

LESSON 5

Blackwood and Gerber

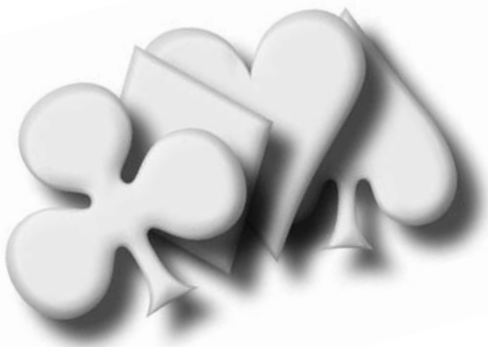


General Concepts

General Introduction

Group Activities

Sample Deals



GENERAL CONCEPTS

Blackwood and Gerber

This is the first of two lessons on slam bidding conventions. This lesson covers the Blackwood and Gerber conventions. Cuebidding will be discussed in the next lesson. Most of the students will be familiar already with at least the rudiments of the Blackwood convention, but this lesson discusses a number of areas in which even experienced partnerships can have misunderstandings.

To keep the interest of those who already may be familiar with Blackwood, the introduction poses a challenge that isn't answered until the very end of the lesson.

Bidding

The standard form of Blackwood is discussed. There is no mention of variations such as Key Card Blackwood. Both Key Card Blackwood and Roman Key Card Blackwood are outlined in the Appendix, but they are not recommended for casual partnerships. If anything, such variations would be more relevant in the next lesson, Finding Key Cards, but they are outside the scope of this series. The emphasis is on the correct use of Blackwood, a convention frequently misused.

The standard form of the Gerber convention is introduced, along with appropriate guidelines for its use. It is emphasized that Gerber is used in concert with Blackwood, not as a substitute.

Here are the topics covered:

The First Ingredient — Combined Strength

This introduces the concept that approximately 33 combined points are required for a small slam and 37 points for a grand slam. Quantitative slam bidding in notrump and suit contracts is outlined. Avoid getting into a discussion of Blackwood at this point.

The Second Ingredient — Trump Fit

This section emphasizes the importance of uncovering the strain in which the final contract will be played before the bidding gets too high. Many students rush into the Blackwood convention before settling on the best strain.

The Third Ingredient — Controls

This section looks at the importance of first-and second-round controls, after the first two conditions have been satisfied. Here the Blackwood convention is introduced as a method for determining the number of aces and kings held by the partnership.

Showing a Void

One method for showing a void when responding to Blackwood is discussed. The participants may find this a bit confusing, so you should point out that the guidelines are in the textbook. You can suggest that they ignore this extension if they prefer, since it doesn't arise very often. The important point to make is that when responding to Blackwood, a void cannot be counted as an ace.

Stopping in 5NT

When a minor suit has been agreed upon as the trump suit, it's easy to get beyond a safe level when using Blackwood. It is key to show how to stop in 5NT after using Blackwood. The value of Blackwood is keeping the partnership out of an unmakeable slam.

Handling Interference over Blackwood

Two common methods for handling interference are DOPI and DEPO. They are concepts that could be skipped if the class appears to be struggling. ROPI (Redouble = 0; Pass = 1) isn't discussed. Ignoring a double of Blackwood will suffice for most students.

When Is 4NT Blackwood?

It's important to understand that 4NT isn't always Blackwood. In addition to the quantitative use of 4NT, the earlier lessons on the Michaels cuebid and the unusual notrump have already provided examples of other uses of 4NT.

The Gerber Convention

The Gerber convention is introduced to cover those situations where a jump to 4NT would be quantitative.

When Is 4♣ Gerber?

This is another important section. The standard guideline is used — a jump to 4♣ is Gerber after a natural 1NT or 2NT bid. Partnerships can have additional agreements, but this keeps things fairly straightforward. The common agreement that 4♣ is Gerber following a 2♣ Stayman inquiry is also introduced. This brings the discussion back full circle to the challenging auction introduced at the beginning of the lesson.

Play & Defense

The focus of all four deals is slam bidding conventions, and there are no difficult play concepts. The auctions should be challenging enough. If the students can get to the right level in each case, they will be rewarded.

The first deal includes a variation. Have the participants make the suggested change and then rebid the hand.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

To capture the group's interest, you might start the lesson like this:

“In the next two lessons, we'll focus on slam bidding. You want to make the most of your luck when the partnership has most of the strength, so it's worth the effort to spend some time on this subject.

“If you're traveling to the bridge game with your partner, probably the only discussion you will have about slam bidding is, ‘Do you play the Blackwood convention?’ Once you agree on that, you move on to other subjects. When you sit down to play, however, you may soon discover that your brief discussion hasn't covered all of the basics.

“The cards are sorted into suits. Construct the following hand in front of South.

“In spades: the ace, the ten and two low cards.

“In hearts: the ace, the queen and two low cards.

“In diamonds: two low cards.

“In clubs: the ace, the queen and a low card.”

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	
			1NT	SOUTH
Pass	2♣	Pass	2♥	♠ A 10 x x
Pass	4NT	Pass	?	♥ A Q x x
				♦ x x
				♣ A Q x

Check that each table has the correct starting hand set up dummy style in front of South.

“**What is South's opening bid?** (1NT.) With a balanced hand and 16 high-card points, open 1NT even with the low doubleton in diamonds.

“**West passes, and North responds 2♣. What does South do after East passes?** (2♥.) North's 2♣ response is Stayman, so you dutifully bid one of your four-card major suits. With two four-card majors, common practice is to bid the suits up the line, 2♥.

“**West passes, and North jumps to 4NT. East passes. Discuss with the others at your table what call South makes now.**”

Give the students a couple of minutes to discuss whether 4NT is Blackwood or quantitative. You'll probably find that there is some disagreement over the meaning of 4NT. Don't give an answer at this point. Instead, say something like this:

“When it comes to slam bidding, there's a lot of room for discussion. We'll revisit this hand later in the session, after we've discussed some of the essential ingredients for slam bidding.”

GROUP ACTIVITIES

The First Ingredient — Combined Strength

Introduction

“There are three main ingredients for bidding a slam, and the first of these is combined strength. You don’t usually think about bidding a slam, unless there is some indication that the partnership has enough combined strength to be in the slam zone. The standard guidelines are:

- 33 or more combined points for a small slam.
- 37 or more combined points for a grand slam.

“If you are thinking of bidding a slam in notrump, the points are mostly high-card points, although you can still include length points when you have a five-card or longer suit. In a suit contract, distribution will play a much larger role, and you will be valuing shortness — singletons and voids.

“On some deals, all you need is this first ingredient. You can simply bid a slam based on power.”

Instructions

“Change the South hand.

“In spades: take away a low card.

“In hearts: take away a low card.

“In diamonds: add the queen and a low card.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
	1NT	Pass	6NT

SOUTH
 ♠ A 10 x
 ♥ A Q x
 ♦ Q x x x
 ♣ A Q x

“**Your partnership has agreed to use a range of 15 to 17 HCP for 1NT openings. Suppose North deals and opens the bidding 1NT. What does South respond?** (6NT.) You have 18 high-card points and North has at least 15 HCP, giving the partnership a combined total of 33 or more points, putting you in the slam zone. Since North has a maximum of 17 HCP, the partnership has at most 35 combined points, leaving you in the range for a small slam, but not a grand slam.

“**Does South know in what strain to play the contract?** (Yes.) With a balanced hand and no four-card major, you plan to play the contract in notrump.

“Does South need any further information from opener before deciding on the contract? (No.) It won’t do any good to ask about aces. If North doesn’t have an ace, you would still bid the slam, since you can afford to lose one trick. If North does have an ace, giving your side all of the aces, you still don’t have enough combined strength to bid a grand slam — even if you also have all of the kings. Whether or not North has an ace, you should be in a small slam.

“It might seem that there is no harm in asking about aces on the way to slam, but it merely provides additional opportunities for something to go wrong. If you were to bid 4NT, for example, thinking that would be asking for aces, partner might pass. A raise of 1NT to 4NT is not the Blackwood convention — it’s a quantitative raise, inviting opener to bid slam with a maximum for the 1NT opening. Even if you were to bid 4♣, the Gerber convention that will be discussed shortly, there’s the possibility that West could make a lead-directing double, getting East off to the only lead that might defeat the slam.

“In summary, if you aren’t interested in the answer, don’t ask the question!

“Suppose North–South use a range of 20 or 21 points for a 2NT opening. North deals and opens the bidding 2NT. What is South’s response? (7NT.) Again, there’s no need to get any additional information before making your decision. Partner has at least 20 HCP. Adding that to your 18 points gives a combined total of 38 points, more than enough for a grand slam. Simply jump right to 7NT.

“Change the South hand.

“In clubs: take away the queen and add a low card.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
	1NT	Pass	4NT

SOUTH
 ♠ A 10 x
 ♥ A Q x
 ♦ Q x x x
 ♣ A x x

“With 16 high-card points, South is all set to open 1NT, but North beats South to it. What does South respond to North’s opening bid of 1NT? (4NT.) You have more than enough to take the partnership to game, but not quite enough to commit the partnership to slam. If North has only 15 HCP, the combined partnership total will be 31 points. If North has 17 HCP, however, there will be 33 combined points, enough for slam.

“The way to invite opener to slam is to raise 1NT to 4NT. This is a quantitative, or invitational, raise. It asks opener to bid slam with a maximum, 17 HCP. With a minimum, 15 HCP, opener passes and the partnership will rest safely at the four level. With 16 HCP, opener should generally err on the side of caution and pass but, with a good 16 HCP — some 10’s and 9’s or a five-card suit — opener could accept the invitation and bid slam.

“The raise from 1NT to 4NT does not ask for the number of aces. We’ll look at how to ask for the number of aces over an opening notrump bid a little later. Instead, it’s similar to the raise from 1NT to 2NT, inviting game.”

With a more experienced group, you can add that opener doesn’t have to accept the invitation by bidding 6NT. Opener has the option of bidding four-card suits “up the line” at the five level or jumping to the six level in a five-card suit. This may allow the partnership to reach slam in an eight-card fit when 12 tricks aren’t available in notrump. Using this approach, opener’s bid at the five level is not showing the number of aces held — although inexperienced partnerships might interpret the bid in that manner.

“Suppose North opens the bidding 2NT, showing 20 or 21 high-card points. What does South respond? (5NT.) Combined with South’s 16 HCP, the partnership has at least 36 combined points, enough for a small slam, but might have 37 combined points, enough for a grand slam. To invite opener to bid a grand slam, responder raises to 5NT. Unlike the raise to 4NT, the raise to 5NT is forcing. Opener is expected to bid a small slam with a minimum, 20 HCP, and a grand slam with a maximum, 21 HCP.”

Again, with an experienced group, you could point out that opener doesn’t have to bid 6NT or 7NT. Opener has the option of bidding a suit at the six or seven level, looking for an eight-card fit.

“Although the idea of quantitative bidding is usually applied to a notrump contract, it also can be used for a suit contract.

