

## Esther Discusses

# “Promoting’ ‘Winners’ in a Long Suit When Playing Either NT or Suit Contracts as Declarer”

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

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<https://esther-bridge.com/index.html>

**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 “Promoting’ ‘Winners’ in Long Suit When Playing Either NT or Suit Contracts as Declarer”. 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 such a “warm and caring” person!

**Bruce:** Errr, well, sorry again about that, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther. Well, in any case, in there anything you wish to say initially before you delve into the heart of today’s Esther bridge lesson?

**Esther:** Well, my *gracious giver*, I will certainly try to help you! And yes, indeed, there is something I would like to say at the outset. The ideas presented here are drawn from Marc Smith’s excellent article, “Establishing Tricks With Long Cards”, that was published in the June, 2025 issue of the ACBL Bridge Bulletin. The example Boards are from that article but Esther may have altered some of the cards in the various Hands.

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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.

**Bruce:** Errr, well, Esther... Are you actually being nice to me?

**Esther:** Well, my *inquisitive interlocutor*, of course I am being "nice" to you! Why wouldn't I be "nice" to you?

**Bruce:** Errr, well, in any case, would you first define what you mean by "promoting" cards?

**Esther:** Well, my *handsome hombre*, I will certainly try to help you. "Promoting" cards refers to the strategy of forcing Opponents into playing their "high" cards in a Suit thus converting your lower-ranking cards into "winners". For example, if you are playing a **NT** contract and you hold K,Q,x in a Suit and you lead the King and an Opponent plays the Ace in that Suit then your Queen has now been "promoted" into a "winner". Or if you are playing a **NT** contract and you as Declarer hold 5,4,3,2 in a Suit and your Partner's Dummy Hand holds the 8,7,6 in the same Suit and you lead this Suit 3 times and both Opponents follow Suit all 3 times your 2 in the Suit has now been "promoted" into a "winner". Both Declarer and the Defenders can "promote" cards.

**Bruce:** Ummm. Hmmmmmm. Well, Esther, could you first give us an example of when you playing a **3NT** contract as Declarer might need to "promote" cards in order to make your contract?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. Here is an example Board:

NORTH (14)

**S:** J 7  
**H:** K 8 2  
**D:** A K 6 4 2  
**C:** K 7 2

WEST (7)

**S:** K 5  
**H:** Q J T 7 3  
**D:** 7 3  
**C:** J T 8 5

EAST (6)

**S:** Q T 9 2  
**H:** 9 5 4  
**D:** Q T 9 5  
**C:** Q 9

SOUTH (13)

**S:** A 8 6 4 3  
**H:** A 6  
**D:** J 8  
**C:** A 6 4 3

**Bidding**

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1 <b>S</b>	PASS	2 <b>D</b> *	PASS
2 <b>NT</b>	PASS	3 <b>NT</b>	PASS
PASS	PASS		

\*This is "2 Over 1" ("2/1") bid<sup>2</sup> that says, "Partner, I hold (1) 13+ HCPs and (2) 4+ Diamonds. My bid says nothing about my Spade holdings."

**Bruce:** Well, Esther, WEST leads the Heart Queen as the "top" of a "touching" Honor sequence. Would you talk us through the Declarer SOUTH's thought process once the NORTH Dummy comes "down"?

**Esther:** Well, my *studly salamander*, yes, I will try to help you. Declarer SOUTH should first try to count his "winners". SOUTH can see as certain "winners" 1 Spade, 2 Hearts, 2 Diamonds, and 2 Clubs for a total of 7 Tricks. Declarer SOUTH must create 2 additional "winners" to "make" his contract.

The Diamonds may provide a source of additional Tricks for Declarer SOUTH. The E/W Opponents hold 6 Diamonds. The most likely "split" when Opponents hold an "even" number of "missing" cards is not the equal "split". In this case the probability of a 4-2 "split" is 48.4% while the probability

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<sup>2</sup> Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons" see: "Convention Lesson #1: The '2 Over 1 ('2/1') Convention":

[https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/2 over 1.pdf](https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/2%20over%201.pdf)

of a 3-3 "split" is **35.5%**.<sup>3</sup> However Declarer SOUTH can pick up 2 "extra" Diamond Tricks if EAST holds the Diamond Queen even if EAST holds Q,x,x in Diamonds.

