c:\bridge\winners.docx 9/23/26 **+ #207**

"As Declarer Playing a Suit Contract, Should You Count 'Losers' *or* Instead Count 'Winners'?"

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 Suit Contract, Should You Count 'Losers' or Instead 'Winners'?"**. 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 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**

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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**.

Dialogue Lesson" come from a bridge newspaper column, "Tips on Planning and Control", written by Richard Pavlicek and published January 31, 1988.

Bruce: Errr, well… Err, I mean… Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, ummm… 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… Err, I mean… Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, OK. Well, what is the fundamental focus of this "**Esther Bridge Lesson**"?

Esther: Well, Bruce, as you know, all bridge players playing as Declarer once the Dummy is exposed then formulate a tentative "Line of Play". Most expert bridge players in NT contracts do based on counting "winners", and in Suit contracts do so by counting "winners". However, **1** prominent bridge player/author/teacher *instead* argues for counting "winners", not "losers", when playing *both* **NT** and Suit contracts. That prominent bridge expert is Richard Pavlicek. Pavlicek notes that once the lead is made and the Dummy is exposed:

> "…[D]eclarer should take a moment to plan the play. I continually emphasize the practice of counting *winners*, as I am convinced that this is more accurate than counting losers. *Winners* take tricks; losers do not." (italics in original)

Bruce: Errr, well, would you now present the bridge board example that Pavlicek used in his newspaper column to illustrate his strategy as Declarer of counting "winners" rather than "losers"?

Esther: Well, Bruce, of course:

Dealer: **NORTH**
Vul: **NONE**

NORTH (**14**)
S: A K 4 3
H: 7 5 4 3
D: A Q J 7
C: 2

WEST (**9**)
S: Q J 9
H: A T 8
D: 8 3
C: Q T 8 4 3

EAST (**8**)
S: 5 2
H: K J 9 2
D: T 9 6 5
C: K J 7

SOUTH (**11**)
S: T 8 7 6
H: Q 6
D: K 4 2
C: A 9 6 5

Bidding

NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	WEST
1**D**	PASS	1**S**	PASS
3**S**	PASS	4**S**	PASS
PASS	PASS		

On Trick **#1** WEST leads the Club 4 as the 4th from the "top" of his "longest and strongest" Suit so that Partner EAST (and Declarer) can use the "**Rule of 11**"[2] to determine exactly how many Clubs higher than the Club 4 Declarer (and EAST) holds.

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. When counting "winners" in Pavlicek's system you *only* count

[2] Within the "**Esther Bridge Lessons**" see: "**Some of the 40 or So Bridge Bidding/Play 'Rules'**": https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/rules.pdf

"**Trump Power Winners**" and not Trump cards that are used to ruff. On this Board Declarer sees as "**Trump Power Winners**" assuming the expected 3-2 E/W Trump Spade "split" (**49.7%** probability, 2-2 **40.7%** probability, 5-0 **9.5%** probability[3]), **3** "**Trump Power Winners**". He also counts **4** Diamond "winners" and 1 Club "winner" for a total of 3 + 4 + 1 = **8** "winners". Declarer SOUTH therefore must hope to "win" **2** additional Tricks by ruffing his own Club "losers".

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast…, err, I mean Esther. Well, would you now talk through the Declarer's "Line of Play" on this bridge Board?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I certainly will try to help you. There is one BIG dangerous *pitfall* that Declarer SOUTH *must* not fall into. As Pavlicek notes:

> "Many players would take their club ruffs prematurely, weakening the dummy's trumps. Then, when it comes time to run the diamonds, West will ruff the third round and dummy's last diamond will go to sleep. Zzzzz."

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast…, err, I mean Esther. Well then, after Declarer "wins" Trick **#1** should the Declarer instead *immediately* turn his attention to "drawing" the **13** – 4 – 4 = **5** Trump Spade cards?

Esther: Well, Bruce, no, *no*, ***NO!*** That **2nd** choice *also* would *certainly* be another *BIG* mistake! As Pavlicek emphasizes:

> "Another popular attempt is to cash the top trumps at once and then play diamonds. This will work if West is lured to ruff with his master trump, but a smart defender will discard. Later West can gain the lead in hearts to *cash the spade queen*, which leaves declarer a trick short." (italics in original)

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast…, err, I mean Esther. Well then, is there a **3rd** "Line of Play" with which Declarer SOUTH can succeed in making his 4**S** contract?

Esther: Well, Bruce, yes indeed! After "winning" Trick **#1** in his own Hand with his Club Ace on Trick **#2** Declarer SOUTH must

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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

follow bridge wizard Larry Cohen's sound advice in his January, 2026 article, "General Principle" (p. 53), in the ACBL Bridge Bulletin:

"As Declarer Give Up Your *Inevitable* 'Losers' EARLY!"

On Trick **#2** Declarer SOUTH should execute a "**Loser-on-Loser Play**": **https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/loser.pdf**

On Trick **#2** Declarer SOUTH should lead his Heart 6 "loser" and then play the NORTH Dummy's Heart 3 "loser". As Pavlicek notes,

> "Declarer must lead *one heart* early. Opponents can take a second heart if they want; but whatever the defense, declarer will next cash his top trumps, run diamonds (throwing his last heart if still held) and crossruff." (italics in original)

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast…, err, I mean Esther. Well, couldn't a bridge Declarer when formulating "Line of Play" count *both* his "winners" and his "losers"???

Esther: Well, Bruce, yes indeed! You have finally said something about bridge that is ***important***! There is certainly no reason why a Declarer can't count *both* "winners" and "losers". Doing so gives the Declarer an expanded more comprehensive perspective!

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast…, err, I mean Esther. Well, if Pavlicek is emphasizing counting "winners" does that mean that Pavlicek is saying that as Declarer focusing on dumping "losers" is not that important?



Esthers says…

"That is absolutely, *positively* NOT what Pavlicek is saying!!! Your *primary*, **superordinate** duty as a bridge Declarer is to 'dump' your Partnership's 'losers'!!! I have discussed this is some detail in **2** of my very important 'Esther Bridge '*Pop*' Quizzes': **https://esther-bridge.com/quiz/q0336_q.pdf and**

https://esther-bridge.com/quiz/q0353_q.pdf

As Declarer you can 'dump' your 'losers' by (1) sluffing a 'loser' on 1 of your Partnership's 'winners', (2) ruffing a 'loser' by ruffing the 'loser' from the other Hand that you as Declarer controls, or (3) sluffing a 'loser' on a Trick that the Defenders will *inevitably* 'win' anyway (i.e., a '**Loser-on-Loser Play**')."