“Change the South hand.

“In spades: add the king, the jack and a low card.

“In diamonds: take away all four cards.

“In clubs: add a low card.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
	1♦	Pass	1♠
Pass	2♠	Pass	6♠

SOUTH
 ♠ A K J 10 x x
 ♥ A Q x
 ♦ —
 ♣ A x x x

“Suppose North opens the bidding 1♦. What does South respond? (1♠/2♠.) With 18 high-card points and a six-card suit, you could make a jump shift to 2♠, but that takes up a lot of bidding room which you might need to explore for the best contract. Unless North has a fit with spades, you might belong in clubs, notrump or even hearts. It’s probably more practical to respond 1♠. That’s forcing and leaves plenty of room to explore. You can show your additional strength later in the auction.

“Suppose South responds 1♠ and North raises to 2♠. Now what does South bid? (6♠/5♠/3♣.) The practical bid at this point is probably a simple jump to 6♠. You know the partnership is close to the combined values for slam, since North has 13 to 16 points in this auction. If you want to be a little more cautious, you could make a quantitative jump to 5♠, inviting North to bid slam with more than a bare minimum.

“It is possible that you can make a grand slam with this hand, but it will be very difficult to find out. You could start exploring with a bid such as 3♣, but unless your partnership has very sophisticated slam bidding methods, you are unlikely to be able to find out if North has exactly the cards you need to make a grand slam. A jump to 6♠, based on pure power, is probably the best you can do. It doesn’t always pay to be too refined. If you don’t give the opponents too much information, they may help you out with the opening lead or later plays.”

Summary

“The first ingredient for bidding a slam is sufficient combined strength:

- 33 points for a small slam.
- 35 points for a grand slam.

“Sometimes that will be enough, and you can bid or invite slam based on power alone.”

The Second Ingredient — Trump Fit

Introduction

“When you can determine that the partnership holds 33 or more points, you know the partnership should be considering a slam. On most hands, however, combined strength isn’t the only ingredient you need.”

Instructions

“Change the South hand.

“In spades: take away the king and the jack; add the queen.

“In hearts: take away the ace.

“In diamonds: add the ace and the king.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
	1 ♥	Pass	?

SOUTH
 ♠ A Q 10 x x
 ♥ Q x
 ♦ A K
 ♣ A x x x

“**Suppose this is your hand. Partner, North, opens the bidding 1 ♥, and East passes. Does South know whether the partnership belongs in the slam zone?** (Yes.) You have 19 high-card points plus 1 length point for the five-card suit. North has a minimum of 13 points, so the partnership has a combined total of at least 33 points. You know right away that the partnership should be considering a slam level contract.

“**Can South bid slam right away based on the combined strength?** (No.) **Can South launch right into the Blackwood convention to ask for the number of aces?** (No.) Although you know the partnership belongs in the slam zone, you still do not know where. Suppose you bid 4NT right away, asking for the number of aces held by North, and North responded 5 ♦. You would know now that the partnership has all of the aces but you wouldn’t know whether the partnership belonged in 6 ♥, 6 ♠, 6NT or even 6 ♣. You would be missing the second key ingredient to slam bidding — a suitable trump fit. You must know where you are going to play the slam, before you can jump to slam or use any of the slam-bidding conventions.

“In fact, on this hand, you also wouldn’t know whether the partnership belonged in a small slam or a grand slam, since you don’t have enough information about North’s strength.

“**Instead of launching into slam bidding right away, what should South respond?** (1 ♠/2 ♠.) With 20 points, you have enough strength to jump shift into 2 ♠ but that’s probably not a good idea. You would use up bidding room on a hand that might require a lot of investigation to determine the best strain for the contract. Instead, a simple forcing response of 1 ♠ should suffice for now. Once you’ve found out more about opener’s hand, you can show the extra strength later.

“To see why finding a fit takes priority over bidding a slam, leave the South hand as it is and construct the following hand in front of North.

“In spades: the king and a low card.

“In hearts: the ace, the jack, the ten and four low cards.

“In diamonds: the queen, the jack and a low card.

“In clubs: the jack.

<p>NORTH</p> <p>♠ K x</p> <p>♥ A J 10 x x x x</p> <p>♦ Q J x</p> <p>♣ J</p>	<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">WEST</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">NORTH</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">EAST</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">SOUTH</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">Pass</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">1♥</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">Pass</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">1♠</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">Pass</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">2♥</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">Pass</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">(6♥)</td> </tr> </table>	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	Pass	1♥	Pass	1♠	Pass	2♥	Pass	(6♥)	<p>SOUTH</p> <p>♠ A Q 10 x x</p> <p>♥ Q x</p> <p>♦ A K</p> <p>♣ A x x x</p>
WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH											
Pass	1♥	Pass	1♠											
Pass	2♥	Pass	(6♥)											

“**What would North open ?** (1♥.) With 12 high-card points plus 3 length points for the seven-card suit, North would open the bidding 1♥.

“**What does South respond?** (1♠.) The 1♠ response is forcing, giving North a chance to further describe the hand.

“**What does North rebid?** (2♥.) North shows a minimum opening bid with six or more hearts by rebidding 2♥.

“**Is South in a better position now to consider a slam contract?** (Yes.) Now South knows that the partnership has at least an eight-card heart fit, so the partnership can play in that suit. South also knows that North has a minimum opening bid, so the partnership probably doesn’t belong in a grand slam. We’ll look at more sophisticated slam bidding methods a little later, but South could reasonably jump right to 6♥ at this point, based on the partnership’s combined strength and combined fit.

“6♥ is an excellent contract. You should take at least 12 tricks and may take all 13 tricks if the ♥K is favorably placed. 6NT, however, is a poor contract. If the opponents lead a club and the heart finesse loses, you may be defeated several tricks.

“Change the North hand.

“In spades: add the jack and a low card.

“In hearts: take away the jack and a low card.

<p>NORTH</p> <p>♠ K J x x</p> <p>♥ A 10 x x x</p> <p>♦ Q J x</p> <p>♣ J</p>	<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">WEST</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">NORTH</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">EAST</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">SOUTH</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">Pass</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">1♥</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">Pass</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">1♠</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">Pass</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">2♠</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">Pass</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">(6♠)</td> </tr> </table>	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	Pass	1♥	Pass	1♠	Pass	2♠	Pass	(6♠)	<p>SOUTH</p> <p>♠ A Q 10 x x</p> <p>♥ Q x</p> <p>♦ A K</p> <p>♣ A x x x</p>
WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH											
Pass	1♥	Pass	1♠											
Pass	2♠	Pass	(6♠)											

“**What would North open?** (1♥.) North would open the long suit, 1♥.

“**What does South respond?** (1♠.) A response of 1♠ leaves North plenty of room for a good bidding conversation.

“**What does North rebid?** (2♠.) With four-card support and a minimum opening bid, North would raise to the two level.

“**Does South now have enough information to consider bidding a slam?** (Yes.) North has shown a minimum opening bid, so South knows the partnership probably belongs in a small slam rather than a grand slam. The partnership has uncovered a fit in spades, so the partnership can play with that suit as trump. In effect, South now has enough information to jump to 6♠ and to expect that to be a reasonable contract. South might want to use some slam-bidding conventions along the way, but they are unlikely to add much useful information.

“Notice that 6♠ is an excellent contract on these combined hands. South might even take all 13 tricks by ruffing the club losers in dummy and discarding the heart loser on dummy’s extra diamond winner. 6♥ would not be a good contract. You would need a favorable lie of the missing hearts. Similarly, 6NT does not work well. After a club lead, you have almost no chance to take 12 tricks.”

Summary

“The second important ingredient for slam bidding is to determine the strain you want to play in — a trump fit or notrump — before launching into slam. Once you know you have the required strength and a suitable strain, you are two-thirds of the way along.”

The Third Ingredient – Controls

Introduction

“While having enough combined strength and an agreed trump suit may be enough for a slam, on many hands there is a third consideration.”

Instructions

“Pick up the North and South hands and sort the cards back into suits. Construct the following hand in front of South.

“In spades: the king, the queen and two low cards.

“In hearts: the king, the queen, the jack and two low cards.

“In diamonds: a low card.

“In clubs: the ace, the king and the jack.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	SOUTH
	1 ♠	Pass	?	♠ K Q x x
				♥ K Q J x x
				♦ x
				♣ A K J

“**Suppose North deals and opens the bidding 1 ♠. Are the first two ingredients for slam taken care of?** (Yes.) In support of spades you have 19 high-card points plus 3 dummy points for the singleton diamond. There’s more than enough combined strength for at least a small slam. There’s also an excellent trump fit in spades, so you know where the contract can be played.

“**Apart from the possibility of missing a grand slam, is there anything to prevent South from jumping right to 6 ♠?** (Yes.) If you are missing two aces, the opponents can take the first two tricks. That will defeat the slam, before declarer has a chance to develop extra winners on which to discard losers.

“Leave the South hand in place and construct a hand in front of North.

“In spades: the ace, the jack, the ten and three low cards.

“In hearts: a low card.

“In diamonds: the king, the queen and the jack.

“In clubs: the queen and two low cards.

NORTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	SOUTH
♠ A J 10 x x x		1 ♠	Pass	4NT	♠ K Q x x
♥ x	Pass	5 ♦	Pass	5 ♠	♥ K Q J x x
♦ K Q J	Pass	Pass	Pass		♦ x
♣ Q x x					♣ A K J

“**What would North open?** (1 ♠.) With 13 high-card points plus 2 length points for the six-card suit, North has more than enough to open the bidding at the one level, 1 ♠.

“If South were to take the partnership right to 6♠, what would be the result? (Down one.) The defenders have two aces to take to defeat the contract. Even if they don’t take their aces right away, they’ll still have another chance.

“Notice that you have lots of tricks. You have six spade tricks; you can develop at least two tricks in hearts and two tricks in diamonds; you have three tricks in clubs. That’s 13 winners. Unfortunately, you have to lose two tricks in the process of developing your winners and that’s no good in a slam contract.

“The problem is that the partnership has wasted values in the heart and diamond suits. South’s ♥K, ♥Q and ♥J are not of much value opposite North’s singleton heart. You could still take 11 tricks in a spade contract without them. Similarly, North’s ♦K, ♦Q and ♦J are wasted opposite South’s singleton diamond. Declarer could take 11 tricks in spades holding three low diamonds by ruffing two of the losing diamonds in the dummy.

“Change the North hand, giving North 2 fewer points.

“In diamonds: take away the king, the queen and the jack; add the ace and two low cards.

