

Cue Bids For Slam

When the trump suit has been agreed upon, the partnership may cue-bid for controls to investigate slam possibilities. Major-suit control cue-bidding is easier than minor-suit cue-bidding. Minor-suit cue-bidding rules are slightly different due to the fact that there is less bidding room. The following treatment assumes that the partnership uses "splinter" bids.

1. Preliminaries

1.1 Blackwood or Cue Bid?

- If you have a void, prefer to cue-bid.
- If you have an 'uncontrolled suit' (a suit of two or more cards lacking the ace and king), prefer to start by cue-bidding. You may later revert to Blackwood.
- If you need to know whether partner holds a specific king, use cue-bidding (but RKC Blackwood followed by a control ask also may locate this information).
- If you hope or suspect that partner might hold a key void or a key singleton, use cue-bidding.
- If you plan to use the 5NT Trump Ask, use cue-bidding.

1.2 What a Control Cue Bid Shows

Note: Controls in the trump suit are never cue-bid.

- 1st round control or 'primary' control (void or ace) - Bidding a 1st round control announces that you can take the first trick in the bid suit by either ruffing or playing the ace.
 - Void
 - A(x)
- 2nd round control or "secondary" control (void, singleton or king) - Bidding a 2nd round control announces that you can take the second trick in the bid suit by either ruffing or playing the king.
 - Void
 - x
 - AK(x)
 - Kx(x)
- 3rd round control or "tertiary" control (void, doubleton or queen) - Bidding a 3rd round control announces that you can take the third trick in the bid suit by either ruffing or playing the queen. 3rd round controls are rarely bid.
 - Void
 - xx
 - AKQ(x)
 - KQx(x)

■ Qxx(x)

1.3 Trump Asking Bids

Since trump controls are never cue-bid, there are three common ways to check on the top trumps after the cue-bidding has ended. (Note that these "Trump Ask" bids can also be used in the absence of cue-bidding.)

- RKC Blackwood
- Jumps Or Raises To Five Of The Agreed Major
- 5NT Trump Ask

2. Cue Bidding with a Major Suit Agreed as Trumps

Cue-bidding principles vary slightly depending on whether trumps are a major or minor suit. The following treatments will pertain to major suits; minor suit differences will be pointed out later. In order to start a cue-bidding sequence a major suit must first be established either directly or by inference.

2.1 Determining the Trump Suit

A trump suit must be determined first before initiating cue-bidding. There are two ways to establish a trump suit: Direct supporting auctions and inferential auctions.

2.1.1 Direct Supporting Auctions That Establish A Trump Suit

- [1D: 1H] ; [2H: 4C.....primary cue-bid, hearts are trump
- [1C: 1S] ; [3S: 4H.....primary cue-bid, spades are trump
- [1H: 1S] ; [4S: 5D.....primary cue-bid, spades are trump
- [1C: 1D] ; [1H: 3H] ; [4C.....primary cue-bid, hearts are trump

Normally any subsequent bid at the four level will be a primary cue-bid after direct support is shown. The one exception is if hearts are trump and spades haven't been bid, a 3S bid is a primary cue-bid.

- [1D: 1H] ; [2H: 3S.....primary cue-bid, hearts are trump
- [1C: 1H] ; [3H: 3S.....primary cue-bid, hearts are trump

2.1.2 Inferential Auctions That Establish A Trump Suit

- [1H: 2NT] [3C: 4D.....primary cue-bid, Jacoby 2NT indicates heart fit
- [1S: 3D] ; [4D.....primary cue-bid, Bergen raise indicates spade fit
- [1S: 4D] ; [4H.....primary cue-bid, splinter bid indicates spade fit
- [1S 2C 3C Pass] ; [4D.....primary cue-bid, limit raise cue-bid of 3C indicates spade fit
- [4H: 4S/5C/5D.....primary cue-bid, hearts are trump
- [2S: 2NT] ; [3C: 3D/3H/4C.....primary cue-bid, spades are trump.....2NT must first be bid, then after any response by opener, responder's bid of any suit but trumps is a primary cue-bid.

2.2 Basic Principles Of Cue-Bidding

Cue-bidding almost always starts at the four-level. The exception is after hearts have been bid and raised when 3S is available as the first cue-bid. The first cue-

bid says, "I am interested in slam and have first-round control in this suit."
Controls are always bid 'up the line'.

