



Adventures in Bridge

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This Week in Bridge

(287) Bidding Slam with a Void

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Level: 2, 4

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General

When we have a large fit and a void in a side suit, it may be possible to bid and make a slam (in a suit contract) even when we are missing two Aces. If one of the opponents' Aces is in the suit in which we are void, then it may not be a loser; but if our void is opposite one of partner's Aces, then both of the opponents' Aces are "cashing" and we will likely have two losers. Here we look at options for how to determine if we should bid a slam when we have a void.

Using Traditional Slam Bidding Tools

Level 2

Some of our traditional tools for exploring slam can still be used when we have a void. Sometimes partner's Ace will be needed as a discard and we can tell that slam should only be bid when we are missing one keycard. If this is the case, we bid as if we do not have a void and use Keycard to determine if we are missing one Keycard only.

A valuable tool for getting partner to re-evaluate their hand (when we have shortness) is a splinter bid. When we have a void, a splinter can be used to get partner's input about whether or not slam is a good contract. In this case, partner will push on for a slam with few honors opposite our void and will stop short of slam with multiple honors in that suit.

Control Showing Cuebids

Level 2

One of the simplest ways to determine which Ace partner holds is to have partner tell us by using a *Control Showing Cuebid* (CSC). This method is most effective if we play American Style Cuebidding, where partner shows *first* round controls, not first or second round. Here is an example, where we are void in ♦, we can find out if partner has the ♦A (the wrong Ace), and determine if slam is good contract or not.



Example 1

♠ AKxxx
♥ KJTx
♦ --
♣ AQJx
1♠ 3♠
___?

If we bid 4NT at this point in the auction, and partner shows one Ace and no ♠Q, then we will not know if partner has the right Ace (the ♥A) or the wrong Ace (the ♦A). A better way to continue the auction is to bid 4♣, a control showing cuebid. If partner now bids 4♦, we know they have the ♦A. We can still bid Keycard, but now we know if they show only one Ace, that it is not the right one (it is the ♦A). If partner shows two Aces, we know the other is the ♥A and we can continue exploring slam.

Cuebidding before using Keycard often allows us to know which specific Ace partner holds and this helps us better understand how to make use of the information we obtain from bidding 4NT - helping us visualize the location of partner's honors.

Exclusion Keycard

Level 4

Another way to determine if partner has the "right" Aces is to use a gadget called Exclusion Keycard. This tool is used to ask partner for their number of Aces (or Keycards), but for them to exclude the Ace in one suit (the suit in which we are void) when counting. We use this gadget by making an unusual jump to a high level, often beyond game.

Example 2

1♠ 3♠
5♣

Here Opener's 5♣ bid asks Responder for Keycards in ♠, but asks partner not to count the ♣A.

Example 3

1♠ (2♣) 5♣

Here Responder's unusual jump to 5♣ over the 2♣ overcall asks Responder for Keycards in ♠, but asks partner not to count the ♣A.

The responses to Exclusion vary based on our agreements. Most players who play Keycard Blackwood play this unusual jump as "Exclusion Keycard", still retaining the four other Keycards as important cards. It is important to discuss with partner how to respond to this Exclusion bid.



Simple Blackwood Style Responses (0, 1, 2, 3)

Step 1 0 Keycards – 5♦ in the examples above

Step 2 1 Keycard - 5♥ in the examples above

Step 3 2 Keycards – 5♠ in the examples above

Step 4 3 Keycards – 5NT in the examples above

Note: One disadvantage to this approach is that we do not find out about the trump Queen.

1430 Style Responses (1/4, 3/0, 2-. 2+)

Step 1 1 or 4 Keycards – 5♦ in the examples above

Step 2 3 or 0 Keycard - 5♥ in the examples above

Step 3 2 Keycards without the Queen – 5♠ in the examples above

Step 4 2 Keycards with the Queen – 5NT in the examples above

Note: One disadvantage to this approach is that after Step 1 or Step 2 we may not have room to “ask for the Queen” and keep the auction at a reasonable level.

Preempt Keycard Style Responses (0, 1-, 1+. 2-, 2+)

Step 1 0 Keycards – 5♦ in the examples above

Step 2 1 Keycards without the Queen – 5♥ in the examples above

Step 3 1 Keycards with the Queen – 5♠ in the examples above

Step 4 2 Keycards without the Queen – 5NT in the examples above

Step 5 2 Keycards with the Queen – 6♣ in the examples above

Note: This method has the disadvantage of adding a fifth step to the response structure, but it clarifies the holding of the trump queen. This is the TWiB preferred choice of Exclusion responses.

Void Responses to Keycard

When partner is using 4NT Keycard (this also applies if we are playing Blackwood) and we have a *useful void* then we have some options for describing our hand beyond our traditional Keycard responses.

- With a useful void and an even number of Keycards, we respond 5NT (one step beyond our traditional responses)
- With a useful void and an odd number of Keycards, we respond 6♣ (some partnerships bid the void, especially if it is below our trump suit and may be ambiguous to partner).



Conclusion

When we hold a void in a side suit, it is often difficult to determine if partner has the right cards we need for slam or if partner has the wrong cards. Bids that show shortness, like splinter bids, do a good job of getting partner to re-evaluate their hand. But if our hand is so strong that all we need to know is “which ace” partner holds, then other tools, like CSC or Exclusion Keycard can help us solve this problem.

When partner asks us for Aces (or Keycards) and we hold a “useful void” then we have extensions to Blackwood (Keycard) that allow us to let partner know. When you have a large trump fit with partner and your hand can combine with partner’s to take a lot of tricks because of shape, even missing multiple Keycards may not be a barrier to bidding and making slam if you can figure out whether you have the right combined cards!