NORTH ♠ A J 10 x x x ♥ x ♦ A x x ♣ Q x x	<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="width: 20%;">WEST</th> <th style="width: 20%;">NORTH</th> <th style="width: 20%;">EAST</th> <th style="width: 20%;">SOUTH</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td></td> <td>1 ♠</td> <td>Pass</td> <td>4NT</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Pass</td> <td>5 ♥</td> <td>Pass</td> <td>6 ♠</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Pass</td> <td>Pass</td> <td>Pass</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH		1 ♠	Pass	4NT	Pass	5 ♥	Pass	6 ♠	Pass	Pass	Pass		SOUTH ♠ K Q x x ♥ K Q J x x ♦ x ♣ A K J
WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH															
	1 ♠	Pass	4NT															
Pass	5 ♥	Pass	6 ♠															
Pass	Pass	Pass																

“What would North open? (1♠.) Although North has 2 fewer high-card points, North would still open 1♠. There are 11 high-card points plus 2 length points for the six-card suit.

“How would North–South fare in a slam contract if these are the combined hands? (Make 6♠.) Declarer would only have to lose the ♥A. The two diamond losers could be ruffed in dummy or discarded on dummy’s extra heart winners.

“The difference between these hands and the previous hands is the controls held by North and South. A control is a holding that prevents the opponents from taking too many tricks in a suit.

- An ace is a first-round control, since it prevents the opponents from taking the first trick in a suit.
- A king is a second-round control, since it prevents the opponents from taking the first two tricks in a suit — or at least gives you a chance of stopping the opponents from taking the first two tricks in a suit.

- In a trump contract, a void acts like an ace, since it gives you first round control of the suit — and often more control than that. A singleton acts like a second-round control, since it prevents the opponents from taking the first two tricks in a suit.

“When you bid a slam, you would like to make sure your side has a sufficient number of controls to prevent the slam from being defeated right off the top, before you have an opportunity to do something about your losers.

- In a small slam, you need first-round controls in three suits and at least second-round control in the fourth suit.
- In a grand slam, you need first-round control in all four suits.

“Having enough controls to bid a slam doesn’t guarantee that you will make the slam. It only means that you will have a reasonable chance. You still may have work to do — losers to eliminate and finesses to take — but at least the opponents can’t defeat you right away by taking their winners. The first two ingredients for slam bidding — enough combined strength and a suitable strain — should help ensure you have a play for slam once you gain the lead.

“How do you find out whether you have enough controls to bid a slam? This is where the Blackwood convention comes into play. Easley Blackwood popularized the concept that when a partnership feels there is enough combined strength for slam and a trump suit has been agreed upon, a bid of 4NT asks how many aces partner holds. Partner responds as follows:

- 5♣ shows zero aces or all four aces
- 5♦ shows one ace
- 5♥ shows two aces
- 5♠ shows three aces

“The reason that 5♣ doubles up to show either zero or four aces is to leave 5NT available to ask for kings. The 4NT bidder should be able to determine whether partner holds no aces or all four aces since there is a 16-point difference.

“If the partnership holds all of the aces and you are interested in a grand slam, a bid of 5NT asks how many kings partner holds:

- 6♣ shows no kings
- 6♦ shows one king
- 6♥ shows two kings
- 6♠ shows three kings
- 6NT shows four kings (there’s no need to reserve this bid to ask about queens!)

“Let’s see how the Blackwood convention would help.

“After North opens 1♠, what call does South make? (4NT.) An immediate jump to 4NT over an opening suit bid is the Blackwood convention. By inference, it implies agreement with opener’s suit as the trump suit, since responder hasn’t bothered to investigate other possibilities.

“What response does North make to the 4NT bid? (5♥.) A response of 5♥ shows two aces.

“What call does South make after hearing the 5♥ response? (6♠.) Now South has all of the information necessary to bid 6♠. South knows the partnership has enough combined strength to belong in the slam zone. South knows the partnership has a suitable trump fit in spades. Finally, South knows the partnership is missing only one ace. Whichever ace it is — the ♠A, the ♥A or the ♦A — the defenders won’t be able to take more than one trick before declarer gains control.

“Change the North hand back to the previous example.

“In diamonds: take away the ace and two low cards, and add the king, the queen and the jack.

NORTH		WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH		SOUTH
♠ A J 10 x x x			1♠	Pass	4NT		♠ K Q x x
♥ x		Pass	5♦	Pass	5♠		♥ K Q J x x
♦ K Q J		Pass	Pass	Pass			♦ x
♣ Q x x							♣ A K J

“North opens the bidding 1♠, and South again jumps to 4NT. What response does North make? (5♦.) With one ace, North responds 5♦.

“What call does South make after hearing North’s response? (5♠.) Knowing the partnership is missing two aces, South signs off by returning to the agreed trump suit at the five level, 5♠.”

Summary

“The Blackwood convention is designed to help the partnership discover whether it is missing too many controls — aces or kings — to bid a slam. It is not a convention to get you to good slams. The first two ingredients — combined strength and a suitable trump fit — are more important in that aspect. Instead, it is a convention to keep you out of bad slams, when you have the first two ingredients but are missing the third ingredient.”

➡ “Let’s do Exercise 1 in the student text to review what we have just discussed.”

Exercise One — Responding to Blackwood

What call does East make with each of the following hands after the auction goes as shown?

1)	WEST 1♥ 4NT	NORTH Pass Pass	EAST 3♥ ?	SOUTH Pass	♠ K 8 3 ♥ A J 10 5 ♦ Q 10 7 4 ♣ J 8
2)	WEST 4NT	NORTH Pass Pass	EAST 1NT ?	SOUTH Pass	♠ A Q J 5 ♥ K 10 7 ♦ A 10 9 ♣ K 6 3
3)	WEST 1♠ 4NT 5NT	NORTH Pass Pass Pass	EAST 1♦ 2♠ 5♦ ?	SOUTH Pass Pass Pass	♠ A 9 6 3 ♥ K 7 5 ♦ K Q 10 3 ♣ J 2
4)	WEST 1♦ 3♠ 5♦	NORTH Pass Pass Pass	EAST 1♠ 4NT ?	SOUTH Pass Pass	♠ K Q 9 8 4 ♥ 3 ♦ K 4 ♣ A K J 8 2
5)	WEST 1♠ 3♦ 5♦	NORTH Pass Pass Pass	EAST 2♦ 4NT ?	SOUTH Pass Pass	♠ 4 ♥ A K 10 ♦ K J 9 8 7 3 ♣ A K 3

Exercise One Answer — Responding to Blackwood

- 1) 5♦. This response shows one ace.
- 2) 6NT. West's 4NT bid is quantitative (invitational). With a maximum for the 1NT opening bid, East accepts West's invitational raise.
- 3) 6♥. After East shows the number of aces in response to 4NT, West asks for the number of kings. The 6♥ response shows two kings.
- 4) 5♠. Two aces are missing, so East signs off at the five level in the agreed trump suit.
- 5) 6♦. Only one ace is missing, so East bids slam in the agreed trump suit.

Blackwood and Voids

Introduction

“The basic mechanics of the Blackwood convention are quite straightforward, but sometimes situations arise that require more partnership agreements.”

Instructions

“Pick up both the North and South hands and sort the cards back into suits. Construct the following hand in front of North.

“In spades: the queen and three low cards.

“In hearts: the queen, the jack and two low cards.

“In diamonds: the ace, the queen, the jack and two low cards.

NORTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
♠ Q x x x		1♦	Pass	1♥
♥ Q J x x	Pass	3♥	Pass	4NT
♦ A Q J x x	Pass	?		
♣ —				

“**What does North open?** (1♦.) With 12 high-card points plus 1 for the five-card suit, you have enough to open the bidding 1♦.

“**East passes, South responds 1♥ and West passes. What call does North make now?** (3♥.) With four-card support for South’s suit, you can revalue the hand using dummy points. That gives you 12 high-card points plus 5 points for the club void — 17 points, a medium-strength hand. That’s enough to make a jump raise to 3♥.

“**East passes, and South jumps to 4NT, the Blackwood convention. Should North count the void as a second ace when responding?** (No.) Although a void serves the same purpose as an ace in a trump contract, as a first-round control, don’t count it as an ace when responding to Blackwood.

“To see why, leave the North hand as it is and construct a hand in front of South.

“In spades: a low card.

“In hearts: the ace, the king and three low cards.

“In diamonds: the king and a low card.

“In clubs: the ace, the king, the jack and two low cards.

NORTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	SOUTH
♠ Q x x x		1♦	Pass	1♥	♠ x
♥ Q J x x	Pass	3♥	Pass	4NT	♥ A K x x x
♦ A Q J x x	Pass	5♦/6♣	Pass	6♥	♦ K x
♣ —	Pass	Pass	Pass		♣ A K J x x

“Put yourself in the South position. North opens 1♦, you respond 1♥ and North jumps to 3♥. Since you have the first two ingredients for slam, you jump to 4NT, the Blackwood convention, to check for aces.

“If North responds 5♥, treating the club void as a second ace, what might South be tempted to do? (Bid 7♥.) From your perspective, the partnership holds all of the aces. You might be tempted to bid a grand slam. This would not be a great success!

“Counting a void as an ace when responding to Blackwood doesn’t work well. You need to have an agreement with your partner before showing a void when responding to Blackwood. We’ll look at one possible agreement, although it might be a good decision to simply ignore voids completely. The partnership can decide how much complexity it wants. One possible agreement is the following:

- With no aces, respond 5♣ — don’t show the void.
- With one ace and a void:
 - Jump to the six level in the void suit if it is lower ranking than the trump suit.
 - Jump to the six level in the trump suit if the void is higher ranking than the trump suit.
- With two aces and a void, bid 5NT.

“Some partnerships have other agreements, such as showing the number of aces at the six level with a void. The partnership needs to agree on the specific method used. If the partnership has this agreement, let’s see how it would be used on these hands.

“What would be North’s opening bid? (1♦.)

“What would South respond? (1♥.)

“What would be North’s rebid? (3♥.)

“What would be South’s next call? (4NT.)

“What would North respond to the Blackwood convention? (6♣.) With one ace and a void in a lower-ranking suit than the trump suit, North jumps to the six level in the void suit, clubs.

“Based on this information, what call would South make? (6♥.) South knows that the partnership is missing an ace, either the ♠A or ♦A, so South settles for a small slam in hearts. North’s club void will not be useful.

“You can see why it might not be a good idea to use methods where North–South would get to the six level when North has no aces and a void — the partnership would be overboard with no way to back out. With no aces and a void, you usually can’t afford to show the void in response to Blackwood. You would have to have other methods to show the void earlier in the auction. We’ll be discussing this in the next lesson.

“Even with one ace and a void, there is some danger in jumping to the six level. You should only show a useful, or potentially useful, void. North doesn’t know that South has the ♣A and ♣K, so the club void is potentially useful. If the auction had gone differently, with South showing values in the club suit, North should probably ignore the club void, since it isn’t likely to be useful — the partnership will have wasted values in the club suit.

“Change the North hand.

“In spades: take away all of the cards.

“In clubs: add the queen and three low cards.