**Bruce:** Well, Esther, how should Declarer SOUTH play assuming this placement of the cards?

**Esther:** Well, my *curious carnivore*, the SOUTH Declarer should first "win" Trick **#1** in the NORTH Dummy with the Dummy's Heart King. On Trick **#2** lead the NORTH Dummy Heart 2. If EAST "ducks" by playing the Diamond 5 "second Hand low" then play the Diamond Jack in your "closed" (hidden) Hand. If instead EAST "covers" by playing the Diamond Queen then "duck" in your "closed" Hand and now your Diamond Jack has been "promoted" into a "winner". You will later take 3 Diamond "winners" and play a 4<sup>th</sup> Diamond to "knock out" EAST's last Diamond and thus "promote" the NORTH Dummy's 5<sup>th</sup> Diamond into another "winner". You have 1<sup>st</sup> Round "control" in both Majors and Clubs and you will eventually take **4** Diamond, **1** Spade, **2** Heart, **2** Club Tricks for a total of **9** Tricks through the "magic" of "promoting" "low" cards into "winners" when playing a **NT** contract! By the way, if on Trick **#1** you had not "won" with the NORTH Dummy Heart Ace you would not have been able to take advantage of your holding the Diamond Jack and you would have only made your contract if the Opponents' Diamond "split" was the less likely 3-3 "split".

**Bruce:** OMG, Esther, what about "promoting" "winners" when playing a **Suit** contract? Do the same principles apply?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, my *bodacious beau*, I will try to help you. Here is a second Board:

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<sup>3</sup> Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons" see: "Card Split Probabilities for *Even vs Odd Splits*": <https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/probabil.pdf>



**Bruce:** Well, Esther, is there any hope at all for this ambitious N/S contract?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, actually there may be a glimmer of hope in the "long" N/S Clubs! On Trick **#1** Declarer SOUTH "wins" in his "closed" Hand with the Heart Jack. On Trick **#2** Declarer SOUTH "cashes" his Club Ace. On Trick **#3** Declarer SOUTH leads his only remaining Club, the Club Jack, and WEST "wins" with his Club Queen.<sup>4</sup> On Trick **#4** WEST leads his Trump Heart 2 which Declarer SOUTH "wins" in the NORTH Dummy with his Trump Heart 9. On Trick **#5** Declarer SOUTH leads a "low" Club from the NORTH Dummy and ruffs in his "closed" Hand. On Trick **#6** Declarer SOUTH leads a "low" Diamond to cross to the NORTH Dummy's Diamond Ace singleton. On Trick **#7** Declarer SOUTH leads another NORTH Dummy Club and again ruffs in his "closed" Hand. On Trick **#8** Declarer SOUTH leads a "low" Spade to the NORTH Dummy Ace. On Trick **#9** Declarer SOUTH plays the NORTH Dummy Trump Heart Queen to "draw" the last Trump Heart held by the Opponents.

On Trick **#10** Declarer SOUTH plays the Club 9 "winner" in the NORTH Dummy. On Trick **#11** Declarer SOUTH leads the Spade 5 in the NORTH Dummy and "wins" in his "closed" Hand with Spade King. On Trick **#12** Declarer SOUTH leads the Diamond King "winner" in his "closed" Hand. On Trick **#13** Declarer SOUTH leads his Diamond Jack and ruffs in the NORTH Dummy for a total of 12 Tricks and "makes" his **6H** contract. The following page shows the cards played on each Trick and the "winning" card on each Trick is presented in **bold red**.

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<sup>4</sup> Against slam contracts it may be best to immediately capture "winning" Tricks even "second Hand high"!

