

Simple Slams

Chapter 6 : Logical Inferences in Slam Bidding

Board 7 Dlr S ALL VUL

♠ 8		
♥ 10 9 6 3		
♦ A Q J 7 3		
♣ K Q J		
♠ K Q 9 3		♠ J 10 7 6 2
♥ 8 5 2		♥ J
♦ 9 6 4 2		♦ K 8 5
♣ 10 7		♣ 9 8 6 4
	♠ A 5 4	
	♥ A K Q 7 4	
	♦ 10	
	♣ A 5 3 2	

This is an extremely useful slam hand for illustrating a number of different approaches which can make bidding slams very much easier. As you can see, there is a quite frigid grand slam in hearts on for NS but is it that easy to bid? Simon and I actually did bid it, the following way:

S	W	N	E
1H	NB	2D	NB
3C	NB	4NT	NB
5S	NB	5NT	NB
6D	NB	6H	NB
7H!			

Was South's 7H an undisciplined punt, or based on good reason? The rest of the bidding was fair enough, given that North knows that South has a GOOD hand. So let's first see why bidding SIX should not have been difficult. South's 3C bid was a REVERSE. At least WE play it as a reverse, even though it was the lowest level that South could bid clubs at. If you're playing ACOL, or any other system for that matter, you should have the ability to REBID TWO HEARTS OR TWO NO TRUMPS over the 2D response, therefore to bid 3C you should have at least a good 15 count. That, coupled with the fact that North has such great clubs, South's second suit, should add up to slam in hearts provided South has two aces. North's main problem is the heart suit, where there are possible losers, but for South to have REVERSED, the chances are that the hearts are reasonably strong anyway.

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So, with every intention of bidding the slam in hearts, North asks for aces. Simple Blackwood is adequate. South shows three, and now North asks for kings. But the fact that North asks for kings means two more things: firstly, that NS have all four aces between them, and secondly that North has an interest in a grand slam if South's hand is suitable.

You see, we don't ask for kings after asking for aces UNLESS we have all the aces accounted for. It DOES make subsequent grand slam bidding easier, believe me!

North has every reason to suggest to South that the grand slam may not be out of the question. No point in asking for kings to decide whether to bid the SMALL slam or not, since after a bid of 5NT you're ALREADY in a small slam the moment partner shows them! People tend to forget that.

Different if you're using Gerber, but even then we recommend NOT asking for kings unless you're already committed to a small slam and are looking for more. Unless of course you've used Gerber when partner has opened 1NT which limits their hand narrowly and YOU are totally in charge, in which case you might ask for kings to help you decide WHICH SMALL slam to bid!

When South shows one king with a bid of 6D, North signs off in 6H. WHY? That answer is quite obvious. North can see a possible heart loser, and if no heart loser, then a possible loser in the diamond suit. SOUTH should realise that. After all, South has the top hearts. South ALSO has a singleton diamond. Whatever North's problems may be, South looks to have them covered. The singleton diamond in partner's suit is not a great feature, the KING would have been much better, but then again, it means that there are increased options for setting up the diamond suit if required, MORE than just a possible one way finesse. So, South knows that North does NOT know the full extent of South's values, yet despite that has asked for aces AND kings and settled in 6H. Isn't that enough for South to bid one more?

Often when one hand has a good suit with the top cards, such slams are bid much more easily than when the top cards are split between the two hands. For instance, if one hand has AQxx and the other Kxxxx neither hand may be sure that there are no losers in the suit unless they have a specific way of finding out about the holding in the suit. Such things ARE possible, especially with Roman Key Card Blackwood, or trump asking bids after cue bidding sequences. But for now, we'll worry about OTHER logical and reasonable ways to bid the grand slam. You can see that it wasn't too difficult even for the SIMPLE souls to bid it!

After the same sequence, 1H-2D; 3C, given that the 3C bid in the context is FORCING TO GAME as indeed it should be, North can bid 3H. This is NOT offering to bail out in 3H. North has responded at the two level, hence should have at least a ten count. South has REVERSED, and those two things put together have GUARANTEED that NS are in game.

As per our earlier discussion, the bid of 3H should be STRONGER than 4H if you play by the 'principle of slow arrival'. South now bids 3S, a CUE BID which shows FIRST ROUND spade control. North is now very interested, and in turn cue bids 4D. South bids 5C to show their second ace. Now North bids 5NT. NOT an offer to play, or bailing out. The cue bidding has been strong from both partners, so there is no question of not bidding the slam. But what 5NT means is: we have now been through our cue bidding and I need to know about your TRUMPS. South bids 7H, the top three trumps are clearly something that North needed to know about.

In some instances, the bid of 5NT can come out of the blue, and is what is known as a 'GRAND SLAM FORCE'. In the old days when it first came into being, it merely said: bid the grand slam if you have two of the top three honours". That as you can see was fairly crude. A better way is to simply respond in steps as you do for aces: first step, NONE, second step ONE, third step two and fourth step all three top honours. Thus, over 5NT the response would be 6H. As long as North knows that is what South is telling them, no problem, but if North merely thinks South has taken the 5NT as a WAITING bid and has nothing further to show, the grand slam will be missed! It helps to have a trusting partnership.

More about 'TRUMP ASKS' while we're on the subject. In a cue bidding sequence, the partnership will have exchanged sufficient information about OUTSIDE controls, yet not know about the respective trump holdings. When either partner bids 4NT (5NT if 4NT is not available) the bid asks about trumps.

The simple step sequence of responses can be used, or some specific trump holdings can be shown if you think they're necessary and more accurate. For instance knowing that partner has AKxxxx opposite your xxxx is enough to expect NO losers in the suit, but opposite AQxxxx you certainly wouldn't want to be in a grand slam. The same response when you just ask for the NUMBER of top honours but a different and more specific response if you're more sophisticated. More on that later though.

Another point: when cue bidding, do you bid your controls starting from first round and in order, or do you bid first OR second round controls? Our preference is the simple way of starting with first round and then bidding second round. If you bypass a suit, you do NOT have that control at the level you're bidding them at. But you may decide that you won't initiate a cue bidding sequence without a minimum specified number of controls, in which case bidding either first OR second round controls in ascending order can give you more vital information at an earlier stage.

And another thing. There will be times when you start a cue bidding sequence below 3NT AFTER having agreed a suit. In such cases, the bid of 3NT, if you have agreed a MAJOR, is merely a 'waiting bid', indicating the inability to show a control, or not wanting to show it at the four level. However if you have agreed a MINOR, then a bid of 3NT after having started a cue bidding sequence, is AN OFFER TO PLAY. You can see why, I hope!

And another thing: even if you have apparently agreed one suit, if you bid your own suit at game level, or partner's suit, that too, is an offer to play. Such an offer to play usually happens in sequences where each of you has bid a suit and then agreed a third one, or when one of you has shown a long(er) suit and agrees another. For instance, you open 1S, partner bids 2C and you bid 3C. After a cue bidding sequence, if either partner bids 4S, that is CLEARLY an offer of an alternative GAME contract.