NORTH	<table style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">WEST</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">NORTH</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">EAST</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">SOUTH</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">♠ —</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">1♦</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">Pass</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">1♥</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">♥ Q J x x</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">Pass 3♥</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">Pass</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">4NT</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">♦ A Q J x x</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">Pass 6♥</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">Pass</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">7♥</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">♣ Q x x x</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">Pass</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">Pass</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	♠ —	1♦	Pass	1♥	♥ Q J x x	Pass 3♥	Pass	4NT	♦ A Q J x x	Pass 6♥	Pass	7♥	♣ Q x x x	Pass	Pass		SOUTH
WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH																			
♠ —	1♦	Pass	1♥																			
♥ Q J x x	Pass 3♥	Pass	4NT																			
♦ A Q J x x	Pass 6♥	Pass	7♥																			
♣ Q x x x	Pass	Pass																				
			♠ x																			
			♥ A K x x x																			
			♦ K x																			
			♣ A K J x x																			

“**What would North open?** (1♦.) With 12 high-card points plus 1 length point for the five-card suit, North would still open 1♦.

“**What would South respond?** (1♥.) South’s initial response is unchanged.

“**What would North rebid?** (3♥.) North can count 5 dummy points for the spade void. Combined with the 12 high-card points, this is enough to give a jump raise to 3♥.

“**What would South bid next?** (4NT.) Opposite North’s jump raise, South is interested in slam and uses the Blackwood convention to check that the partnership isn’t missing two aces.

“**What is North’s response to Blackwood?** (6♥.) With one ace and a higher-ranking void than the trump suit, North jumps to slam in the agreed trump suit, 6♥.

“**Why doesn’t North simply jump to slam in the void suit?** (May be too high.) When the void is in a higher-ranking suit than the trump suit, it would be illogical to jump to the six level in the void suit. The partnership could not stop at the six level in the agreed trump suit.

“While there is the possibility of some ambiguity when using this method of responses, the Blackwood bidder will usually be able to determine the void suit based on the earlier auction. On this auction, it is clear that North’s void is in the spade suit, since that is the only higher-ranking suit than hearts.

“**Based on this information, what call does South make?** (7♥.) From North’s jump to 6♥, South knows North holds one ace — which must be the ♦A — and a void in spades. That’s enough information to make 7♥ a reasonable gamble. South should bid the grand slam.”

Some of the students may be worried about a heart loser or a club loser in 7♥. That is a real possibility, but a loser in either suit is unlikely. Since North has no high cards in spades, it's hard to imagine a hand for North that would have enough for a jump to 3♥ without both the ♥Q and the ♣Q. Even if the ♥Q is missing, the partnership will have a nine-card heart fit, so the grand slam will at least have a reasonable chance of making. If the ♣Q is missing, South may be able to ruff the losing clubs in dummy, if North has only a doubleton, or discard the losing clubs on extra diamond winners. At worst, the grand slam might depend on a finesse, a reasonable gamble. Without very sophisticated methods, it would be impossible to get any better guarantee of a grand slam contract. On the actual combined hands, the grand slam is very secure — only an unlikely club ruff on the opening lead would defeat it.

“Would you bid the grand slam with the South hand? If you wouldn't — perhaps because you are worried that there has been some misunderstanding and partner's jump to 6♥ means something else — then you probably should be ignoring this added complication for voids. Ignore your voids when responding to Blackwood and you'll be fine on most deals. It takes a firm partnership agreement and lots of faith in partner to use such methods, and they don't come up that often. Another consideration to weigh is whether you want to invest the extra memory work for such infrequent situations. It might be more appropriate to keep it simple.”

Summary

“When partner bids Blackwood and you hold a void, don't treat it as an ace. Either ignore the void completely or, if you have discussed such responses with partner, use your agreed methods. The agreement suggested here is:

- With no aces, respond 5♣ — don't show the void.
- With one ace and a void:
 - Jump to the six level in the void suit if it is lower ranking than the trump suit.
 - Jump to the six level in the trump suit if the void suit is higher ranking than the trump suit.
- With two aces and a void, bid 5NT.

“This convention isn't a good idea unless you're playing in a regular partnership.”

➡ “Let's do Exercise 2 in the student text to review what we have just discussed.”

Exercise Two — Blackwood and Voids

What call does East make with each of the following hands after the auction goes as shown?

1)	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	♠ K 10 7 4 ♥ K J 8 5 ♦ — ♣ A K J 8 3
	1♥ 4NT	Pass Pass Pass	1♣ 4♥ ?	Pass Pass Pass	
2)	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	♠ — ♥ A J 9 6 ♦ K Q 9 4 3 ♣ K Q 8 6
	1♥ 4NT	1♦ Pass Pass	Pass 4♥ ?	Pass Pass Pass	
3)	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	♠ A 7 6 3 ♥ Q 10 8 7 2 ♦ 10 9 7 3 ♣ —
	1♣ 1♠ 4NT	Pass Pass Pass	1♥ 3♠ ?	Pass Pass Pass	
4)	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	♠ K 10 2 ♥ A K J 8 7 5 ♦ A ♣ K Q 6
	1♦ 3♥ 6♥	Pass Pass Pass	1♥ 4NT ?	Pass Pass Pass	
5)	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	♠ A 10 7 4 ♥ Q J 8 3 ♦ — ♣ A Q J 7 4
	1♥ 4NT	4♦ Pass	1♣ 4♥ ?	1♦ Pass	

Exercise Two Answer — Blackwood and Voids

- 6♦. The jump to 6♦ shows exactly one ace and a diamond void.
- 6♥. The jump to the six level in the agreed trump suit shows one ace and a higher-ranking void. In this situation, West will know the void is in spades.
- 5♦. Simply show one ace. The club void isn't likely to be useful, since clubs is one of West's suits.
- 7♥. West's response has shown one ace and a higher-ranking void. West must hold the ♣A and a void in spades. There shouldn't be any losers in a 7♥ contract, since the spade losers can be ruffed in the dummy.
- 5NT. This response shows two aces and a void. That may be enough for West to go for a grand slam.

Stopping in 5NT

Introduction

“When you use 4NT as the Blackwood convention to ask for the number of aces, a continuation of 5NT is used to ask for the number of kings. The 5NT bid is used only when the partnership holds all of the aces and a grand slam is a possibility. Sounds straightforward enough, but you may have to be careful when the agreed trump suit is clubs or diamonds.”

Instructions

“Pick up both the North and South hands and sort the cards back into suits. Construct the following hand in front of North.

“In spades: the king and a low card.

“In hearts: the king, the queen and a low card.

“In diamonds: the king and the queen.

“In clubs: the ace, the queen, the ten and three low cards.

NORTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
♠ K x		1 ♣	Pass	3 ♣
♥ K Q x	Pass	4NT	Pass	5 ♦
♦ K Q	Pass	5 ♥	Pass	5NT
♣ A Q 10 x x x	Pass	Pass	Pass	

“**What would North open?** (1 ♣/2NT.) With 19 high-card points plus 2 points for the six-card club suit, the hand isn’t quite strong enough for an opening bid of 2 ♣. You might open 2NT, although the hand isn’t quite balanced because there are two doubletons. 1 ♣ would be a reasonable opening bid.

“**Suppose North opens 1 ♣, East passes and South makes a limit raise to 3 ♣. West passes. What call does North make?** (4NT.) North might settle for 3NT or 5 ♣, but slam looks like a reasonable proposition. It’s difficult to imagine a hand for South’s limit raise that doesn’t have at least one ace and, if South holds two aces, slam can’t be any worse than a finesse. North can check for aces by bidding Blackwood.

“**Suppose North bids 4NT and South responds 5 ♥. What call does North make?** (6 ♣.) Since partner holds two aces, 6 ♣ should be a good spot. The partnership is missing one ace.

“**Now, suppose North bids 4NT and South responds 5 ♦. What call does North make?** (5 ♥.) The 5 ♦ response reveals that two aces are missing. North can’t bid 6 ♣, since that contract is unlikely to have any chance. Unfortunately, it’s no longer possible to sign off in 5 ♣. The only possible resting spot at this point is 5NT. There should be a play for 11 tricks in a notrump contract if all the partnership is missing is two aces.

“**Can North bid 5NT?** (No.) If North bids 5NT, that would be a continuation of the Blackwood convention, asking South to show the number of kings held. That would get the partnership into even more trouble.

“The standard agreement in this situation is that the bid of the cheapest suit at the five level that could not possibly be meant as a trump suit asks partner to bid 5NT. Then you can pass. Let’s go over the complete auction.

“**North opens the bidding 1♣, and South raises to 3♣. North bids 4NT, and South responds 5♦. What call does North make?** (5♥.) A bid of 5♥ by North can’t be a suggestion to play with hearts as a trump suit. The partnership has already found a club fit. Instead, it is a request for South to bid 5NT.

“**What call does South make?** (5NT.) As requested, South bids 5NT.

“**What call does North make?** (Pass.) North can now pass 5NT and hope for the best.”

Summary

“When you bid 4NT as the Blackwood convention, you can’t rebid 5NT as a signoff. To stop in 5NT, you have to bid a suit at the five level that can’t be a suggested trump suit. This asks partner to bid 5NT, and you can now pass.

“When a minor suit has been agreed upon as the trump suit, think twice before launching into the Blackwood convention. Make sure you are prepared for any response partner might make. You don’t want to get beyond the agreed trump suit and find you have nowhere to go.”

Handling Interference over Blackwood

Introduction

“When your side is looking for slam, it’s unlikely the opponents will be in the auction, since they won’t hold very many points. Nonetheless, with very distributional hands, it’s possible that the opponents may compete, both to interfere with your auction and, perhaps, to find a profitable sacrifice. When the opponents interfere with your Blackwood auction, it’s a good idea to have some agreements to handle the situation.”

Instructions

“Change the North hand.

“In spades: add a low card.

“In hearts: add a low card.

“In diamonds: take away the king and the queen; add two low cards.

“In clubs: take away two low cards.

NORTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
♠ K x x		1 ♣	Pass	1 ♥
♥ K Q x x	2 ♦	2 ♥	4 ♦	4NT
♦ x x	5 ♦	?		
♣ A Q 10 x				

“**What would North open?** (1 ♣.) With a balanced hand too weak to open 1NT, North would open 1 ♣.

“**East passes, and South responds 1 ♥. West overcalls 2 ♦. What call does North make?** (2 ♥.) West’s overcall doesn’t prevent North from making the intended response, 2 ♥, showing heart support and a minimum opening bid.

“**East makes a jump raise to 4 ♦, and South bids 4NT. What does North intend to respond to South’s 4NT bid?** (5 ♦.) South’s 4NT is Blackwood, and a response of 5 ♦ would show one ace.

“**Before North has an opportunity to bid 5 ♦, West bids 5 ♦. Now what does North do?** West has taken away your response. With no agreement, you could pass, leaving the next decision to South, or you could make a penalty double of 5 ♦. However, that won’t give South the information needed to determine whether or not to bid slam.

“It is a good idea for the partnership to have some agreement about the meaning of calls when the opponents interfere over Blackwood. A common conventional agreement is to play DOPI when the opponents interfere at the five level:

- Double shows **O** (zero) aces.
- Pass shows **I** (one) ace.
- The next available bid (step) shows two aces; the next available bid (step) shows three aces; and so on.

