

"As Bridge Declarer Do You Know How to Execute a 'Winkle Endplay'?"

Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen¹

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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 Bridge Declarer Do You Know How to Execute a 'Winkle Endplay'?"** 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, sorry about that. Well, at the start would you tell us what a **"Winkle Endplay"** is?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. The **"Winkle Endplay"** was explained by Alan Truscott in his December 2, 1985 New York Times (NYT) article, "The Winkle, a Useful Play, Is Sometimes Misidentified."

About Alan Truscott

Alan Truscott (1925 - 2005) was a British-American bridge player, writer, and author. From 1964 until 2005 for 41 years he wrote a daily bridge column for the NYT. He also served as Executive editor from 1964 until 2002 for 6 editions of the Official Encyclopedia of Bridge.

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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.

Truscott wrote:

“A secondary squeeze [play] in which the defense must choose between [1] being endplayed and [2] allowing a ‘useless’ card in the dummy to come back to life is known as a **winkle**. It is named for a twisted British shellfish that presents problems to the human consumer.”² (p. 17) [emphasis added]

Bruce: Errr, well... Err, I mean... Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, ummm... Who named the “**Winkle Endplay**”?

Esther: Well, Bruce, the Wikipedia entry, “Winkle Squeeze”, says that the “**Winkle Endplay**” was named and analyzed by **Terence Reese** in his book, Master Play in Contract Bridge. According to Wikipedia, Terence Reese (1913 – 1996) “was a Bridge player and writer, regarded as one of the finest of all time in both fields.”

Bruce: Errr, well... Err, I mean... Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, could you talk us through an example?

Esther: Well, Bruce, sure. On my “**Esther Bridge Lessons**” website I have previously recommended the “**BBO Bridge Master**” website:

<https://www.bridgebase.com/v3/anon/bridgemaster>

The “**BBO Bridge Master**” 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 you can then request a solution in which the optimal “Line of Play” is discussed step by step. Here as an illustration I will use the *free* “**BBO Bridge Master**” Level-5 **Lesson B-22** which gives you the opportunity to see and *repeatedly practice* playing a given bridge Board. I may have altered some of the cards in this illustrative bridge Board.

² The **winkle** is a type of sea snail. If the winkle is exposed to an “algae bloom” such as a “red tide” and is then consumed this can lead to non-life-threatening but uncomfortable “Diarrhetic Shellfish Poisoning”!

BBO Bridge Master Level 5 Lesson B-22

Dealer: **WEST**

NORTH (14)

S: A K Q J
H: 6 4 3 2
D: J T 9
C: Q J

WEST (6)

S: T 8
H: K J T 9 8 7 5
D: Q 5 3
C: 7

EAST (4)

S: 9 7 6
H: --
D: A 8 7 6 4
C: 6 5 4 3 2

SOUTH (16)

S: 5 4 3 2
H: A Q
D: K 2
C: A K T 9 8

Bidding

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
3H	PASS	PASS	3NT
PASS	6NT	PASS	PASS
PASS			

On Trick #1 WEST leads his Spade Ten.

Bruce: Errr, well... Err, I mean... Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, first of all, do you agree with WEST's opening pre-empt bid of **3H**?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will try to help you. Yes, I agree with WEST's opening bid. This pre-empt bid "shows" (1) **7** Hearts and (2) a "weak" Hand. This bid (1) perfectly describes WEST's Hand and (2) eats up a lot of the N/S bidding space.

As argued so effectively by bridge wizard Larry Cohen in his award-winning 1992 book, To Bid or Not to Bid: The LAW of Total Tricks, Suit contracts are not about HCPs. This was illustrated by Esther in her lesson about the "Moonraker" bridge Hand in which ACBL LifeMaster James Bond 007 "made" a successful **7C** DOUBLED REDOUBLED contract even though his Partnership *together* held only **8** HCPs:

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

This was also demonstrated by the Board discussed in "Esther Bridge Dialogue Lesson #159": "Playing Bridge Contracts as Declarer When You and Dummy Hold 'Mirrored Hands'":

<https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/Mirror H.pdf>

This Board is quite unusual in that any of the 4 players can "make" (1) either 5C and 5H contracts or 5D and 5S contracts and (2) a 3NT contract even though every player holds only 10 HCPs!

Bruce: Oh, my, goodness, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen! Well, would you now talk us through the play of this bridge Board?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will try to help you. On Trick #1 Declarer SOUTH "wins" with the NORTH Dummy Spade Jack. SOUTH sees 4 Hearts in the Dummy and SOUTH himself holds 2 Hearts. Therefore, SOUTH knows that EAST holds 13 - 7 - 4 - 2 = 0 Hearts. This means that EAST cannot lead Hearts through SOUTH's A,Q Heart holding toward WEST's "long" Hearts, which is "good" news.

