



*Marty Bergen*

[www.martybergen.com](http://www.martybergen.com)

# Better Bridge with Bergen

## Everything's under control – part 1

Cuebids are bids in the opponent's suit, such as Michaels. There is also a second category of cuebids, however, that are slam-try cuebids. These bids promise a control in the suit named as well as interest in slam.

It's unfortunate that these two share a common name while representing two very different types of bids.

Jeff Rubens, the long-time editor of *The Bridge World*, has proposed a solution. Bidding a suit as a slam try promises a control in that suit, so he suggested calling it a control bid.

"Marty, why do we have to bother with control bids? We love Blackwood." Whenever I hear that complaint, I always reply with "The Great Debate."

The participants: On one side, we have the reigning champion 4NT. On the other, the challenger the control bid.

*Degree of difficulty:* Bid 4NT now and worry later. No thinking required! Advantage: Blackwood.

*Democracy or not?* 4NT is like a dictatorship. With control bids, however, both partners are involved

in the evaluative process. Advantage: control bid.

*Level:* 4NT forces you to the five level. Control bids can be made at the four level or lower, and allow you to stop in game if you decide to. Advantage: control bid.

*Flexibility:* After Blackwood, no more control bids can be made. After control bidding, you can still bid 4NT. Advantage: control bid.

*What you find out:* 4NT: number of aces (or key cards). Control bid: location.

Game, set, and match to the control bid. The moral of the story: Don't just close your eyes and bid 4NT. Instead, give control bids a try.

Take a look at this uncontested auction:

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
1♦	1♥
3♥	3♠

Regardless of whether you call it a control bid or a cuebid, everyone agrees that 3♠:

- does not indicate length in spades,
- shows interest in a heart slam,
- promises a control in spades.

What kind of control does 3♠ show? There are two distinct points of view. Some players answer, "It shows first-round control," meaning the ace or a void. Others would answer, "first- or second-round control," which means either the ace, king, void or singleton.

Do I have a decided preference on this topic? Yes.. Let's look at this hand:

♠KQ6 ♥AKQ987 ♦9 ♣762.

<i>Partner</i>	<i>You</i>
1♦	1♥
3♥	?

Once opener showed 17–19 dummy points, you have points galore. So, what would you bid?

I know that many players would bid 4NT. Suppose partner bids 5♥. Then what? If you bid 6♥ because your side has a lot of points and you're only missing one ace, you won't be happy when your left-hand opponent leads a club, and partner tables:

♠A ♥J632 ♦AK876 ♣QJ4.

But if you passed 5♥, you deserve a dummy where 6♥ is cold, such as:

♠872 ♥J632 ♦AKQ86 ♣A.

What should you do? Try making a 3♠ control bid, promising a control in spades, and interest in a heart slam. Easy as one, two, three.

I've always believed that when you wanted to make a slam try, you showed a control. It didn't matter whether the control was an ace or a king. If or when partner wanted to know what you have, that's what Blackwood is for.

When I began teaching, I taught that second-round controls were okay to show. Some of my students, however, reported that they were told to "only cuebid aces."

Next month we'll examine control bidding with either first- or second-round controls as this series continues. □

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