“Using **DOPI**, what would North’s call be over West’s **5♦** bid? (Pass.) Pass would show one ace.

“**Suppose North passes, East passes and South doubles. Now what call does North make?** (Pass.) South is the captain after using Blackwood. North’s response has told partner how many aces the partnership holds. It’s now up to South to decide what to do. South knows how many combined aces the partnership holds; North does not. North should respect South’s decision. South may be doubling because the partnership is missing three aces. Or the partnership may be missing two aces and South has decided that the penalty for defeating **5♦** will be better than bidding **5♥**. Similarly, if South decides to bid **5♥** or **6♥**, North should pass, accepting South’s decision.

“Change the North hand.

“In clubs: take away the ace and add the king.

NORTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
♠ K x x		1♣	Pass	1♥
♥ K Q x x	2♦	2♥	4♦	4NT
♦ x x	5♦	Double		
♣ K Q 10 x				

“**What would North open?** (1♣.) With 13 high-card points, North would open 1♣.

“**East passes, South responds 1♥ and West overcalls 2♦. What is North’s rebid?** (2♥.)

“**East jumps to 4♦, South bids 4NT and West bids 5♦. What call does North make?** (Double.) Double shows zero aces. Now it will be up to South to decide on the best North–South contract.

“Change the North hand.

“In hearts: take away the king and add the ace.

“In clubs: take away the king and the queen and add the ace and a low card.

NORTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
♠ K x x		1♣	Pass	1♥
♥ A Q x x	2♦	2♥	4♦	4NT
♦ x x	5♦	5♥		
♣ A 10 x x				

“What would North open? (1 ♣.) With 13 high-card points, North would open 1 ♣.

“East passes, South responds 1 ♥ and West overcalls 2 ♦. What is North’s rebid? (2 ♥.)

“East jumps to 4 ♦, South bids 4NT and West bids 5 ♦. What call does North make? (5 ♥.) Double would show no aces; pass would show one ace; the next available step, 5 ♥, shows two aces. After this response, South can set the contract.”

With a more advanced group, you could discuss what to do if West doubled 4NT instead of bidding 5 ♦. Without discussion, the partnership could simply ignore the double. However, many partnerships play ROPI — redouble shows zero aces; pass shows one ace; the next available step, 5 ♣, shows two aces. Under that agreement, North would bid 5 ♣ if West doubled.

“If the opponents’ interference leaves you no room to stop safely at the five level, the conventional agreement is to switch from DOPI to DEPO:

- Double shows an **Even** number of aces — zero, two or four.
- Pass shows an **Odd** number of aces — one or three.

“There is some ambiguity in this arrangement, but you don’t have much room left without committing the partnership to the slam level. Partner will usually be able to figure out which number of aces you have, since there is an 8-point difference between one ace and three aces.

“Let’s see how we might put this agreement to work with this hand.

“North opens 1 ♣. South responds 1 ♥ and West overcalls 2 ♦. North bids 2 ♥, East jumps to 4 ♦ and South bids 4NT. West now jumps to 6 ♦. What call does North make? (Double.) With two aces, you would double, showing an even number. Hopefully, South will be able to tell from your earlier bidding that you have two aces rather than zero. South will know you can’t have four aces, because you wouldn’t have shown a minimum opening bid by raising to only 2 ♥ when holding four aces.

“Now it will be up to South to decide whether to bid a small slam, a grand slam or simply pass and defend for penalties.”

Summary

“It is useful to have an agreement about what to do when the opponents interfere over partner’s 4NT bid. A common agreement is to use DOPI and DEPO. If you don’t have this agreement, double is simply for penalty and other bids are natural — not the standard responses to Blackwood. It’s a good idea to discuss this with partner before it happens at the table. It won’t come up that often, but when it does, it may be worth a lot of points to be on firm ground about your agreements.”

When Is 4NT Blackwood?

Introduction

“A bid of 4NT is not always the Blackwood convention. It’s important for the partnership to agree on when 4NT is a conventional bid asking for aces and when it has some other meaning. The general agreement is that 4NT is only Blackwood if the partnership has clearly agreed upon a trump suit — either directly or by inference.”

Instructions

“Change the North hand.

“In spades: take away the king.

“In diamonds: add the king.

NORTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
♠ x x		1 ♣	Pass	1 ♥
♥ A Q x x	Pass	2 ♥	Pass	4NT
♦ K x x	Pass	?		
♣ A 10 x x				

“What would North open? (1 ♣.)

“Assume the opponents are silent and South responds 1 ♥. What would be North’s rebid? (2 ♥.)

“South now jumps to 4NT. What call does North make? (5 ♥.) South’s 4NT bid is clearly Blackwood, since you have agreed on hearts as the trump suit. You would respond 5 ♥, showing two aces.

“Suppose North opens the bidding 1 ♣ and South responds 1 ♦. What would be North’s rebid? (1 ♥.) You would continue bidding suits up the line, looking for a fit.

“South now jumps to 4NT. What is North’s call? (5 ♥.) The standard agreement is that South’s 4NT bid is Blackwood. Hearts is the agreed trump suit by inference.

“If North opens 1 ♣ and South jumps to 4NT right away, that would be the Blackwood convention. Presumably, South has a big fit with clubs and needs to know how many aces you have in order to decide on slam. South might have something else in mind, such as bidding slam in notrump after hearing how many aces you hold, but you must assume for now that the agreed trump suit is clubs. South has taken over captaincy by using Blackwood, and your responses are dictated by the convention.

“Suppose South opens the bidding 1 ♥. What response does North make? (2 ♣/2NT.) Your response will depend on the methods you are using to show a game-forcing raise in hearts. If you aren’t using a conventional raise, you might respond 2 ♣, planning to show the heart support next. If you are using the Jacoby 2NT, then you would jump to 2NT to show a forcing raise in hearts.

“Suppose North uses the Jacoby 2NT in response to South’s 1♥ bid and South now bids 4NT. What is North’s call? (5♥.) South’s bid is Blackwood, since your artificial 2NT bid confirmed hearts as the trump suit. You would show your two aces by bidding 5♥.

“Now suppose North opens the bidding 1♣ and South responds 1♠. What’s North rebid? (1NT.) With a minimum balanced hand, you would rebid 1NT.

“Over North’s 1NT rebid, South jumps to 4NT. What call does North make? (Pass.) In this situation, no trump suit has been agreed upon. South’s 4NT bid is a natural, invitational bid, showing a hand too strong to stop in 3NT, but not quite strong enough to bid slam. It’s similar to the direct raise of 1NT to 4NT. With a minimum-strength hand of 13 points, you should probably decline the invitation by passing.

“If South wants to find out about aces after this start, South would first have to set the trump suit. With a slam-going hand and a strong spade suit, South should first jump shift to 2♠. South can then rebid the spades to set the trump suit and later bid 4NT, which would clearly be Blackwood. With a slam-going hand with spades and clubs, South might start with a jump shift in spades and then show club support. After that, 4NT would clearly be Blackwood with clubs as the agreed trump suit.”

With a more experienced group, you could discuss how South might set clubs as the trump suit after responding only 1♠. Over North’s 1NT rebid, South might have to make a forcing bid, such as 3♦ or 3♥, then show the club support and then bid 4NT as Blackwood. Alternatively, if the partnership uses a method such as new-minor forcing over opener’s 1NT rebid, South can agree on clubs by first bidding 2♦ and then bidding clubs. Setting the trump suit before bidding Blackwood can sometimes be quite complicated.

“Suppose East opens the bidding 4♠, South overcalls 4NT and West passes. What call does North make? (5♣/6♣.) In this sequence, most partnerships would treat South’s 4NT as the unusual notrump, showing a two-suited hand, likely with both minors. North should be picking a minor suit, not showing the number of aces held. Actually, since partner is willing to compete to the five level over East’s preemptive 4♠ opening, North should probably be bidding slam in a minor, 6♣, with this much strength — or making an even stronger bid in search of a grand slam.”

Summary

“When it’s unclear whether 4NT is Blackwood, there can be uneasiness among the players at the table. One partner will often take a long time to make a call, and everyone will know it’s one of those ‘Is it or isn’t it?’ situations. To avoid this, make your decision in a reasonable tempo. If in doubt, treat 4NT as Blackwood and hope for the best.

“Some partnerships prefer to play that 4NT is always Blackwood. That’s technically incorrect but may put the partnership more at ease.”

➔ “Let’s do Exercise 3 in the student text to review what we have just discussed.”

Exercise Three — Using Blackwood

What call does East make with each of the following hands after the auction goes as shown?

1)	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	♠ 3 2 ♥ K Q 9 8 5 ♦ A Q ♣ Q 10 7 6
	2♣	Pass	1♥	Pass	
	4NT	Pass	3♣	Pass	
	5♠	Pass	5♦	Pass	
			?		
2)	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	♠ J 8 3 ♥ K J 8 3 ♦ 9 4 ♣ A Q 8 3
	1♥	Pass	3♥	4♦	
	4NT	5♦	?		
3)	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	♠ A 9 ♥ A K Q 9 6 3 ♦ K Q J 3 ♣ A
	2♦	Pass	2♣	Pass	
	3♥	Pass	2♥	Pass	
	5♦	Pass	4NT	Pass	
			?		
4)	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	♠ K Q 10 8 7 3 ♥ 6 ♦ A K J 4 ♣ K 9
	1♣	1♥	1♠	4♥	
	4♠	Pass	4NT	5♥	
	5♠	Pass	?		
5)	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	♠ K 4 ♥ K 3 ♦ K 6 ♣ A K J 10 9 7 4
	1♥	Pass	3♣	Pass	
	4♣	Pass	4NT	Pass	
	5♦	Pass	?		

Exercise Three Answer – Using Blackwood

- 1) 5NT. West's 5♠ bid can't be a suggestion to play with that suit as trump. It is a request for East to bid 5NT. West can then pass to allow the partnership to play in 5NT.
- 2) Pass. When the opponents interfere over Blackwood, pass shows one ace when playing DOPI.
- 3) 5NT. The partnership has all of the aces, so a grand slam is possible. East bids 5NT to ask about the number of kings West holds. If West holds one king, East should be able to take 13 tricks; if not, East will settle for a small slam.
- 4) 6♠. Playing DOPI, West's 5♠ bid shows two aces. Pass would show none; double would show one; the first available step would show two.
- 5) 5♠. The partnership is missing two aces, and it's too late to stop in 5♣. East bids 5♠, a suit that can't be a possible trump suit in light of the previous auction. This asks West to bid 5NT, which East will pass.

The Gerber Convention

Introduction

“4NT is the Blackwood convention after a trump suit has been agreed upon. A jump to 4NT is not Blackwood when there is no agreement on trump. When there is no suit agreement, however, you still may need to know how many aces and kings partner holds before bidding a slam. This requires another convention.”