And SOUTH would like WEST to be the player who breaks Hearts so that SOUTH can "win" Heart Tricks as cheaply as possible. SOUTH also expects that EAST holds the "missing" E/W Diamond Ace because WEST's opening 3H bid was "weak". SOUTH must hope that WEST holds the "missing" Diamond Queen.

Bruce: Ok, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, what "line of Play" should Declarer SOUTH now follow?

Esther: Well, Bruce, on Trick #2 Declarer SOUTH should lead 1 of the NORTH Dummy's Diamond Honors. If EAST "wins" Trick #2 with the Diamond Ace WEST eventually can subject WEST to a "Simple Squeeze Play". Esther discussed the "Squeeze Plays" in her "Esther Bridge Dialogue Lesson #142: "How as Declarer to Execute an Endplay 'Squeeze'":

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

Because EAST can see the potential for WEST to be "squeezed" in Diamonds, EAST will "duck" on Trick #2. So, SOUTH "wins" Trick #2 with his own Diamond King.

On Tricks #3-#10 SOUTH "cashes" 3 Spade "winners" and 5 Club "winners". After Trick #9 N/S have "won" 9 Tricks and E/W have "won" 0 Tricks. The 4 cards held in the 4 Hands after 9 Tricks are:

NORTH (14)

S:
H: 6 4
D: J T
C:

WEST (6)

S:
H: K J
D: Q 5
C:

EAST (4)

S:
H: --
D: A 8 7
C: 6

SOUTH (16)

S:
H: A Q
D: 2
C: K

Bruce: Oh, my, goodness, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen! On Trick #10 when Declarer SOUTH leads his Club King "winner" WEST will have exactly 2 choices:

1. WEST can play his Heart Jack card "guarding" WEST's Heart King, in which case WEST will have been "**squeezed**" into giving SOUTH 2 Heart Tricks. And after SOUTH "wins" Tricks #10, #11, and #12 WEST on Trick #13 will "win" with his Diamond Queen but SOUTH will exactly "make" his 6NT contract!
2. Or, alternatively, if on Trick #10 WEST discards his Diamond 5 on Trick #11 Declarer SOUTH can force WEST into the lead by playing his own Diamond 2. Then on Trick #12 and #13 Declarer SOUTH will "win" both the last 2 Tricks and exactly "make" his 6NT contract no matter which Heart WEST leads on Trick #12. My goodness, in this alternative WEST has been "**endplayed**".

Esther: Yes indeed, Bruce. SOUTH has forced WEST, in Truscott's words, to:

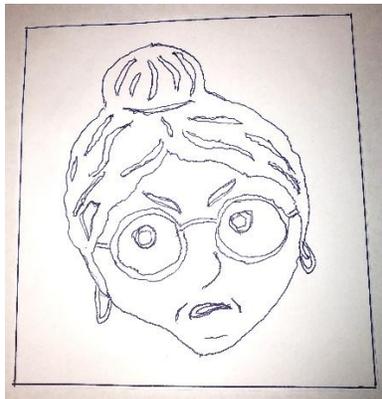
"...choose between [1] being endplayed and [2] allowing a 'useless' card in the dummy to come back to life..." (p. 17)

In other words, put simply, SOUTH has "**winkled**" WEST!

Truscott noted that a "**Winkle Endplay**" occurred in one of the Swiss teams at the conclusion of one of the Summer Nationals in Las Vegas, NV on a Board which he discussed in his 1985 NYT article:

"The contract was 'only' one no-trump, but led to some delicate cut-and-thrust between Bonnie Smith of Denver, the

West player, and Janet Cohen of Los Angeles, the South player... South led a club, noted the appearance of the queen and addressed West: 'You have been winkled, my dear.'"



Esther says...

“Why not proceed *immediately* to ‘**Bridge Base Online Bridge Master**’ Level-5 Lesson #**B-22** to practice playing a “**Winkle Endplay**” on this Board? Search ‘BBO’, then Click ‘Bridge Master’, then Click ‘Play’, then Click ‘Level 5’, then Click ‘B-22’. You can play this Board *repeatedly* in Bridge Master for *free!*”

Esther also says...

“I have now prepared a ‘Map’ of all the ‘**Esther Bridge ‘Pop’ Quizzes**’ that use ‘BBO Bridge Master’ lessons to teach the ‘*Squeeze Play*’, the ‘*Elimination Endplay*’, the ‘*Loser-on-Loser Play*’, the ‘*Unblocking Play*’, the ‘**Distribution Safety Play**’, and the ‘*Dummy Reversal Play*’”:

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