

## "As Declarer, 'Dumping' Your Loser(s) Using a 'Loser-on-a-Loser' Strategy"

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

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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 "As Declarer, 'Dumping' Your Loser(s) Using a 'Loser-on-a-Loser' Strategy". 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, very sorry about that, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen. Well, would you begin by talking us through playing Suit contracts as Declarer, and your initial tasks once your Partner's Dummy Hand comes down?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, of course I will try to help you! Once the Dummy comes down when you are playing a Suit contract your first task is to identify your "certain losers". There are several ways to "dump" your "losers" including ruffing your "losers" in either the Dummy or in your own "closed" (hidden) Hand and thus creating or heightening ruffing opportunities. Ruffing has *many* purposes: (1) taking "winners", especially if you do so in the Hand that is "shortest" in Trump cards (usually the Dummy), and thus

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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**.

create "new" Tricks, (2) transportation between your "closed" Hand and the Dummy, or vice versa, and (3) "dumping" "losers" by sluffing "losers" on Tricks that have been ruffed by you or an Opponent.

**Bruce:** Errr, well, Esther, ...err, I mean Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, could you please use a specific Board in order to make this discussion concrete?

**Esther:** Bruce, I will try to help you. The "**BBO Bridge Master**" website<sup>2</sup> 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-3 **Lesson A-13**.<sup>3</sup>

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

**Bidding**

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
2 <b>D</b>	PASS	PASS	<b>DBL</b>
PASS	3 <b>C</b>	PASS	3 <b>H</b>
PASS	4 <b>H</b>	PASS	PASS
PASS			

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

<sup>3</sup> The "**BBO Bridge Master**" deals, such as Level-3 **Lesson A-13**, are not fixed. Some of the cards in the deal over repetitious play of the Board change from time to time within the website.

WEST leads his Diamond King from the top of his 5 "touching" Diamond sequence.

**Bruce:** Errr, well, Esther, ..err, I mean Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen. What will happen next?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, once the NORTH Dummy is down Declarer SOUTH must first make his *initial, tentative* plan for his Line of Play. Declarer SOUTH can see **1** "loser" in Spades (the 3<sup>rd</sup> Spade in the NORTH Dummy and Declarer SOUTH's 3<sup>rd</sup> Spade), **1** "loser" in Diamonds, and **1** certain "loser" in Clubs (the Declarer SOUTH's Club 7). Declarer SOUTH **must** try to find a way to avoid losing a **2<sup>nd</sup>** Diamond Trick.

Given that WEST showed **6** Diamonds during the auction by opening **2D**, and Declarer SOUTH once the Dummy comes "down" sees N/S together hold  $2 + 3 = 5$  Diamonds, Declarer SOUTH knows that EAST must hold  $13 - 6 - 5 = 2$  Diamonds. Because WEST is "long" in Diamonds and EAST is "short" in Diamonds, therefore EAST is *likely* to hold *more* Trump Hearts than WEST. And with E/S together holding **5** Trump Hearts, an "odd" number, Declarer SOUTH knows that a 3-2 Heart "split" is more likely (**67.8%** probability) than a 4-1 Heart "split" (**28.3%**;  $67.8\% / 28.3\% = 2.4$ ). Thus, a 3-2 Trump Heart "split" is **2.4** times more likely than a 4-1 Trump Heart "split".

Declarer SOUTH can only "make" his contract on this Board by making a "**loser-on-loser**" **play**. As defined by Wikipedia, "A loser on loser play is a type of [D]eclarer's play in contract bridge, usually in [T]rump contracts, where the [D]eclarer discards [or sluffs] a loser card (the one that is bound to be given up [lost] anyway) on an [O]pponent's winner, instead of ruffing." The Wikipedia post noted that the "loser on loser" technique can be executed to achieve the following goals, among others:

1. to "promote" lower cards in the Suit being led so that the "prompted" cards become later "winners",
2. to maintain Trump control when Declarer and Dummy together are "short" of Trump cards,
3. to "transfer" ruffing opportunities to a "safer" Suit, or
4. to "rectify the count" for a subsequent "squeeze play".

