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"As Declarer Playing a 6NT Contract Prefer 'Running' a 'Long' Suit as Against Making an '*Unmarked Finesse*'"

Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen[1]

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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 Playing a 6NT Contract Prefer 'Running' a 'Long' Suit as Against Making an '*Unmarked Finesse*'**[2]". 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! Well, Esther, at the

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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**.

[2] Within the "**Esther Bridge Lessons**" see: https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/U_M_S_Fin.pdf

outset, would you tell us from where your current report originated?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. The ideas and the bridge Board example in this "**Esther Bridge Dialogue Lesson**" come from a bridge newspaper column, "Failure to Combine Chances Costs", written by Richard Pavlicek and published November 13, 1988.

Bruce: Errr, well, sorry again about that, Ms. Klinktoast…, err, I mean Esther. Well, before we delve into your fascinating topic would you please first tell us a bit about this Richard Pavlicek fellow?

Esther: Well, Bruce, of course I am happy to address your question.

About **Richard Pavlicek**

Richard Pavlicek (1945-) has won **11** North American Bridge Championships, including a record-setting **3** straight wins in the Reisinger Board-a-Match Teams, 1982-84, and again in 1990. He won the 1973 inaugural Grand National Teams tournament and repeated a win there in 1997. He has written or co-authored several bridge books, including with co-author William S. Root their 1981 book, Modern Bridge Conventions. From 1984 until 1990 Pavlicek was the Bridge Columnist for the Fort Lauderdale News and Sun-Sentinel. Esther particularly likes the Bridge Simulation Studies presented on his bridge website:
https://www.rpbridge.net/rpsi.htm
and his re-posts of his newspaper bridge columns:
https://www.rpbridge.net/rpco.htm

Bruce: Errr, well, sorry again about that, Ms. Klinktoast…, err, I mean Esther. Well, what is the fundamental focus of this "**Esther Bridge Lesson**"?

Esther: Well, Bruce, as you know, all Declarers during the "Play of the Hand" must *confront* and *resolve* various choices. The present "**Esther Bridge Dialogue Lesson**" focuses on choosing between making an "**unmarked finesse**"[2], where you have no information about the Opponents' Hands from the *auction* because Opponents were both silent, and no or little information from *play* because it is early in the "Play of the Hand".

Bruce: Errr, well, would you now present the bridge board example that Pavlicek used in his newspaper column to illustrate making this choice between finessing versus "running" a long Suit?

Esther: Well, Bruce, of course:

Dealer: **NORTH**

Vul: **NONE**

NORTH (**17**)
S: A K 7 5
H: K 9
D: A K T 6 4
C: 8 5

WEST (**1**)
S: J T 9 4
H: T 7 6 3
D: 2
C: T 7 6 3

EAST (**6**)
S: 8 3 2
H: 8 4 2
D: Q J 5 3
C: K 9 2

SOUTH (**16**)
S: Q 6
H: A Q J 5
D: 9 8 7
C: A Q J 4

Bidding

NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	WEST
1**D**	PASS	1**H**	PASS
1**S**	PASS	3**NT***	PASS
4**NT****	PASS	6**NT**	PASS
PASS			

*"Partner, I hold a 'big' Hand and 'stoppers' in the unbid Club Suit."

"Partner, I think we can make a 6NT** contract. Please bid 6**NT** if you agree." This is an "**Quantiative NT Raise**" and not the Blackwood convention.

On Trick **#1** WEST leads the Spade Jack as the "top" of a "touching" Honor sequence in his "longest and strongest" Suit.

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast…, err, I mean Esther. Well, as Declarer once the NORTH Dummy is exposed how many "winners" should Declarer SOUTH count?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I certainly will try to help you. Declarer SOUTH sees as "winners" **3** Spades, the Spade A,K,Q, **4**

Hearts, the Heart A,K,Q,J, at least **2** Diamonds, the Diamond A,K, and **2** or **3** Clubs with his Club A,Q,J,x depending upon where the "missing" E/W Club Queen sits, for a total of 3 + 4 + 2 + **2** = 11 or 3 + 4 + 2 + **3** = **12** Tricks.

Declarer SOUTH has 2 additional "Line of Play" opportunities:

1. Declarer SOUTH can lead a "low" Club from the NORTH Dummy and execute a Club finesse assuming that EAST holds the Club King. Indeed, if the **1st** Club finesse succeeds, SOUTH can then re-enter the NORTH Dummy and then finesse Clubs a **2nd** time.
2. Declarer SOUTH sees that N/S together hold 5 = 3 = **8** Diamonds including the Diamond A,K,T,9,8,7 while E/W together hold 13 – 8 = **5** Diamonds including the Diamond Q,J. SOUTH knows that when the Opponents hold an "*odd*" number of Diamond cards, such as **5**, the *most likely* "split" is the most *nearly-equal* 3-2 "split".[3] Specifically, the probability of a 3-2 "split" is **67.8%**, the probability of a 4-1 "split" is **28.3%**, and the probability of a 5-0 "split" is **3.9%**. Thus, the probability of a 3-2 "split" is 67.8% / 28.3% = **2.4** times more likely than a 4-1 "split".