**Cards Played on Each Trick**  
**With "Winners" Shown in Bold Red**

NORTH (10)

**S:** **A** 7 5  
8 12 11

**H:** **Q T 9** 5  
9 13 4 1

**D:** **A**  
6

**C:** **9** 6 4 3 2  
10 7 5 3 2

WEST (4)

**S:** Q T 6 3  
13 11 8 5

**H:** 8 7 2  
9 1 4

**D:** 9 6 5 3  
12 10 7 6

**C:** **Q** 8  
3 2

EAST (6)

**S:** J 9 2  
11 9 8

**H:** 4 3  
4 1

**D:** Q T 7 4  
13 12 10 6

**C:** K T 7 5  
7 5 3 2

SOUTH (20)

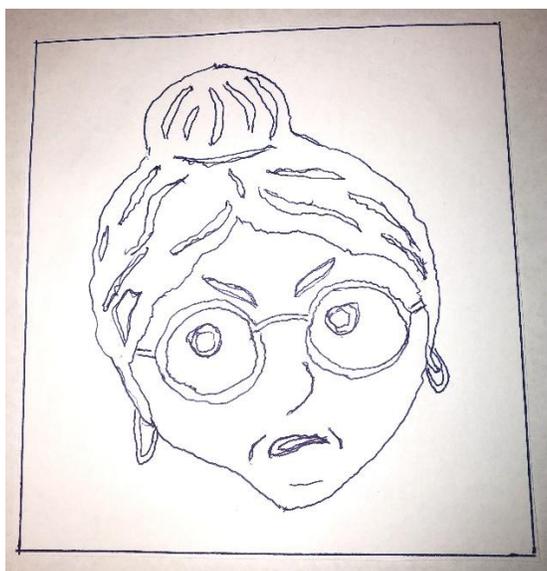
**S:** **K** 8 4  
11 10 8

**H:** **A K J** 6  
7 5 1 4

**D:** **K** J 8 2  
12 13 9 6

**C:** **A** J  
2 3

**Bruce:** My goodness, Esther, those "long" Clubs proved very useful, first by providing ruffs for the Declarer SOUTH, and lastly by "promoting" the NORTH Dummy 5<sup>th</sup> Club, the "lowly" Club 9, into a "winner"!



**Esther:** Bingo, Bruce. "Promoting" "long" Suits when playing **NT** contracts is very, very important. As you know in my previous "Esther Bridge Lessons" I have emphasized the importance of "promoting" "winners" when playing a **NT** contract, such as in "Esther Bridge Lesson #113, '3 Strategies for 'Promoting' 'Winners' When Playing NT Contracts as Declarer'":

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

and "Esther Bridge Lesson #105: 'Playing NT Contracts as Declarer: The *Supercritical* Importance of Maximizing Your 'Trick Count' By 'Promoting' Low Cards into Winners in 1 of 2 Ways'":

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

But "promoting" "long" Suit winners can also be important when playing **Suit** contracts! So, I very much agree with this "take home" message in Marc Smith's recent ACBL Bridge Bulletin article!

One of my favorite bridge teachers is Marti Ronemus who posts very good lessons on the "BridgeBee" website:

<https://bridgebee.app/authors/3/Marti%20Ronemus>

Within the "Porch Sitting—Everyday Challenges" section of her lessons, in her lesson "First Trick Fiasco," Marti emphasizes that, "The moral of the story is that '**No 5-card [S]uit in Dummy should ever be ignored**'." (emphasis added)

## About Marti

Marti Ronemus has written over 100 articles for various ACBL publications. She also authored 22 columns a month for Vu-Bridge and was the Program Manager for "Easybridge!". Currently she runs more than a dozen Bridge Boot Camps a year. This quotation from "Marti's Mutterings"<sup>5</sup> says A LOT about Marti and her passion for bridge as well as her *mind-blowing* humor:

"You are about to become utterly addicted to a strange new world. You won't notice the little changes at first. It's probably already too late. So how does this happen? Very innocently and I'll share how it happened to Gary and me, as a Cautionary Tale.

My husband and I went to a Nationals, the biggest of the tournament types. We had taken a couple bridge lessons and someone told us there was a tournament about 20 miles away. Gosh, we said, why not? How hard can it be?

Well. We were knocked over! Hundreds and hundreds of tables of bridge going all at the same time. Games just for players as clueless as we were. Wonderful speakers right before each game. So we played...

At the end of the game, they announced that Gary and I had won the 0-5 Masterpoint game! We got great glasses saying WINNERS to prove it! (And didn't we thrust those on people...till the ink wore off.) Our first Nationals hooked us. We were done for."

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<sup>5</sup> See:

<https://barbaraseagram.com/pdf/20230927-previous-articles.pdf>