

Keycard Asks after Suit Agreement

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Suit agreement comes in many flavors. Examples include Jacoby 2NT*, splinter bids (e.g. Direct or Ambiguous), inverted minors (e.g. 10+ or Cross-cross=13+), Bergen type raises (e.g. Regular, Reverse, and Combined), Limit Raises (10-12HCP), and many, many more.

After suit agreement is achieved, one often wants to ask about keycards at the cheapest possible level to investigate slam. There are many options available including the bid of 4NT, Kickback, Redwood, Cheapest Blackwood and Baby Blackwood, to name a few, all of which depend on whether you play keycard 1430/3014.

Recall that in general 1430 is used when the strong hand asks and 3014 (rck) is used when the weak hand asks since it facilitates the follow-up queen-asking bid. For simplicity, I will assume that the partnership has agreed upon the 1430 keycard agreement in all cases independent of whether the strong or weak hand is asking.

Kickback (the suit above the agreed upon suit) is useful whether the agreed upon suit is a major or a minor. When the suit agreed upon is a minor suit, the asking bid for Redwood is similar to Kickback, a relay to the next suit. Since with clubs agreed the relay is diamonds and with diamonds agreed the suit is hearts, BOTH RED SUITS, hence the name of Redwood.

Recall also that a King ask assumes all the keycards including the queen of trumps and is a grand slam try. It is initiated by 5T+1, ONE STEP above the agreed upon trump suit. Hence for spades it is 4NT and for hearts it is 4♠, etc. And, it is always a specific king ask not the number of kings since this approach allows on to ask about a second king.

What is your keycard agreement after suit you have established suit agreement?

With suit agreement, your 1430-keycard bid should be that which saves the most bidding space, the next available bid. But remember, any asking bid below the 4-level must be alerted (e.g. 2NT*/3♣*/3♦*/3♥*/3♠*/3NT*=Baby Blackwood). Why?

Lets look at a simple example.

Opener	Responder
♠AK7	♠83
♥7	♥AK102
♦QJ10987	♦K32
♣AQ9	♣5432

Where the bidding may go:

Opener	Responder
1♣	1♥
3♦	4♦
?	

In this example the agreed suit is diamonds. Using 4NT as the keycards ask, 5♥=2 goes beyond 5♦ and resulting in an impossible slam. Instead, the cheapest bid of 4♥ should be used. Now the answer is 5♣=2 without the Queen (since 4♠=1/4, 4NT=0/3, 5♣= 2/5 w/o Queen, 5♦= 2/5 w Queen) and one may sign-off in 5♦.

What are some sequences that may be used with partnership agreement?

Opener	Responder
1M	2NT*=1430 for the major
1♥	3♥*=Limit Raise with 3-card support and 13-15 Dummy Points
3♠*=1430	
1♥	2♠=2/1 Game Force (GF)
3♠	3NT*=1430 for spades
1♥	4♣*=splinter (13+ with Singleton/Void depending on agreement)
4♦=1430	

When opening a minor thing often become more difficult since one may prefer NT instead of the agreed upon minor. Common agreement includes Minorwood (the agreed upon suit is the ask at the 4-level) or Criscross (the opposite minor is used as the keycard ask).

1♦	2♦*=Inverted/3♣*=limit raise in Diamonds (Crises-cross)
4♦*=1430 Minor wood	
4♣ = 1430 Crosswood	
3NT=to play	

We consider another example:

Opener	Responder
♠A72	♠K54
♥K853	♥A
♦76	♦AKQJ1082
♣AK54	♣Q10

1♣	1♦
1♥	1♠* 4 th Suit forcing to game
1NT	3♦ trump is set
3NT	4♥ kickback for Diamonds
5♣ Two without the Queen	5♥ King ask
5NT ♥K no ♠K	6♣ a second king (club) asks?
7♦ Yes	7NT

Note that the bid of 6♦ (return to trump suit) over 6♣ would deny the king and to allow responder to bid 6♦/6NT. The bid of 4♥ is clearly a kickback bid; however, some may use the Cheapest Blackwood bid of 4♣ (also Crosswood) or perhaps 4♦ (as Minorwood).

While cheapest bid agreements work well for suits, what happens when you open 1NT=15-17. While many may use Gerber to ask for aces or 1430 Gerber (Expert Gerber) and then ask about kings, what is critical are not these alone but A-K combinations as suggested by the French bridge expert Takis Stilianas.

Over a 1NT=15-17 opening, the bid of 3♣* is the artificial bid used to initiate the convention. To use the convention you MUST HOLD Aces and Kings in at least three suits and have at least 10+HCP. It replaces Puppet/Muppet Stayman used by some partnerships but may still be used with the Mini-Maxi convention when 5-5 in the minors with 10+HCP or 5-5 in the majors.

To respond, one employs steps:

- 1st step = no A-K combinations
- 2nd step = one
- 3rd step = two
- Etc.

Subsequent next step relay bids by responder asks opener for (1st-relay) Aces (with No associated King), (2nd-relay) A-Q combinations, (3rd-relay) Kings, and (4th-relay) Queens.

The opening bidder always responds using steps (e.g. 1st step=0, next step=1, etc.) where any bid by responder that is not a relay (next bid suit) is taken as the final contract.

Lets look at two examples.

Opener	Responder
♠KQ6	♠AJ3
♥QJ53	♥K42
♦KQ5	♦432
♣A92	♣KQJ

The bidding follows.

1NT(15-17)	3♣* (artificial asking bid)
3♦* (No A-K Combinations)	3♥* (1 st relay asks for aces not accompanied by a King)
3NT* (2 nd step=1Ace)	Pass

The opener has 17HCP; if responder uses Gerber or 4NT with 15HCP it may get the contract too high missing two aces.

Opener	Responder
♠KQ6	♠743
♥K53	♥AQ2
♦KQ5	♦A2
♣A962	♣KQ754

The bidding follows.

1NT(15-17)	3♣* (a)
3♦* (b)	3♥* (c)
3NT* (d)	4♣* (e)
4♠* (f)	4NT (g)
5♦* (h)	6NT
Pass	

- (a) Artificial Asking bid
- (b) No A-K combinations (1st step)
- (c) 1st relay ask
- (d) 2nd step = 1 Ace w/o King
- (e) 2nd relay ask
- (f) Two K-Q combinations (3 steps)
- (g) 3rd relay
- (h) 1 King (2 steps)

Did you get to 6NT?