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast…, err, I mean Esther. Well, obviously Declarer SOUTH could execute *both* of these plays. But should SOUTH try the "unmarked" Club finesse *early* or should Declarer SOUTH *first* explore the Diamond situation?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I certainly will try to help you. Here is an important bridge principle:

General Bridge Principle Regarding Making "Unmarked Finesses"

As Declarer *only* execute an "**unmarked finesse**" once you learn that you must do so or in order to "make" your contract. Also, generally you should not execute an "**unmarked finesse**" to secure an Overtrick *only* if you can do so without jeopardizing your contract.

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[3] Within the "**Esther Bridge Lessons**" see: "**A *Comprehensive* List of 8 *Different Categories* of Bridge Probabilities, and How These May Help Guide Your Bidding and Play**": https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/8_probs.pdf



Esther says…

"Bruce, here is the bottom line: The probability that the 5 E/W Diamonds will 'split' 3-2 and thus likely give you 3+ Diamond Tricks is 67.8% but the probability of a Club "unmarked finesse" succeeding is 50%. Most bridge players know that *67.8% > 50%*!

Here are all the **16**[4] possible "splits" of the **5** E/W Diamond Q,J,5,3,2 cards:

	3-2	**"Splits"**	
A.	Q J	5 3 2	**#1**
B.	Q 5	J 3 2	**#2**
C.	Q 3	J 5 2	**#3**
D.	Q 2	J 5 3	**#4**
E.	J 5	Q 3 2	**#5**
F.	J 3	Q 5 2	**#6**
G.	J 2	Q 5 3	**#7**
H.	5 3	Q J 2	**#8**
I.	5 2	Q J 3	**#9**
J.	3 2	Q J 5	**#10**
	4-1	**"Splits"**	
J.	Q	J 5 3 2	**#11**
K.	J	Q 5 3 2	**#12**
L.	5	Q J 3 2	**#13**
M.	3	Q J 5 2	**#14**
N.	2	Q J 5 3	**#15**
	5-0	**"Split"**	
K.	-	Q J 5 3 2	**#16**

In **1** of the **16** *equally-probable* "splits" (1 / 16 = **6.25%** probability) of the **5** E/W Diamond cards, **"Split" "A"**, Declarer SOUTH by successively playing the NORTH Dummy's Diamond A,K will "win" a total of all **5** Diamond Tricks. In **10** of the **15** equally-probable "splits" (11 / 16 = **68.75%**

[4] The number of "splits" of **5** "missing" Diamond cards equals $2^{(5-1)} = 2^4 = 2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2 = \mathbf{16}$ "splits".

probability) of the **5** E/W Diamond cards Declarer SOUTH will "win" **4** E/W Diamond Tricks. And in **4** of the **16** *equally-probable* "splits" (4 / 16 = **25.0%** probability) of the **5** E/W Diamond cards Declarer SOUTH will "win" **3** E/W Diamond Tricks.

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast…, err, I mean Esther. Well then, if Declarer SOUTH should explore the E/W Diamond holdings *before* attempting the Club finesse, what "Line of Play" should Declarer SOUTH follow?

Esther: Well, Bruce, after "winning" Trick **#1** with his own Spade Queen, on Trick **#2** Declarer should explore the E/W Diamond "split" by leading his own "low" Diamond to the Diamond Ace. SOUTH discovers that both WEST and EAST "follow" and neither "drops" an Honor. If a Diamond Honor had "dropped" a "split" other than 3-2 would have been implicated. On Trick **#3** Declarer SOUTH should "cash" the NORTH Dummy's Heart King. On Trick **#4** SOUTH should "cross" to his own Heart Ace. Then on Trick **#5** Declarer SOUTH should lead a **2nd** "low" Diamond from his own Hand:

1. If WEST "follows" then "duck" in the NORTH Dummy and you are assured of **4** Diamond Tricks.
2. If *instead* WEST "shows out" forget about continuing to immediately pursuing Diamonds. "Win" Trick **#5** with the NORTH Dummy's Diamond King. Now (not earlier) you *must* take the Club "**unmarked finesse**".[2] Happily, EAST to the right of Declarer SOUTH holds the Club King and N/S eventually "win" all **13** Tricks!