

Cue Bidding Controls for Slams

Sometimes the auction to reach slam is as simple as 1NT-6NT. However, other times when the bidding indicates you and your partner have the combined strength to reach a slam, you need to check on controls. Your goal is to have at least second round control of each suit and not be off two cashing tricks. The Blackwood convention is great for discovering how many aces your partner holds but it doesn't tell you which aces. Take a look at this hand:

South: ♠AKT862 ♥83 ♦KT ♣AKQ

SOUTH	NORTH
1♠	2NT (forcing spade raise)
4NT	5♦
??	

What should South bid? You have discovered you're not off two aces but which of these hands does North hold:

- A. ♠QJ75 ♥AK2 ♦QJ98 ♣JT
 B. ♠QJ75 ♥QJ2 ♦AQJ ♣JT2

With hand A, declarer is cold for slam but with hand B, the opponents can cash two heart tricks. It's clear that Blackwood wasn't the solution to the problem.

First a definition: The standard method of bidding slam controls is for a player to always show a first-round control (ace or void) first. Only after one lap of the suits has been completed can a second-round control (king or singleton) be shown.

Over partner's forcing raise, South should bid 4♣. This shows first round control and an interest in slam. With hand A North will bid 4♥ showing the ace of hearts and denying the ace of diamonds. South can then bid the small heart slam. Holding hand B, North will bid 4♦. South can then jump to 5♠ asking North to bid the slam when holding a first or second round control in the unbid suit. For this hand, this will result in a quick pass from North.

Here's another example:

♠AJT93 ♥KQ76 ♦K3 ♣Q9
 ♠K7 ♥AJ985 ♦QT9 ♣AKJ

NORTH	SOUTH
1♠	2♥ (game forcing)
3♥	4♣
4♠	5♣
5♦	6♥

South responds 2♥ forcing to game in the 2/1 system and North sets the trump suit with his 3♥ raise. Holding 18 high card points including the valuable king in opener's first suit, South is anxious to reach slam. But he knows it is possible to be off the top two diamond honors so he starts on a cue-bidding mission. He cue bids his ace of clubs and is disappointed his partner does not show the ace of diamonds. However, North does show slam interest by cue bidding past game so South next shows the king of clubs. This gets a diamond cue bid showing the king (he already denied the ace) and South bids the slam.

This method of cue bidding first round controls followed by second round has been used for many years. However, it is only fair to also discuss the popular Italian style of cue bidding. Another definition: Italian Cue Bids are an approach to the bidding of slam controls that treats first and second round controls equally. If a player fails to show a control (by bypassing a suit) that means that he has neither a first-round nor a second-round control in that suit.

The advantage of Italian Cue Bids is that an uncontrolled suit is found very quickly and the bidding can stop at the four-level. Just as importantly, if there is no suit uncontrolled, this is discovered prior to 4NT being passed. Now Roman Keycard Blackwood can be used to check that there is not more than one key card missing.

Let's take a look at this method:

♠KJ9 ♥KQ7 ♦T3 ♣AK987

♠AT8 ♥AJ985 ♦2 ♣QJ62

SOUTH	NORTH
1♥	2♣ (game forcing)
3♣	3♥ (sets trump suit)
3♠	4♣
4♦	4NT
5♥	6♥

After North sets the trump suit with his 3♥ the cue bidding begins. Notice that without the diamond cue bid, the auction would probably stop at game. Also notice that with two small diamonds, North could not use Blackwood due to the fear of two losing cards in that suit.

I realize cue bidding can be difficult but the important thing is to understand what a powerful weapon it is.

<http://www.northerncoloradobridge.com/playerscorner/CueBids1.htm>