- Bid 1st round controls before 2nd round controls.
- Bid 2nd round controls before 3rd round controls.
- With two or more 1st round controls, bid the cheapest first (not necessarily the lowest ranking suit).
- Where the choice is to cue-bid an ace or a void as a 1st round control, the "cheapest first" rule applies. The same decision is king versus singleton or queen versus doubleton.
- A cue-bid shows 2nd round control only if:
 - 1st round control in that suit has already been shown by either partner, OR
 - 1st round control in that suit has already been denied by the bidder.
- A cue-bid shows 3rd round control only if:
 - 2nd round control in that suit has already been shown by either partner, OR
 - 2nd round control in that suit has already been denied by the bidder.

2.3 The Extent of Cue-Bidding

Once cue-bidding has commenced, it continues until one partner or the other has sufficient knowledge to be able to place the contract. Usually one partner knows the cards required for the small slam or grand slam and when they are located or their absence determined, that player signs off by reverting to the trump suit at the appropriate level.

2.3.1 When Not To Stop Cue-Bidding

- Once the cue-bidding has commenced, no bid may be passed except in the agreed trump suit or 6NT.
- Never pass partner's cue-bid.
- Even though one partner signs off in the agreed trump suit, the other is entitled to keep on bidding and again a further cue-bid is forcing.
- The partnership must revert to the agreed trump suit at the end of the auction unless it is judged that 6NT or 7-anything offers better prospects.

2.4 Signing Off In The Agreed Trump Suit

A bid of the agreed trump suit in a cue-bidding auction is a denial bid. It denies the ability or the willingness to cue-bid anything more. The most common reason to return to the trump suit is that you have no further controls to show. However, there are a number of specific understandings, depending on the situation involved and the number of suits that have been cue-bid so far.

2.4.1 Only One Cue-Bid Has Been Made

If you make the first cue-bid and partner immediately bids the agreed trump suit, partner's message is: "I have no first round controls outside of trumps."

2.4.2 Two Cue-Bids Have Been Made

While the return to the agreed trump suit is normally a denial of control(s), it can nevertheless encourage partner to continue if partner has something extra. Here are two such situations.

Return to the Trump at the Four Level - The first cue-bidder is indicating concern whether the values are adequate for a slam. For example, partner makes the first cue-bid, you reply with a cue-bid and partner now bids four of the agreed major. Partner's message is: "I am interested in slam but my hand is not strong enough to insist on slam. Please bid on if you have extra values. Otherwise, let's just play in game."

Return to the Trump at the Five Level - The message is: "I do not have first or second round control in the unbid suit. Please pass if you also lack control, but bid on if you have first or second round control in the missing suit."

2.4.3 Three or More Cue-Bids Have Been Made

Control in Each Outside Suit Has Been Shown - The message is: "I am interested in slam but my hand is not strong enough to insist on slam. Please bid the slam if you have extra values. Otherwise, let's just play in game."

One Outside Suit is Still Unbid -The message is: "I do not have first or second round control in the unbid suit. Please pass if you also lack control, but bid on if you have first or second round control in the missing suit."

2.4.4 Jump or Raise to Five of the Agreed Major Suit

Jumping to the five level or raising from four to five is a trump ask bid, not a sign-off.

2.4.5 Signing Off in Six of the Agreed Trump Suit

A bid of six in the agreed major suit is intended to end the bidding. Only in the rarest circumstances would partner bid on. The message is: "We have sufficient values for a small slam and the bidding has told me that a grand slam would be a poor risk."

2.5 Cue-Bidding Beyond Five Of The Agreed Trump Suit

A cue-bid at the five level higher than the agreed trump suit, or any cue-bid at the six-level is looking for a grand slam. Consequently such a cue bid guarantees that there are no 1st round controls missing.

3. Using Blackwood After Cue-Bidding

3.1 Standard or Roman Keycard Blackwood

After cue-bidding has commenced, a bid of 4NT can still be used as the Blackwood convention (standard or Roman Key Card). The normal response is made even though one or more aces may have already been shown via a cue-bid.

The common reason for using Blackwood after a cue-bidding auction has started is to locate the ace of trumps or to check whether a cue-bid showed a void or the ace. In addition there are some hands where the problem is to determine precisely which aces partner holds and if you have a void, the best approach is to start by cue-bidding. If the situation has not been clarified by partner's next bid, 4NT can be used to determine the ace position.

3.2 Voidwood "Voidwood", or "Avoidance Blackwood", was introduced by Bobby Goldman. Voidwood is used to show a void and simultaneously ask for key cards outside the void suit. [**1C: 1H**] ; [**3H: 5D**.....The 5D bid makes no

sense as a cue-bid (4D would be a cue-bid) or natural bid, hence it is “Voidwood” and says: “I am void in diamonds. Give me your key card answers but ignore the ace of diamonds in your reply”. Similarly, [**1C: 1H**] ; [**3H: 4S or 5C**] would be “voidwood” since 3S or 4C would be a cue-bid.

