

Simple Slam Bidding and Play

Chapter 9 : Easy Slams, Poor Slams, and Ridiculous Slams

Dlr N NS VUL

♠ 6 5 3
♥ A K J 4
♦ J 7 5 2
♣ K 10

♠ Q 8 7 2
♥ 10 9 8
♦ 10 6
♣ 9 5 4 3

♠ 10 9 4
♥ 6 5
♦ Q 9 8 4
♣ 8 7 6 2

♠ A K J
♥ Q 7 3 2
♦ A K 3
♣ A Q J

How often do you joke about what would you do if you had a 24 count opposite a 1NT opening? It just doesn't happen, but this time it did. When North opened 1NT, South just about fell out of his chair. But despite a combined 36 count with all the aces and kings, North cannot make even SIX No Trumps! That's what happens when you have two flat hands opposite each other. The opposing hands aren't even mirror images! Only the conservative elements in our midst who bid to 6H will have had any success on this hand unless East chooses the foolish opening of a low diamond against 6NT. Or is there a way that you CAN make 6NT on the most obvious and most sensible lead of the ten of spades, or on the inferior leads of a heart or club? 6H of course presents no problem at all. Draw three rounds of trumps and then discard a spade on the third club and ruff the jack of spades, losing a diamond at the end. That is why many less obvious slams should be played in a 4-4 fit rather than in No Trumps, but I would have every sympathy with those who simply asked for aces and bid 7NT! Could you possibly imagine, as South, that the correct action on your hand, when partner opens 1NT, would be to firstly use Stayman and then to bid 6H?

Another option for South is to bid 5NT, which says: bid 6NT if you have a MINIMUM, and bid 7NT with a MAXIMUM. A bid of 4NT opposite a 1NT opening is strictly QUANTITATIVE, asking North to PASS with a minimum, so South should not bid that. To ask for aces over 1NT, you should always use Gerber so that you don't get left in 4NT when partner has a minimum!

If playing TRANSFERS with a 'Range Finder', South might bid 2S. North of course will bid 2NT to show a minimum, and South will be no better off, and just ask for aces and kings and end up bidding 6NT. About the only way I can see that NS would end up in 6H is if South is a super conservative, or if they are playing a system where they do not open a weak 1NT. They would still need to be conservative and have a fairly sophisticated bidding system to end up in 6H rather than 6NT or higher.

One final word: This slam occurred in a MATCH POINT session, which is why I have 'demoted' the bid of 6H as comparatively unlikely. On the same hands, if you're playing TEAMS, you should ensure that you play the above hand in HEARTS: SIX if you're a conservative pair, and SEVEN if you're more optimistic. You'll note that 7H has the extra chance of JUST dropping the queen of diamonds without needing a spade finesse. AND that there is NO difference in terms of i.m.p.s for making 7H or 7NT.

Dlr S EW VUL

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

It matters not how the bidding goes on this hand, 6NT should be the MINIMUM contract reached by any EW pair that has any idea of bidding at all. The moment West opens 1S, East must surely know the partnership will be in slam. Once more, just asking for aces and then kings will give East enough information to bid 6NT and tell West that East is considering a grand slam. As it is, with 12 top tricks, the grand slam is on a spade finesse, which as it happens works. But you really shouldn't bid grand slams which depend on a finesse. Bid grand slams which, according to the information you have, are at LEAST on a finesse, with extra possibilities. For instance, if East finds out that West has SIX spades and an ace and two kings, East might reason that if West has the king of SPADES plus either red king and a red queen, the chances are getting up quite high that thirteen tricks are close, if not certain. In fact the king of spades instead of the king of diamonds would make the grand slam odds on.

How, then can East find out about the king of spades? Not too easily unless they employ cue bids or a trump ask, or both. Let's say East bids 2H in response to west's 1S. West should bid 3D, which should be played as CLOSE to a reverse and show at least a 15 count. At least we play it that way and it helps. We wouldn't reverse with worse hearts, but opposite a known five card heart suit and 10+ HCP, the West hand is so much better isn't it?

There is another option for West, which is to rebid THREE spades over East's 2H response. That would definitely land EW in 7S because East should expect a better six card spade suit. Jump rebids with VERY good suits do take the guesswork out of bidding. The earlier conjecture about if West had an ace and two kings and IF one of the kings was the spade king would then be no conjecture at all. So, West does NOT rebid 3S but tries 3D. East can bid 3H which, in a game forcing situation, is completely forcing. West can then either bid 4H or 3S. If 4H, then East just has to ask for aces and kings and judge whether to bid the grand slam or not. Given that West has opened spades and supported hearts, bidding the grand slam in NO TRUMPS is not unreasonable. Why NO TRUMPS? Because even if there is an apparent heart or spade loser, there may be sufficient tricks not to need both heart and spade tricks. Since East cannot tell WHICH, rather than guess the WRONG major suit, No Trumps seems perfectly sensible.