Instructions

“Change the North hand.

“In spades: take away a low card.

“In hearts: take away the queen.

“In diamonds: add the queen, the jack and two low cards.

“In clubs: take away the ten and a low card.

NORTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
♠ x				1NT
♥ A x x	Pass	?		
♦ K Q J x x x x				
♣ A x				

“**Suppose South opens the bidding 1NT. Does the partnership have enough combined strength for the slam zone?** (Yes.) North has 14 high-card points plus 3 points for length in diamonds. The partnership has a combined total of 32 to 34 points, putting it in the slam zone.

“**Does North have a suitable trump fit?** (Yes.) South has at least two diamonds, so you have a nine-card or longer diamond fit.

“**What is the only thing holding North back from simply jumping to 6♦?** (Controls.) You could be missing two aces, so you should check for controls before bidding slam.

“**Would a jump to 4NT be Blackwood?** (No.) A jump to 4NT would be a quantitative, invitational, raise, asking South to bid slam with a maximum or pass with a minimum.

“One possibility would be to first agree on diamonds as the trump suit. That would be easy if a jump to 3♦ is forcing in the partnership methods. If South raises, you could bid 4NT, and South would play that as Blackwood. If South bids 3NT over 3♦, the situation becomes a little murkier. If you then bid 4NT, South might take that as a quantitative raise and pass with a minimum hand. You could try rebidding 4♦ to confirm that you want to play in diamonds, but if South were to raise to 5♦, you would no longer be able to bid Blackwood.

“Many partnerships don’t play a jump to 3♦ as a forcing bid. They might play it as an invitational bid with a six-card diamond suit, for example. This

may make it difficult, or impossible, to agree on diamonds as a trump suit before bidding 4NT.

“To simplify matters, John Gerber of Houston, Texas suggested using a jump to 4♣ to ask for aces when partner has opened the bidding 1NT or 2NT. This agreement is appropriately named the Gerber convention.

“In response to 4♣, partner bids as follows:

- 4♦ shows zero aces or all four aces.
- 4♥ shows one ace.
- 4♠ shows two aces.
- 4NT shows three aces.

“The responses follow the same pattern as the Blackwood convention, with the cheapest step showing no aces or all four aces, the next step showing one ace and so forth. Following the same reasoning as the Blackwood convention, the response of 4♦ doubles up to show either zero or four aces in order to leave 5♣ available to ask for kings. Presumably, the 4♣ bidder can determine whether partner holds no aces or all four aces since there is a 16-point difference.

“After hearing partner’s response to the 4♣ bid, any bid except 5♣ is a sign-off bid. If the partnership holds all of the aces and there is interest in a grand slam, a bid of 5♣ asks how many kings partner holds:

- 5♦ shows no kings.
- 5♥ shows one king.
- 5♠ shows two kings.
- 5NT shows three kings.
- 6♣ shows four kings.

“Let’s see how the Gerber convention would work on this hand.

“South opens the bidding 1NT. What response does North make? (4♣.)

A jump to 4♣ is the Gerber convention, asking about the number of aces South holds.

“Suppose South responds 4♦. What call does North make now? (5♦ / 4NT.) The 4♦ response shows no aces. That means that the partnership is missing two aces. You would now bid 5♦. 5♦ is a sign-off bid and South is expected to pass.

“If you are playing matchpoint duplicate, you might bid 4NT instead of 5♦. 4NT would be a sign-off bid, not Blackwood, since you have already asked about the number of aces. 4NT might look a little risky when you have such an unbalanced hand, but since you know you were thinking of playing at the slam level, the partnership should have enough combined strength to take at least 10 tricks in notrump. It’s unlikely that you are missing much other than the two aces.

“It’s important to know that 4NT is a sign-off bid after using the Gerber convention. If the agreed suit were clubs instead of diamonds, you could not

bid 5♣ as a sign-off bid. 5♣ would ask about the number of kings. When the agreed suit is clubs, you must prepare to play in 4NT if the partnership is missing two aces. It's similar to the situation when you need to stop in 5NT after using the Blackwood convention.

“Suppose South opens 1NT, North responds 4♣ and South bids 4♥. Now what call does North make? (6♦.) South's 4♥ response shows one ace, so the partnership is missing only one ace. Whether South holds the ♦A or the ♠A, slam should be a reasonable proposition, so you can jump to 6♦.

“Suppose South opens 1NT, North responds 4♣ and South bids 4♠. Now what call does North make? (5♣.) South's 4♠ bid shows two aces, so the partnership has all four aces. You might still settle for 6♦, but if South has enough kings, you might be able to make a grand slam. It can't hurt to bid 5♣.

“Suppose North bids 5♣ and South responds 5♦. Now what call does North make? (6♦/Pass.) If South has no kings, you might be worried about making slam. You could pass and settle for game in 5♦. Even if South has no kings, however, there should be a reasonable play for slam. South must have almost all of the missing queens and jacks to have enough to open 1NT! It would be timid not to bid 6♦.

“Suppose North bids 5♣ and South responds 5♥. Now what call does North make? (6♦.) If partner has two aces and one king, 6♦ should definitely be a reasonable contract.

“Suppose North bids 5♣ and South responds 5♠. Now what call does North make? (6NT/6♦.) If partner has two aces and two kings, 6♦ is virtually guaranteed. In fact, you should have 12 top winners. 6NT is safer than 6♦, and the score is worth more.”

If the students have difficulty seeing that there will be 12 winners, have them construct a hand for South with two aces and two kings — any two of the three kings — and count the tricks.

“Suppose North bids 5♣ and South responds 5NT. Now what call does North make? (7NT/7♦.) South shows three kings. Now you can count 13 top tricks. You might as well bid 7NT rather than 7♦. That way, there's no possibility the opponents can get a surprise ruff in a suit, and you'll also get the top score available.

“Incidentally, if South does bid 5NT, you know every single high card in partner's hand — the ♠A K, the ♥K, the ♦A and the ♣K. Partner can't have any queens or jacks, since partner has already shown 17 high-card points!”

Summary

“Gerber is not an alternative to Blackwood; it is used in concert with Blackwood. You use the Blackwood convention when a trump suit has been agreed upon. Use the Gerber convention directly over a natural notrump bid by partner. In some situations Blackwood applies; in others, Gerber applies. Either Blackwood or Gerber will be appropriate on a given hand, not both.”

When Is 4♣ Gerber?

Introduction

“It’s a good idea to have a clear partnership agreement about when 4♣ is Gerber. The usual agreement is:

- If partner’s last bid was a natural 1NT or 2NT, then a jump to 4♣ is Gerber.”

Instructions

“Change the North hand.

“In spades: add the ace.

“In hearts: add the queen.

“In diamonds: take away the queen and two low cards.

“In clubs: add the queen.

NORTH	<table style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 100%;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="padding: 2px 10px;">WEST</th> <th style="padding: 2px 10px;">NORTH</th> <th style="padding: 2px 10px;">EAST</th> <th style="padding: 2px 10px;">SOUTH</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;"></td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">2NT</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">Pass</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">4♣</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">Pass</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">?</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;"></td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;"></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH		2NT	Pass	4♣	Pass	?		
WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH										
	2NT	Pass	4♣										
Pass	?												

♠ A x
♥ A Q x x
♦ K J x x
♣ A Q x

“**What would North open?** (2NT.) With a balanced hand and 20 high-card points, open 2NT.

“**Suppose the opponents are silent and South jumps to 4♣. What call would North make?** (4NT.) Since 2NT is a natural opening bid, partner’s jump to 4♣ is the Gerber convention, asking for aces. With three aces, respond 4NT.

“**Suppose South now bids 5♣. What call does North make?** (5♥.) 5♣ is a continuation of the Gerber convention, asking for the number of kings. With one king, you would bid 5♥.

“**If South now bids 6♣, what call does North make?** (Pass.) South’s 6♣ is a sign-off bid. It doesn’t ask for the number of queens. South has placed the contract after checking for aces and kings. You’ve described your hand, so there’s no reason to overrule South’s decision.

“Change the North hand.

“In diamonds: take away the king and add a low card.

“In clubs: take away the ace and add a low card.

NORTH	<table style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 100%;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="padding: 2px 10px;">WEST</th> <th style="padding: 2px 10px;">NORTH</th> <th style="padding: 2px 10px;">EAST</th> <th style="padding: 2px 10px;">SOUTH</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;"></td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">1♦</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">Pass</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">1♠</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">Pass</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">1NT</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">Pass</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">4♣</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">Pass</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">?</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;"></td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;"></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH		1♦	Pass	1♠	Pass	1NT	Pass	4♣	Pass	?		
WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH														
	1♦	Pass	1♠														
Pass	1NT	Pass	4♣														
Pass	?																

♠ A x
♥ A Q x x
♦ J x x x
♣ Q x x

“**What would North open?** (1 ♦.) With 13 points and no five-card major, open the longer minor, 1 ♦.

“**The opponents pass throughout. South responds 1 ♠. What is North’s rebid?** (1NT.) With a minimum balanced hand, rebid 1NT.

“**South now jumps to 4 ♣. What does North bid?** (4 ♠.) South has jumped to 4 ♣ over a natural notrump bid by you, so 4 ♣ is the Gerber convention. With two aces, you respond 4 ♠.

“**If South had jumped to 4NT over your 1NT rebid, what would North do?** (Pass.) 4NT would not be Blackwood, since there has been no agreement on the trump suit. Instead, it would be a quantitative raise, inviting you to bid slam with more than a minimum. With only 13 points, pass, declining the invitation. You can see that it’s important to have an agreement on whether Gerber or Blackwood applies in this situation — otherwise, there could be all sorts of confusion.

“Change the North hand.

“In spades: add a low card.

“In diamonds: take away the jack.

NORTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
♠ A x x	Pass	3 ♥	Pass	1 ♥
♥ A Q x x	Pass	?		4 ♣
♦ x x x				
♣ Q x x				

“**Suppose South opens the bidding 1 ♥. What response does North make?** (3 ♥.) With 12 high-card points, you don’t have quite enough to make a forcing raise in hearts, although that would not be unreasonable. A limit raise to 3 ♥ probably describes your hand best.

“**Suppose North makes a limit raise to 3 ♥ and South bids 4 ♣. Is that the Gerber convention?** (No.) 4 ♣ isn’t Gerber because it isn’t a jump over a natural notrump bid. After a trump suit has been agreed upon, partner would use Blackwood, a jump to 4NT, to ask for the number of aces.

“The meaning of 4 ♣ will be discussed in more detail in the next lesson. For now, all that is important is that 4 ♣ isn’t Gerber.”

4 ♣ would actually be a cuebid in this sequence. North could sign off in 4 ♥ or go beyond game and cuebid 4 ♠. There’s no need to go into a detailed discussion with the students. There are some who will feel that it’s cheaper to use Gerber rather than Blackwood in sequences such as this. That isn’t standard practice, and it is not recommended. If the partnership has enough combined strength to be considering slam, the contract should be safe at the five level. As discussed in the previous section, Blackwood and Gerber aren’t interchangeable. Either one or the other applies in any given auction.

