

**Esther Discusses "Play as Declarer:  
'Endplay' of Your *Dangerous/Strong* Opponent, and  
When to Draw or Not Draw Trump Early"**

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

To return to the "Esther Bridge Lessons," CLICK:

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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 "Playing as Declarer: 'Endplay' of Your *Dangerous/Strong* Opponent, When to Draw or Not Draw Trump Early". 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!

**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, would you *first* discuss what you

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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**.

mean by “the *Dangerous/Strong* Opponent”?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. In duplicate bridge you may determine during the auction, or later in play, that a particular Opponent is a *specific* danger to your making your contract, either because that Opponent holds a dangerous “long” Suit or the preponderance of the HCPs.

As you know, Bruce, I have previously recommended to you the “**BBO Bridge Master**” website.<sup>2</sup> This 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 of each Board you can then request a solution in which the optimal “Line of Play” is discussed *step by step*. The present “Esther Bridge Lesson” Board is drawn from “**BBO Bridge Master**” Level-2 **Lesson D-12**.<sup>3</sup>

**Bruce:** Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther. What was the bidding in the auction on this Board?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, here is the Board:

	NORTH (17)		
	<b>S:</b>	4 2	
	<b>H:</b>	A K 2	
	<b>D:</b>	A K Q 8 7	
	<b>C:</b>	J T 9	
	WEST (13)		EAST (1)
<b>S:</b>	A 9		<b>S:</b> J T 3
<b>H:</b>	Q J T 9 8		<b>H:</b> 7 6 5
<b>D:</b>	6 5 3		<b>D:</b> 4 2
<b>C:</b>	A Q 8		<b>C:</b> 7 6 5 4 2
		SOUTH (9)	
		<b>S:</b> K Q 8 7 6 5	
		<b>H:</b> 4 3	
		<b>D:</b> J T 9	
		<b>C:</b> K 3	

**Bidding**

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	
1 <b>H</b>	1 <b>NT</b>	PASS	4 <b>S</b>	<b>ALL</b> PASS

<sup>2</sup> See: <https://www.bridgebase.com/v3/app/lv?bridgemaster=>

<sup>3</sup> The “**BBO Bridge Master**” deals, such as Level-2 **Lesson D-12**, are not fixed. Some of the cards in the deal over repetitious play of the Board change from time to time within the website. Esther also may have changed some cards in these Boards.

**Bruce:** Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther. What happened on Trick **#1**? Once the NORTH Dummy came down how many losers did Declarer SOUTH see?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, WEST led the Heart Queen thus promising the Heart Jack. And Declarer SOUTH knows that WEST likely held 5 Hearts initially. Because the NORTH Dummy holds **3** Hearts, and Declarer SOUTH holds **2** Hearts, Declarer SOUTH knows that EAST holds **3** Hearts.

Declarer SOUTH knows that he will certainly lose **1** Spade Trick to the Opponent's Trump Spade Ace, and the Club Ace, and possibly a total of **2** Clubs. The SOUTH Declarer **must** try to avoid losing a 2<sup>nd</sup> Club Trick and thus getting set!

The NORTH Dummy holds **17** HCPs, the SOUTH Declarer holds **9** HCPs. WEST likely holds **~13** HCPs, while EAST holds no or few HCPs. This means that WEST holds the Trump Spade Ace and the missing A,Q of clubs and is the **Dangerous/Strong** Opponent. Declarer SOUTH **must** keep EAST out of the lead or EAST will run a Club lead against the SOUTH Declarer's Club K,3.

Declarer SOUTH's "Line of Play" is to eventually discard SOUTH's Club losers on the NORTH Dummy's Diamonds. But Declarer SOUTH must first "draw" Trump. SOUTH does not mind losing 2 Spade Trump Tricks *as long as EAST does not get the lead.*

**Bruce:** Errr, Esther. OK. What happens as the 2 Pairs continue playing the Board?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, Declarer SOUTH wins Trick **#1** in the NORTH Dummy with the Heart King. On Trick **#2** Declarer SOUTH leads the Trump Spade 2 from the NORTH Dummy. EAST plays his Trump Spade 3 "second Hand low". Declarer SOUTH then plays his Trump Spade 5 and WEST wins Trick **#2** with his Trump Spade 9.

On Trick **#3** WEST really has little choice but to lead his Heart Jack which Declarer SOUTH wins in the NORTH Dummy with Heart Ace. On Trick **#4** Declarer SOUTH plays the NORTH Dummy Trump Spade 4, EAST covers with his Trump Spade Ten, Declarer SOUTH plays his TRUMP Spade King, and WEST wins Trick **#4** with his Trump Spade Ace.

Here are the cards held by the 4 players after **4** Tricks have been played with both N/S and E/W having taken **2** Tricks each. Note that Declarer SOUTH has "**endplayed**" the

**Dangerous/ Strong** Opponent. The only sure "winning" Trick WEST can take is his Club Ace, but doing so "promotes" Declarer SOUTH's Club King into a certain "winner".

NORTH (17)			
S:			
H: 2			
D: A K Q 8 7			
C: J T 9			
WEST (13)		EAST (1)	
S:		S: J	
H: T 9 8		H: 7	
D: 6 5 3		D: 4 2	
C: A Q 8		C: 7 6 5 4 2	
SOUTH (9)			
S: Q 8 7 6			
H:			
D: J T 9			
C: K 3			

**Bruce:** OK, Esther. What's next?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, the next "Esther Bridge Lesson" Board is drawn from "BBO Bridge Master" Level-2 **Lesson D-11** although some cards may have changed by Esther.

