

**"Sometimes as Declarer in a Suit Contract  
It is Vital to Discard Some of Your High Honors  
in a 'Side' Suit to Overcome  
Ruffing by Your Opponents"**

**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 "**Sometimes as Declarer in a Suit Contract It is Vital to Discard Some of Your 'Winners' To Overcome Ruffing by Your Opponents**". 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, Est... err, I mean Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, is there anything you wish to say initially before you talk us through "sluffing some of your 'winners' to overcome ruffing by your Opponents?"

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, yes indeed. At the outset I would like to acknowledge that the ideas presented here are drawn from David Bird's Tip #23 (pp. 73-74) in his 2005 book, 52 Great Bridge Tips on Declarer Play. Esther may have altered some of the cards in the Boards presented by Bird. The bidding here is by Esther.

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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, Est..., err, I mean Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, would you tell us a little about this David Bird?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, of course. David Bird is a highly regarded British bridge writer. He has authored more than 140 bridge books and has claimed that he is the most prolific bridge author of all time. **52 Great Bridge Tips on Declarer Play** is one of his 140+ books. He also is the bridge correspondent for both the Mail on Sunday and the London Evening Standard newspapers. He also over 30+ years has authored in Bridge Magazine a series of humorous instructional bridge stories about fictional bridge-playing monks in the fictional St. Titus Monastery.

**Bruce:** Errr, well, hmmm... Well would you now present your first example Board?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. Let's discuss the following Board.

NORTH (12)

S: J  
H: 9 8 6 3  
D: A 8 6 5  
C: A K 7 4

WEST (3)

S: 7 4  
H: 5  
D: Q T 9 7 4  
C: J 9 8 6 5

EAST (9)

S: A 2  
H: Q T 7 4 2  
D: J 2  
C: Q T 3 2

SOUTH (16)

S: K Q T 9 8 6 5 3  
H: A K J  
D: K 3  
C: --

### Bidding

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1S	PASS	2C*	PASS
2S	PASS	3D**	PASS
3H**	PASS	4NT	PASS
5S***	PASS	6S	PASS
PASS	PASS		

\*This is "2 Over 1" ("2/1") bid<sup>2</sup> that says, "Partner, I hold (1) ~13+ HCPs and (2) 3-4+ Clubs. My bid says nothing about my Spade holdings."

\*\*This is bidding Aces "up the line."

\*\*\*This is a "Roman 'Key' Card 1430 (RKC-1430)" bid that says, "Partner, among the 5 'key' cards (the 4 Aces and the Trump Heart King) I hold 2 'key' cards and the Trump Spade Queen."

**Bruce:** Errr, well, Esther, ...err, I mean Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen. WEST led his Heart 5. What "Line of Play" should Declarer SOUTH follow?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, let me first talk about what "Line of Play" Declarer SOUTH definitely should not follow! Declarer SOUTH should not after winning Trick #1 lead a Trump Spade Honor to "knock" out the Opponents' Trump Spade Ace. On these

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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)

holdings EAST will "win" Trick #1. EAST will see 4 Hearts in the NORTH Dummy. Most likely EAST holds 5 Heart cards. Because WEST led the Heart 5 that means after WEST's lead and the NORTH Dummy is exposed EAST knows there are only 13 - 4 - 5 - 1 = 3 Heart cards lying in either SOUTH or WEST's Hands. If WEST held a Heart Honor and the 5 as a doubleton WEST would have led the Heart Honor. EAST will certainly "return Partner's lead" and on Trick #2 will lead a "low" Heart which WEST will immediately ruff. This sets the N/S 6S contract "off the top"!

**Bruce:** Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, that's so depressing! What would have been a better "Line of Play"?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, Declarer SOUTH must also infer that WEST may have led a Heart singleton in search of a Heart lead ruffing opportunity later provided by his Partner, EAST. Declarer SOUTH holds a Club void. Certainly the Declarer knows that WEST may initially have been very "short" in Hearts. And WEST leading a Heart when during the auction Declarer SOUTH "showed" the Heart Ace must be *jarring* and raise some suspicions. Declarer SOUTH **must** protect against WEST ruffing Hearts or else his 6S contract may be "set".

**Bruce:** Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, how can Declarer SOUTH "protect" against E/W ruffing Hearts?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, as David Bird noted in his 2005 Great Bridge Tips book, "it is a **blind spot** among some players that it can be beneficial to discard winning cards when a ruff is threatened" (p. 73, emphasis added). Bird notes that

"...there is a virtually foolproof way to overcome such a danger. Before playing on trumps, you should cross to the [Dummy's] ♦A and play the [Dummy's] two [Club] winners, discarding the [King] and [Jack] of [Hearts]. ...Such a play is not in the least difficult but it is amazing how careless some players can be." (p. 73)

**Bruce:** WOW, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen! That is simply amazing! You are absolutely "correct"! If I had been the Declarer on this Board I would have been suspicious that WEST held a Heart singleton, but I am not sure I would have "seen" the solution of sluffing the Heart K,J Honors in my

own Hand! Can you give us another Board to illustrate this bridge principle?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, here is a second Board presented by Bird. I should also note that this time the bidding was presented in Bird's book.

	NORTH (19)	
	S: Q 9 2	
	H: J 4	
	D: A K Q 5	
	C: A K 7 4	
WEST (3)		EAST (7)
S: 7 5		S: A 6
H: K T 7 6 3 2		H: Q 8
D: T 8 7 4		D: J 9 3 2
C: 8		C: T 6 5 3 2
	SOUTH (11)	
	S: K J T 8 4 3	
	H: A 9 5	
	D: 6	
	C: Q J 9	

**Bidding**

NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	WEST
1C	PASS	1S	PASS
2NT	PASS	3S	PASS
4C*	PASS	4H*	PASS
4NT	PASS	5H**	PASS
6S	PASS	PASS	PASS

\*This is bidding Aces "up the line."

\*\*This is a "Roman 'Key' Card 1430 (RKC-1430)" bid that says, "Partner, among the 5 'key' cards (the 4 Aces and the Trump Heart King) I hold 2 'key' cards and not the Trump Spade Queen."

**Bruce:** Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, here WEST leads the Club 8? What "Line of Play" would you recommend for the Declarer to play?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, WEST leading a "spot" card against a small slam contract when Partner NORTH opened the auction by bidding 1C "...should ring the 'singleton' warning bell" (p. 74). You can "protect" against Clubs being ruffed by E/W by "winning" Trick #1 in the NORTH Dummy. Then on Tricks #2, #3, and #4 play 3 Rounds of Diamond A,K,Q Honors and sluff

the Club Q,J,9 held in your "closed" (hidden) Hand. Then on Trick #5 lead the Trump Spade Queen from the NORTH Dummy which EAST "wins" with his Trump Spade Ace. The 6S contract now cannot be beaten. As Bird (2005) notes:

"Was there a risk in playing three rounds of [D]iamonds before drawing trumps? Yes, of course, but it was less than the risk that the opening lead was a singleton and that East would win with the ace of {T}rumps and deliver a [C]lub ruff."  
(p. 74)