“There is one exception to the guideline that 4♣ is Gerber only if it is used directly over a natural 1NT or 2NT bid. A common partnership agreement is that after a 1NT opening bid, if responder uses the Stayman convention first and then jumps to 4♣, then 4♣ is the Gerber convention.

“Change the North hand back to the hand we had at the start of the lesson.

“In spades: add the ten.

“In diamonds: take away a low card.

“In clubs: take away a low card and add the ace.

NORTH	<table style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">WEST</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">NORTH</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">EAST</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">SOUTH</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">♠ A 10 x x</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">1NT</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">Pass</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">2♣</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">♥ A Q x x</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">2♥</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">Pass</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">4♣</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">♦ x x</td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">?</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">♣ A Q x</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	♠ A 10 x x	1NT	Pass	2♣	♥ A Q x x	2♥	Pass	4♣	♦ x x	?			♣ A Q x			
WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH																		
♠ A 10 x x	1NT	Pass	2♣																		
♥ A Q x x	2♥	Pass	4♣																		
♦ x x	?																				
♣ A Q x																					

“**What would North bid?** (1NT.) A balanced hand with 16 high-card points. Open 1NT.

“**South responds 2♣. What call does North make?** (2♥.) With two four-card majors, common practice is to respond up the line and bid 2♥.

“**After North’s 2♥ rebid, South jumps to 4♣. Now what call does North make?** (4NT.) The agreement is that the jump to 4♣ following the use of the Stayman convention is the Gerber convention, asking for aces. With three aces, you would respond 4NT.

“Finally, let’s go back to the challenge we presented at the start of this lesson.

“**Suppose North opens 1NT, South bids 2♣ and North responds 2♥. South jumps to 4NT. What call does North make?** (5♠/6♠.) Since 4♣ would be asking for the number of aces, 4NT isn’t the Blackwood convention. Instead, it’s a quantitative raise, similar to the direct raise of 1NT to 4NT. South has 16 or 17 points and is inviting you to bid slam.

“Why did South bid using the Stayman convention before jumping to 4NT? South must have a four-card major suit. It isn’t hearts. As you’ve just seen, if South held four hearts, South could jump to 4♣ to find out about aces. By inference, South must have a hand with four spades and 16 or 17 points. First South checked for a spade fit. When you didn’t bid spades, South then made a quantitative invitation to slam.

“Since you now know there is an eight-card spade fit, you can bid 5♠ if you are feeling conservative, or you can bid 6♠ if you want to accept the slam invitation.”

Summary

“As you can see from this last example, it’s important to agree when Gerber applies and when Blackwood applies. On this last hand, if North thinks 4NT is Blackwood, North might make the same 5♠ bid, showing three aces. However, South may be under the impression that partner is declining the slam invitation and signing off in 5♠.

“The standard agreement is that a jump to 4♣ is the Gerber convention:

- If it is made over a natural 1NT or 2NT bid by partner or
- If it is made after using the Stayman convention.

“The partnership may have other agreements, but they require additional discussion.”

➔ “Let’s do Exercise 4 in the student text to review what we have just discussed.”

Exercise Four — The Gerber Convention

What call does East make with each of the following hands after the auction goes as shown?

1)	WEST 1NT	NORTH Pass	EAST ?	SOUTH	♠ A 5 ♥ 3 ♦ K Q J 8 7 6 3 ♣ K Q 6
2)	WEST 4♣	NORTH Pass	EAST 2NT ?	SOUTH Pass	♠ K J 8 ♥ A Q 8 7 ♦ K Q 6 2 ♣ A J
3)	WEST 2♣ 4♣	NORTH Pass Pass Pass	EAST 1NT 2♠ ?	SOUTH Pass Pass	♠ Q J 8 4 ♥ A 8 ♦ A 10 7 5 ♣ A J 3
4)	WEST 2♦ 4♣	NORTH Pass Pass	EAST 1♠ 3NT ?	SOUTH Pass Pass	♠ K J 9 6 2 ♥ A Q ♦ Q J 3 ♣ K Q 10
5)	WEST 1NT 2♥	NORTH Pass Pass	EAST 2♣ ?	SOUTH Pass	♠ A K 7 4 ♥ K Q 8 3 ♦ K J 10 2 ♣ 5

Exercise Four Answer — The Gerber Convention

- 1) 4♣ (Gerber). The partnership should have enough combined strength for a slam contract, if it holds enough first-round controls. East uses the Gerber convention to ask for the number of aces West holds.
- 2) 4♠. This response shows two aces. 4♦ would show none; 4♥ would show one.
- 3) 4NT. This response shows three aces.
- 4) 4♦. East gives preference to diamonds. West's 4♣ isn't Gerber because it wasn't a jump after a natural 1NT or 2NT bid.
- 5) 4♣ (Gerber). Use the Gerber convention to ask for aces. 4NT would be quantitative.

SAMPLE DEALS – LESSON 5*

General Guidelines for Teachers: The focus of all four deals in this lesson is slam bidding conventions. The auctions should prove to be quite challenging. If the students can get to the right level in each case, they will be rewarded.

Bid and Play — Deal 1: Using Blackwood

Guidelines for Teachers: On this first deal, the students will use Blackwood to explore for slam. A variation of the hand is offered where the students can make the suggested changes to the hands and then bid them again.

Introduction

“Let’s play a deal that demonstrates the use of Blackwood to find a trump fit and to bid a grand slam.”

Instructions

“North is the dealer. Take your hands and start the bidding. Stop when you have completed the auction.”

(E–Z Deal Cards: #5, Deal 1 — Dealer, North)

Dealer: North	♠ —				
Vul: None	♥ Q J 8 2				
	♦ 10 4 3				
	♣ A K Q 9 7 3				
♠ A 9 5 4 3	<table border="1" style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S	♠ Q J 7 6 2
N					
W E					
S					
♥ 6 5		♥ 9			
♦ J 8 5		♦ 9 7 6 2			
♣ 10 5 4		♣ J 8 2			
	♠ K 10 8				
	♥ A K 10 7 4 3				
	♦ A K Q				
	♣ 6				

Suggested Bidding

When it appears that all of the tables have completed the auction, review how the bidding should have gone.

* The explanation of each deal is the same as the material in the student text. Teachers should use this information as a starting point for an interactive discussion with the students covering the main points of the hand.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
	1 ♣	Pass	1 ♥/2 ♥
Pass	3 ♥	Pass	4NT
Pass	6 ♥	Pass	7 ♥
Pass	Pass	Pass	

“North opens the bidding in the longest suit and East passes. With 19 high-card points and a six-card suit, South knows the partnership is in the slam range. The first priority, however, is to find a trump fit. South could make a jump shift into 2 ♥, but a response of 1 ♥ is forcing and leaves more room to explore for the best strain.

“Assuming South bids only 1 ♥ and West passes, North’s hand can be revalued in support of hearts. Counting 12 high-card points plus 5 dummy points for the spade void, the hand is worth 17 points, enough for a jump raise to 3 ♥.

“Once the partnership has agreed upon the trump suit, South can use the Blackwood convention to check for the number of aces. South doesn’t want to be in a slam if two aces are missing. If the partnership is missing one ace, a small slam is the best spot. If North has two aces, South can investigate a grand slam.

“North has one ace and a potentially useful void in spades. North shows this by jumping to 6 ♥ — showing one ace and a higher-ranking void. If South interprets this correctly, South will know that North holds the ♣A and a spade void. That should be enough for a grand slam. South will be able to ruff the spade losers with dummy’s trumps. Trusting partner, South bids 7 ♥.”

When everyone understands the proper bids and the final contract, the students can proceed to play out the cards in a contract of 7 ♥ by South.

Suggested Opening Lead

“Turn up all of the cards and put each hand dummy style at the edge of the table in front of each player. Let’s review the play and defense.

“West is on lead against 7 ♥. If North–South have not already supplied an explanation of the auction, West can ask for one. West is probably aware that the ♠A will be ruffed but should lead it anyway. It’s always possible that the opponents have had a misunderstanding. If the ♠A is ruffed, it’s unlikely to matter. East–West probably don’t have much else if the opponents have bid a grand slam.”

Suggested Play

“South should have little difficulty taking all of the tricks in a heart contract. Any spade losers can be ruffed in dummy or discarded on the extra club winners in dummy.”

Suggested Defense

“There’s nothing East —West can do to prevent declarer from taking 13 tricks in a heart contract.”

Bid and Play – Variation of Deal 1 – Blackwood and Voids

Introduction

“Let’s construct a variation of this hand.

“From the North hand, take the ♦ 10, the ♦ 4 and the ♦ 3 and give them to East.

“From the East hand, take the ♠ 7, the ♠ 6 and the ♠ 2 and give them to North.”

Instructions

“North is still the dealer. Take out your hands and let’s see how the bidding will go this time. Stop when you have completed the auction.”

Dealer: North	♠ 7 6 2					
Vul: None	♥ Q J 8 2					
	♦ —					
	♣ A K Q 9 7 3					
♠ A 9 5 4 3		<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: 0 auto;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S	♠ Q J
N						
W E						
S						
♥ 6 5			♥ 9			
♦ J 8 5			♦ 10 9 7 6 4 3 2			
♣ 10 5 4			♣ J 8 2			
	♠ K 10 8					
	♥ A K 10 7 4 3					
	♦ A K Q					
	♣ 6					

Suggested Bidding

When it appears that all of the tables have completed the auction, review how the bidding should have gone.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
	1♣	Pass	1♥/2♥
Pass	3♥	Pass	4NT
Pass	6♦	Pass	6♥
Pass	Pass	Pass	

“The bidding goes the same way in this version of the deal. The only difference is that North has a diamond void rather than a spade void. South uses the Blackwood convention to check for the number of aces.

“North has one ace and a potentially useful void in diamonds. North can show this by jumping to 6♦ — showing one ace and a void in diamonds. South now knows that the partnership is missing either the ♠ A or the ♣ A. South settles for a small slam in hearts by bidding 6♥. North accepts partner’s decision.”

When everyone understands the proper bids and the final contract, the students can proceed to play out the cards. Have all tables play a contract of 6♥ by South.

Suggested Opening Lead

“Turn up all of the cards and put each hand dummy style at the edge of the table in front of each player. Let’s review the play and defense.

“West is on lead against 6♥. West has to decide whether to lead the ♠A or pick another suit. Some players always lead an ace against a slam contract. A better approach is to listen to the auction before deciding what to lead. On this auction, the opponents have bid very strongly, so it’s quite likely they can take 12 or all 13 tricks. Leading the ♠A is probably the best chance for the defense. It’s possible, though unlikely, that the opponents have bid to slam missing both the ♠A and the ♠K. A more likely possibility is that East started with a singleton spade. West may be able to give East a ruff by leading the ♠A and a second round of spades.”