NORTH (7)			
S: 5 4			
H: 4 3			
D: K J 5 4			
C: K 5 4 3 2			
WEST (13)		EAST (5)	
S: J T 9 8		S: 7 6	
H: A Q J 6 5		H: K T 9 8 7	
D: 3 2		D: 7 6	
C: A J		C: Q T 9 8	
SOUTH (15)			
S: A K Q 3 2			
H: 2			
D: A Q T 9 8			
C: 7 6			

**Bidding**

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

**Bruce:** OK, Esther. How was this Board played?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, WEST on Trick #1 leads his Heart Ace and the remaining players all follow Suit. On Trick #2 WEST leads his Heart Queen which Declarer SOUTH wins with a ruff in his "closed" Hand.

Declarer SOUTH sees a possible Trump Spade loser if the Spades "split" 4-2 rather than 3-3. With an "even" number of cards, 6, being "out", the most likely "split" is 4-2 (48.4% probability) rather than 3-3 (35.5%), 5-1 (14.5%), or 6-0 (1.5%).<sup>4</sup> However, the good news for N/S is that WEST likely holds the Club Ace in "front of" the NORTH Dummy "protected" Club King, given that WEST opened the bidding, so N/S likely will lose only 1 Club Trick.

**Bruce:** Well, Esther, on lead on Trick #3 shouldn't the Declarer "draw" 3 Rounds of Trump in the hopes that the "split" is 3-3 even though that is not the most likely "Trump Spade split"?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, *no*, NO, NO! If on Tricks #3, #4 and #5 "draws" 3 Rounds of Trump Spades on Trick #5 EAST will "show out" by sluffing a low Heart "loser".

NORTH (7)		
S:		
H:		
D:	K J 5 4	
C:	K 5 4 3	
WEST (13)		EAST (5)
S:	J	S:
H:	J 6 5	H:
D:	3 2	D:
C:	A J	C:
	SOUTH (15)	
	S:	
	3	
	H:	
	D:	
	A Q T 9 8	
	C:	
	7 6	

Declarer SOUTH will eventually have to play on Clubs and WEST will "win" with his Club Ace. Then WEST will immediately "draw" Declarer SOUTH's last Trump Spade. E/W having already "won" 3 Tricks will then take an *additional*

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<sup>4</sup> Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons", see "Card Split Probabilities for Even vs Odd Splits": <https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/probabil.pdf>

3 Heart Tricks because Declarer SOUTH "drew" too many Rounds of Trump Spades *too early!*

**Bruce:** WOW, Esther, so how instead should Declarer SOUTH have played this Board?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, Declarer SOUTH on Trick #3 should lead his Club 6 toward the NORTH Dummy's visible Club King. Declarer SOUTH believes that WEST holds the Club Ace and will be forced to play the Club Ace while he can do so even though the Club Ace then will not be doing its primary "job" of "killing a King"!

On Trick #4 WEST can try another Heart return, but because Declarer SOUTH did not "draw" any Rounds of Trump yet, the SOUTH Declarer can ruff a Heart lead by WEST in the NORTH Dummy where 2 Trump Spades were initially held. Ruffing in the Dummy where Trump Spades are "short", *unlike* ruffing in the Declarer SOUTH's Hand, indeed does produce "extra" Tricks.

On Tricks #5, #6 and #7 it is now "safe" for Declarer SOUTH to "draw" 3 Rounds of Trump Spades. N/S have now taken 5 Tricks and E/W have taken 2 Tricks. After SOUTH does so, here are the remaining 6 cards held in the 4 Hands:

	NORTH (7)	
	S:	
	H:	
	D: K J 5 4	
	C: K 5	
WEST (13)		EAST (5)
S: J		S:
H: 6 5		H: K 9
D: 3 2		D: 7 6
C: J		C: Q T
	SOUTH (15)	
	S: 3	
	H:	
	D: A Q T 9	
	C: 7	

Declarer SOUTH can now revert to Diamonds. WEST can ruff "at will" but will be able to take zero additional Tricks beyond the single ruff.

**Bruce:** Well, Esther, was there anyway for Declarer SOUTH to know from the auction itself that E/W were **5-5** in Hearts and that NORTH held **2** Hearts?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, EAST's "jump" from **1H** to **4H** strongly suggests that EAST holds **5** Hearts to match WEST's showing of **5+** Hearts in his initial **1H** opening bid. EAST is clearly bidding based on the "**Law of Total Tricks**",<sup>5</sup> popularized by Larry Cohen in his influential 1992 book, To Bid or Not to Bid: The LAW of Total Tricks", which won a Best Bridge Book of the Year Award from the American Bridge Teachers' Association. The "**Law of Total Tricks**" says that you can usually safely bid a Suit contract up to the number of Trump cards your Partnership holds - 6. EAST, knowing that WEST showed **5** Hearts, **must** hold **5** Hearts, because  $5 + 5 = 10$ , and  $10 - 6 = 4$ ! Otherwise, EAST would not have made this bid!

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<sup>5</sup> Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons", see: "(1) Does the 'Law of Total Tricks' Really Work, and (2) Is the 'LOTT' Magic?":

[https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/LOTT\\_bad.pdf](https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/LOTT_bad.pdf)