/Mirror_H.pdf

WEST can "make" a 5C or a 5H contract, both NORTH or SOUTH can "make" a 5D or a 5S contract, and all 4 players can "make" a 3NT contract even though both Pairs hold **only 20 HCPs!**

Empirical bridge research suggests that the "LOTT" generally works.⁵ Yet on the current "**Crossruff Board**" Board Declarer SOUTH makes a 6S contract when N/S together held only $4 + 4 = 8$ Trump Spade cards. While it is true that Trump card counts impact what contracts are makeable, in addition to HCPs card distributions also can profoundly affect what contracts can be "made".



Esther says:

“Why not proceed *immediately* to ‘**Bridge Base Online Bridge Master**’ Level-3 Lesson #A-23 to practice “**Playing a ‘Crossruff Board’ as Declarer Playing a Suit Contract**”? Search ‘BBO’, then Click ‘Bridge Master’, then Click ‘Play’, then Click ‘Level 3’, then Click ‘A-23’. You can play this Board *repeatedly* in Bridge Master for *free!*”

⁵ Within the “**Esther Bridge Lessons**” see “**Esther Discusses “(1) Does the ‘Law of Total Tricks’ (‘LOTT’) Really Work, and (2) Is the ‘LOTT’ Magic?”**” :

https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/LOTT_bad.pdf