Suggested Play

“South should have little difficulty making the slam whether or not West leads the ♠A. If West doesn’t lead the ♠A, declarer can take all 13 tricks by discarding dummy’s spades on the ♦A K Q and then ruffing spade losers in dummy or discarding them on dummy’s extra club winners.”

Suggested Defense

“There’s nothing East–West can do to prevent declarer from taking 12 tricks in a heart contract. The ♠A turns out to be the best lead. Otherwise, declarer can take all 13 tricks.”

Bid and Play – Deal 2: Signing Off with Blackwood

Guidelines for Teachers: On this second deal, East can visualize slam if West holds two aces, so East uses Blackwood to check.

Introduction

“Let’s play a deal where slam appears to be possible if the partnership has the right controls.”

Instructions

“East is the dealer. Take your hands and start the bidding. Stop when you have completed the auction.”

(E–Z Deal Cards: #5, Deal 2 — Dealer, East)

Dealer: East	♠ 10 5 2											
Vul: N–S	♥ Q J 8 4 2											
	♦ J 10 5 3 2											
	♣ —											
♠ J 8 4		<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ A K Q
	N											
W		E										
	S											
♥ 7 3			♥ K 9									
♦ K Q 6			♦ 8									
♣ A J 10 6 2			♣ K Q 9 8 5 4 3									
	♠ 9 7 6 3											
	♥ A 10 6 5											
	♦ A 9 7 4											
	♣ 7											

Suggested Bidding

When it appears that all of the tables have completed the auction, review how the bidding should have gone.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
		1 ♣	Pass
3 ♣	Pass	4NT	Pass
5 ♦	Pass	5 ♥	Pass
5NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

“East isn’t quite strong enough for a conventional (artificial) 2 ♣ opening and starts the auction with 1 ♣, planning to show the extra strength later. South passes, and West makes a limit raise to 3 ♣. West has 11 high-card points and five-card support.

“East can visualize a slam if West holds two aces, so East jumps to 4NT, the Blackwood convention. West’s 5♦ response shows one ace. East knows the partnership can’t make a slam.

“Unfortunately, West’s 5♦ response puts the partnership beyond the safe resting spot of 5♣. East can’t bid 5NT, since that would ask for the number of kings. Instead, East bids 5♥, a suit in which the partnership can’t possibly want to play. This asks West to bid 5NT. When West bids 5NT, East passes. 5NT may not be a safe contract, but it may have a chance. East can expect West to hold some strength in diamonds, since there isn’t room for much else if West has enough strength for a limit raise. Since two aces are missing, 6♣ would have no chance.”

When everyone understands the proper bids and the final contract, the students can proceed to play out the cards in a contract of 5♥ by East.

Suggested Opening Lead

“Turn up all of the cards and put each hand dummy style at the edge of the table in front of each player. Let’s review the play and defense.

“South is on lead and has a difficult choice. The usual lead against a notrump contract would be the ♥5, fourth highest from the stronger of the four-card suits. From the auction, South has a clue that North doesn’t have much, because East–West were trying to get to slam. South might prefer the safer lead of a spade, hoping to give nothing away and make declarer do all of the work to take 11 tricks.”

Suggested Play

“The 5NT contract is a challenge. If South leads a heart, East will have an easy time. East can win the ♥K and then quickly take seven club tricks and three spade tricks to make the contract.

“If South leads a spade, declarer has to find an 11th trick. The best choice is to lead a diamond, hoping South has the ♦A. If North has the ♦A, declarer will have to hope that North also holds the ♥A. Otherwise, the contract will be defeated by several tricks. North could return a heart, trapping East’s ♥K. East is safe. South holds both aces and can’t prevent declarer from taking 11 tricks — three spades, one diamond and seven clubs. A lucky escape for East–West.”

Suggested Defense

“Due to the unfortunate location of the ♦A, the defenders can’t do anything to prevent declarer from taking 11 tricks.”

Bid and Play — Deal 3 – Blackwood, DOPI, DEPO

Guidelines for Teachers: This deal provides an opportunity for the teacher to let the students have a little fun. Highly distributional hands are always interesting.

Introduction

“Let’s play a deal where the distribution produces a lively auction.”

Instructions

“South is the dealer. Take your hands and start the bidding. Stop when you have completed the auction.”

(E–Z Deal Cards: #5, Deal 3 — Dealer, South)

Dealer: South	♠	8 5	
Vul: E–W	♥	K Q J 9 8 6 5	
	♦	—	
	♣	J 10 8 7	
♠	Q J 9 7 6 4	♠	A K 10 3 2
♥	A	♥	2
♦	J 8 4 3	♦	A K Q 9 6 2
♣	A 4	♣	5
	♠	—	
	♥	10 7 4 3	
	♦	10 7 5	
	♣	K Q 9 6 3 2	

N
W E
S

Suggested Bidding

When it appears that all of the tables have completed the auction, review how the bidding should have gone. East uses Blackwood to check for aces, but South, with a great fit with North’s hearts, provides some interference to make the auction interesting.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
			Pass
1 ♠	3 ♥/4 ♥	4NT	5 ♥
5 ♠	Pass	7 ♠	Pass
Pass	Pass		

“South doesn’t have the right type of hand to open the bidding. South can’t open a weak two-bid when the six-card suit is clubs, and with a void and a side four-card major, it would be a bit off-center to open 3♣. West’s hand is too strong for a weak two-bid in spades, so West starts with 1♠. With a good seven-card suit, North can make a weak jump overcall to 3♥. North is unlikely to be defeated more than two tricks, considering the nice side-

suit holding in clubs. Some players might even venture 4♥ with the North hand.

“With an excellent fit for spades and a good hand, East uses the Blackwood convention to ask how many aces West holds. By inference, the jump to 4NT agrees on spades as the trump suit. East doesn’t want to show the diamond suit or do something else, because the opportunity to use Blackwood may not be there when the bidding comes back around. There should be no losers in spades or diamonds, so a small or grand slam will hinge on the number of aces held by West.

“With an excellent fit for North’s hearts — North is showing seven of them — South should take some action over the 4NT bid to make the auction more difficult for the opponents. With such a good distributional hand, South might even envision the partnership making 5♥ if North is short in diamonds. South should bid at least 5♥. An adventuresome South might jump to 6♥ to put more pressure on East–West.

“If South does bid 5♥, West can bid 5♠ to show two aces in response to Blackwood. Playing the DOPI convention, a double would show no aces, a pass would show one ace and the next available step, 5♠, would show two aces. If South jumps to 6♥, West could double to show an even number of aces if the partnership is using DEPO — double even, pass odd. East would now have to guess whether West held no aces (highly unlikely) or two aces (most likely). If South chooses to bid 5♣ rather than 5♥, West would bid 5♦ to show two aces when playing the DOPI convention.

“Over West’s 5♠ bid, North should pass, having already described the hand with the preemptive jump overcall. Assuming East trusts West’s 5♠ bid to be the DOPI conventional response, East can now jump to 7♠. The partnership should have no losers. Even if West doesn’t hold the ♠Q, the partnership has at least a ten-card fit, which should be good enough. A jump to 7NT would be possible, but could lead to disaster if West is short in diamonds and there are diamond losers. Getting to a grand slam in spades over the opponents’ interference should be good enough.”

When everyone understands the proper bids and the final contract, the students can proceed to play out the cards.

Suggested Opening Lead

“Turn up all of the cards and put each hand dummy style at the edge of the table in front of each player. Let’s review the play and defense.

“North is on lead and will probably start with the ♥K, although this probably won’t develop a trick for the defense. East–West are unlikely to bid a grand slam in spades without the ♥A, so North might consider leading a club. It is always possible that the opponents have had a misunderstanding and are missing an ace. That’s a little unlikely, since South might have made a Lightner double asking for an unusual lead holding a minor-suit ace or a void. North’s opening lead won’t make much difference.”

Suggested Play

“There’s nothing to the play. Declarer can draw trumps and claim all of the tricks.”

Suggested Defense

“North–South can’t prevent East–West from making a grand slam. The best North–South can do is to throw up interference and hope that East–West land in the wrong contract.

“North–South will do very well if allowed to play in a heart contract, even if they are doubled. They are unlikely to lose more than two tricks — the ♣A and the ♥A — since East–West are unlikely to find their club ruff.”

Bid and Play — Deal 4 – Gerber Over Notrump

Guidelines for Teachers: This hand introduces Gerber over Notrump and the idea that 4NT would now be quantitative.

Introduction

“Let’s play a deal where the Gerber convention allows the partnership to check for aces and kings at a lower level.”

Instructions

“West is the dealer. Take your hands and start the bidding. Stop when you have completed the auction.”

(E–Z Deal Cards: #5, Deal 4 — Dealer, West)

Dealer: West	♠ K 10 6										
Vul: Both	♥ A K 8 3										
	♦ A 2										
	♣ K 9 7 4										
♠ Q 9 8 5 2	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ J 7 3
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ Q J 9 2		♥ 10 7 5 4									
♦ 10 3		♦ 6 4									
♣ 6 2		♣ Q J 10 8									
	♠ A 4										
	♥ 6										
	♦ K Q J 9 8 7 5										
	♣ A 5 3										

Suggested Bidding

When it appears that all of the tables have completed the auction, review how the bidding should have gone.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
Pass	1NT	Pass	4♣
Pass	4♠	Pass	5♣
Pass	5NT	Pass	7NT
Pass	Pass	Pass	

“With a balanced hand and 17 high-card points, North opens 1NT. East passes. South can visualize a slam if the partnership isn’t missing two aces. South uses Gerber, a jump to 4♣, to ask for the number of aces. A jump to 4NT would be a quantitative (invitational) jump and not the Blackwood convention.

“After West’s pass, North bids 4♠, the third step, to show two aces — 4♦, the first step, would show no aces or all four aces; 4♥ would show one ace.

“South now knows the partnership holds all of the aces and can try for bigger things by bidding 5♣ to ask for the number of kings. North responds 5NT, the fourth step, to show three kings — 5♦ would show no kings; 5♥ would show one king; 5♠ would show two kings; and 6♣ would show all four kings.

“South now can be certain that the partnership has all 13 tricks, the ♠A and the ♠K, the ♥A and the ♥K, seven diamond tricks and the ♣A and ♣K. South can bid a grand slam. Although South was originally planning to play with diamonds as the trump suit, South might as well bid the slam in notrump. That contract is worth more than 7♦ and is slightly safer — no possibility of the opponents getting a ruff on the first trick.”

When everyone understands the proper bids and the final contract, the students can proceed to play out the cards in a contract of 7NT by North.

Suggested Opening Lead

“Turn up all of the cards and put each hand dummy style at the edge of the table in front of each player. Let’s review the play and defense.

“East is on lead and would start with the ♣Q, top of a sequence.”

Suggested Play

“There isn’t much to the play. North has 13 sure tricks: two spades, two hearts, seven diamonds and two clubs.”

Suggested Defense

“If North–South reach 7NT, East–West will just have to wait for the next deal.”