In another sequence, when West rebids spades, e.g. 1S-2H; 2S East can employ the GRAND SLAM FORCE, jumping to 5NT which asks West about their spade honours. When West shows only ONE, East signs off in 6NT knowing there is either a certain or a probable spade loser, but if West shows TWO top spades, then 7NT is a good shot. Note that while no specific suit has been agreed in this sequence, because West has rebid spades and East not asked for any other agreement, when East jumps to 5NT, spades MUST be the 'agreed' suit by inference.

A similar situation can arise in other sequences, e.g. 1H-2C; 2H-2S; 3S. Now there is no way that you can agree spades without signing off in game, and a cue bid will not elicit anything other than 4S from partner either, so you bid 5NT. ALL you want to know is whether partner has one or both the top spade honours. If both, then 7S must be a good shot.

The grand slam force, and trump asks, can be very useful tools indeed, and while they may not be required often, it pays to learn about them and keep them in reserve. They are simple to master, and when they turn up, there's little chance of forgetting.

Dlr N NIL VUL

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

Here is another badly handled slam. Why do people think that having all the aces and all the kings guarantees that they can make 7NT? When North opened 1NT, most Souths launched immediately into ace asking and when they found North with two kings as well, just bid 7NT. Despite all the top cards PLUS the queen of spades and jack of hearts, 7NT is a hopeless contract. The defence can't even give a trick away on the lead, nor does East have any difficulty whatsoever in keeping diamonds nor West keeping clubs. But SEVEN SPADES is absolutely infrangible.

In a top grade club game, would you believe that MOST pairs were in either six or seven NO TRUMPS, and that bidding 7S and making was worth 38/38 match points for the ONLY pair to do so, BUT.....bidding SIX spades and making SEVEN was worth 35/38!! That proves TWO things. The TRUMP contract is nearly always best, and you DON'T need to bid a grand slam if you're not sure about it, because being in the CORRECT small slam will invariably result in a good match point score.

Many pairs fell into the 'No Trump' trap, and others still never even FOUND the spade fit, thanks to the introduction of TRANSFERS into their system. Have YOU ever heard the quote: "A little learning is a dangerous thing", or is it 'a little knowledge' and who was it who said it? Some smart Alec or other. Was it Pope? No, not THE Pope! Anyway, what THAT meant was that if you're smart enough to use transfers, then you should ALSO be smart enough to NOT use transfers when you shouldn't.

(hands repeated for convenience)

Dlr N NIL VUL

♠ K Q 3 2
♥ J 7 5
♦ A K 4 2
♣ 6 5

♠ 10 8
♥ 10 9 6 2
♦ J 7
♣ Q J 7 3 2

♠ J 9 7
♥ 8 3
♦ Q 10 9 8 6
♣ 10 9 8

♠ A 6 5 4
♥ A K Q 4
♦ 5 3
♣ A K 4

South may have wanted to find out if North was maximum or minimum, and bid 2S. North is minimum, and would therefore bid 2NT and, as has happened before, the spade fit is lost now because South does not know how to proceed in any other way than ask for aces and kings! That's what I mean about a little learning.

There is no reason why on this hand South should use anything other than Stayman, and EVERYBODY plays Stayman. Surely South will always be bidding a slam, and if they are to try a GRAND slam, then surely a combined 34 count would only be adequate if played with a 4-4 fit as trumps. Too many people don't use Stayman on 11 or 12 count hands on which they want to invite game, again resulting in inferior contracts when opener has the right four card major, maybe even both. You should NEVER dispense with Stayman unless there is VERY good reason to do so. This hand proves it, as well as many others that you play, and read about.

So, after that little discourse, let me say that using the 2S 'range finder' on the South hand MIGHT get you to 7S if NS know how to bid further than just the skeletal transfer system, which I dare say 99% of people who play transfers DON'T. North also might decide their hand is a MAXIMUM, and in my book it is closer to a maximum than a minimum. IF North decides their hand is MAXIMUM, and South bids 2S as a 'range finder', the bidding proceeds: 3D from North (max and 4+ diamonds), 3H from South, 3S from North. Now the spade fit is found and South bids 4C, quite obviously a CUE BID agreeing spades.

Then follows a sequence of cue bids and a trump ask that tells South that North has AK in diamonds and KQ in spades. South at this stage should just bid 6S because they don't know that North has a doubleton club AND the jack of hearts. Yes, without the jack of hearts, there are only twelve tricks unless the hearts break favourably, and South can work out the possibilities. If South's ambitions reach as far as the GRAND slam, South can bank on North's 'maximum' to contain one more useful card at least. But a smart enough South can also work out that if a grand slam IS to make it will not be in No Trumps. Therefore, in a MATCH POINT game, the smart South will settle for SIX SPADES, knowing that if it makes SEVEN, it will beat all 6NT contracts! Who said you can't get an accurate picture of the hands from a comparatively simple system of bidding?