4. Trump Asking Bids

4.1 Jumps Or Raises To Five Of The Agreed Major (For Small Slam Try)

Note: This approach can't be used if a minor suit is trump since 5C or 5D is a sign-off.

This is most commonly used when you have discovered a 1st round control is missing. The jump to five of the agreed major or raising the agreed major suit from four to five says: “The controls in the outside suit are all right but I am concerned about the trump suit. Please bid six if you hold two of the top three trump honors, otherwise pass.”

4.2 The 5NT Trump Ask (For Grand Slam Try)

Used when 4NT has not been bid and indicates that there are no losers outside of the trump suit. The 5NT bid inquires about the ace, king and queen of the trump suit. This is a grand slam try. Use the jump or raise to five of the major suit for a small slam try. The simplest scheme is:

- 6C = No top trump honor
- 6D = 1 top trump honor
- 6H = 2 top trump honors
- 6S = All 3 top trump honors

5. Cue-Bidding With A Minor suit As Trumps

Almost all the principles that applies for major suit cue-bidding apply also to minor suit bidding but there are some important differences:

- With clubs as trumps, the first available cue-bid is 4D. With diamonds as trumps, 4C may be available as the first cue-bid.
- Raising a minor suit to the four level in an unlimited auction is forcing to game (not an invitation) and requests partner to start cue-bidding or take control with 4NT (Blackwood, not quantitative).
- A jump bid to five of the agreed minor is always a sign off, not a trump ask bid as with a major suit.
- The most important difference is this: If one partner makes a four-level cue-bid and partner replies with a cue-bid, then a sign-off in five of the minor suit indicates no 1st OR 2nd round control in the unbid suit rather than merely a general slam try.

5.1 Stopper Bids At The Three Level

Where a minor suit has been agreed at the three-level and a stopper has been shown, angling for 3NT, definite principles apply to subsequent bidding which affect decisions on slam bidding. These principles apply for minor suit fits.

The goal of the partnership is to explore for a 3NT contract rather than playing at five of a minor. If slam possibilities are evident early-on, the partnership may bypass using stopper bids and commence with cue-bidding and/or ace asking bids. However using stopper bids at the three level while probing for 3NT may result in revealing features and values that encourage the partnership to explore slam using cue-bidding and/or 4NT Blackwood.

5.1.1 Making A Stopper-Showing Bid

[**1H: 2C**] ; [**3C: 3S**].....With the club fit, 3S is a bid showing a stopper in the spade suit. The critical suit is diamonds. (If responder had both spades and diamonds stopped he would not make a stopper bid but rather bid 3NT)

5.1.2 Bidding Principles After A Stopper-Showing Bid

- If a partner has a stopper in the missing suit, partner is expected to bid 3NT unless strong enough to bid for slam.
- Over 3NT, raising a minor suit to the four level in an unlimited auction is forcing to game in the minor suit (not an invitation) and requests partner to start cue-bidding or take control with 4NT (Blackwood, not quantitative).
- A reversion to four of the agreed minor suit says: “I have no stopper in the critical suit and I have two or more losers in that suit”.
- A jump to five of the agreed minor says: “I have no stopper in the critical suit but I do have a singleton there”.
- A bid at the four level in the critical suit shows a void in that suit. This is essentially a cue-bid.
 - A five-level response in the agreed suit would be a sign-off.
 - Any other suit response would be a cue-bid showing 1st round control and slam interest.
 - 4NT response would be Blackwood.
 - 5NT response would be a “trump ask”.

Example:

[**1H: 2C**] ; [**3C: 3S**] ; [??].....Clubs is the agreed minor suit, 3S is a “stopper bid” (spades are stopped) and diamonds is then identified as the “critical suit”. Opener’s possible rebids have the following meanings:

- **3NT**: At least one stopper in the “critical suit”, diamonds.
- **4C**: No stopper in diamonds and no shortage (singleton or void) in diamonds.
- **5C**: No stopper but a singleton in diamonds.
- **4D**: Void in diamonds. This is essentially a cue-bid. Partner’s 5C rebid would be a sign-off. Any other suit rebid by partner would be a cue-bid. 4NT rebid by partner would be Blackwood. **5NT** rebid by partner would be a “trump ask”.
- **4H**: No stopper in diamonds but an excellent 5-card heart suit, prepared to play in 4H opposite a doubleton.
- **4S**: A 3-card holding in spades, a singleton diamond and prepared to play in 4S on a 4-3 fit if responder wishes.