As Cohen explained in his "Loser on Loser Plays" website posting,<sup>4</sup> "...the idea of a loser on loser play is to substitute something that is already a loser for a more productive loser."

On this Board Declarer SOUTH must take Trick #1 with his Diamond Ace. Trying to create a Diamond ruff in the NORTH Dummy is *unlikely* to work, because EAST is also "short" of Diamonds.

Declarer SOUTH on Trick #2 must then exit with one of his "low" Diamonds. This will (1) give E/W a "certain" winner that E/W will in any case "make", but also (2) create an opportunity to ruff a Diamond later in the NORTH Dummy.<sup>5</sup> WEST will "win" Trick #2 with his Diamond 8, or any of the Diamonds in his "touching" Diamonds sequence.

**Bruce:** Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, if WEST then on Trick #3 returns another Diamond, what should Declarer SOUTH then do?

**Esther:** Well, so far both N/S have taken 1 Trick and E/W have taken 1 Trick. Declarer NORTH could ruff Trick #3 from the NORTH Dummy. But a *better* strategy is for Declarer SOUTH to sluff 1 of his "low" Spade "losers" from the NORTH Dummy. This is a "**loser-on-loser**" play. If WEST does not return a Diamond lead on Trick #3, Declarer SOUTH should himself instead lead his remaining Diamond 3 once Declarer SOUTH has regained the lead. By foregoing a ruff on Diamonds from the NORTH Dummy on Trick #3 Declarer SOUTH is "trading" a Diamond ruff from Dummy, which EAST could overruff given that the NORTH Dummy holds *only* "low" Heart Trump cards, for a **safer** Spade ruff by Declarer SOUTH later leading a remaining "low" Spade held in Declarer's "closed" Hand.

**Bruce:** Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, what will happen on Trick #4?

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<sup>4</sup> Cohen's article is posted at: <https://www.larryco.com/bridge-articles/loser-on-loser-plays>  
Also see his articles, "Loser on Loser Squared", at:  
<https://www.larryco.com/bridge-articles/loser-on-loser-squared>

<sup>5</sup> Ruffing from Declarer SOUTH's "closed" Hand does not create "extra" Tricks, because these 5 Heart Trump cards will be won by Declarer SOUTH *no matter* when or how SOUTH plays these Hearts!

**Esther:** Well, on Trick #4 WEST can see that *either* a Spade or a Diamond lead will result in the NORTH Dummy winning, and WEST must assume that Declarer SOUTH will win a Heart Trump lead also. So WEST will shift and lead his Club 9 in the hopes that WEST can "win" a Club Trick.

**Bruce:** Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, won't Declarer SOUTH "win" Trick #4 with his Club Ace? What should Declarer SOUTH then do on Trick #5?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, yes indeed, Declarer SOUTH will "win" Trick #4 with his Club Ace. In case WEST was dealt only 1 or 2 Spades, Declarer SOUTH on Tricks #5 and #6 should draw 2 Rounds of Heart Trump and "drop" the 2 Trump Hearts that WEST is presumed to have.

**Bruce:** Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, at this point Declarer SOUTH has taken 4 Tricks and E/W have taken 2 Tricks. What should Declarer SOUTH do on Trick #7?

**Esther:** Well, on Trick #7 Declarer SOUTH should lead a Spade to the NORTH Dummy's Spade Ace. On Trick #8 Declarer SOUTH should exit the NORTH Dummy with the Spade 5 led toward the Spade King in Declarer's "closed" Hand. On Trick #9 Declarer SOUTH should lead his last Spade for a ruff in the NORTH Dummy. Because WEST was "long" Diamonds, EAST likely *cannot* ruff a Spade on Trick #9.

**Bruce:** OK, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen. N/S have now taken 7 Tricks, and E/W have taken 2 Tricks. After 9 Tricks have been settled, here are the 4 cards held by each player:

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

**C:** 7

It looks like Declarer SOUTH will take **3** Trump Heart "winners" and inevitably "lose" **1** Club Trick, and thus exactly make his **4H** contract by taking **10** Tricks. Is that correct?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, BINGO!!!