

## Misuse of Blackwood

Slam bidding is difficult at the best of times and requires a delicate approach, yet sadly most people are not content to take a softly softly route. Blackwood, any sort of Blackwood, is an ace-asking manoeuvre and for many it is the be all and end all of sophistication. Sadly its use alone seldom provides the way forward, as the following hand will demonstrate.

You hold: S A J  
H Q J 10 9 7 5  
D A 7 6  
C 8 5

Partner opens 1S and you respond 2H and you are surprised and delighted when partner raises to 4H. But what now? You have a seven-loser hand and partner must have about a five-loser hand so a slam looks possible, and for many the solution is to wheel out everyone's favourite convention – Blackwood. So you bid 4NT and partner responds 5D showing one ace. Are you any further forward?

a) Partner could have:

S K Q 10 7 5  
H A K 4 2  
D K Q  
C 5 3

Although you have fourteen tricks 'on top' if the defence lead anything but a club you only have eleven tricks if they do, so clearly you would not want to be in a slam.

b) On the other hand partner could have:

S K Q 10 7 5  
H A K 4 2  
D 5 3  
C K Q

Now you have twelve tricks 'on top' and clearly want to be in a slam, so what has gone wrong?

Clearly Blackwood has failed to solve the problem and this leads us to postulate the following rule: *Never use Blackwood if a particular response leaves you uncertain as to what to do next.* Put another way you must know *exactly* what you are going to bid after you get the response to your ace-asking question.

(For those of you who are *aficionados* of Roman Key-Card Blackwood the same reasoning applies. In the above example the response to the Blackwood enquiry would be 5H, showing two key cards but denying the queen of trumps. The initiator of the enquiry would still not know how to proceed.)

Suppose you hold:       S K Q 8 7 5  
                              H K Q J 8 3  
                              D none  
                              C A K 3

You open 1S and partner responds by bidding 3S, a limit bid showing an eight-loser hand. Clearly a slam is very likely but does bidding 4NT solve all your problems? If you get a response of 5H showing two aces would you know what to do next?

c) Partner could have:   S A 10 9 3  
                              H A 5  
                              D K 9 8 4  
                              C 8 6 5

d) Clearly you would want to be in a grand slam, but what if partner held:  
                              S A 10 9 3  
                              H 10 5  
                              D A K 8 4  
                              C 8 6 5

Now you have a cashing ace against you and the small slam is all you can aspire to. It's the same old story: *Blackwood has been misused because the response to the enquiry has not solved the problem of what to do next.*

*As a general rule NEVER use Blackwood if you have a holding of two low or more in an unbid suit and NEVER use Blackwood if you have a void in an unbid suit.*

## Roman Key-Card Blackwood

Roman Key-Card Blackwood is a more sophisticated way to ask for aces once a suit has been agreed and uses the king of the agreed trump suit as a fifth 'ace'. It works like this: -

In reply to 4NT: -

5C shows 0 or 3 of the five aces

5D shows 1 or 4 of the five aces

5H shows 2 of the five aces *without* the queen of trumps

5S shows two of the five aces *with* the queen of trumps

After a 5C or a 5D reply the enquirer can find out about the queen of trumps by bidding 5D or 5H - if this is below the trump suit. Without the queen of trumps responder signs off in 5 of the trump suit, but with it he will cue-bid his lowest king. With no extra king to show he bids six of the agreed trump suit.

5NT by the enquirer asks for kings on a 0,1,2,3 etc. step response, but remember not to show the king of trumps - you have already owned up to that.

Example: -

S Kxxxx

H A

D AQxxx

C AQ

1S

4NT

5H (Queen of S?)

7S

S AQxx

H xxxx

D Kxx

C xx

3S

5D (1 or 4 'aces')

6D (Yes, & the King of D)

## Cue Bidding

When a trump suit HAS BEEN AGREED, and the partnership IS COMMITTED TO GAME, there can be no use for the bid of a new suit except as a slam try. All such bids can therefore be regarded as CUE-BIDS, showing a CONTROL in the suit (normally the ace or a void) and suggesting the possibility of a slam contract. The first opportunity to make a cue-bid usually arises at the four-level, although it is just possible for a cue-bidding sequence to start at the three-level.

Examples: - a) 1D      2S                      b) 1H    3H      c) 1NT    3S  
                  3S      4C                                      3S                                      4D

The last bid in each sequence is a **cue-bid**.

In a) East cannot wish to play in clubs after spades have been raised. He is showing first round control in clubs and suggesting a slam.

In b) West's second bid commits his side to game, and he is merely showing a strong hand with first round spade control.

In c) there can be no point in showing a diamond suit, so four diamonds is therefore a cue-bid agreeing spades.

*Note that in all cases game is assured when the cue-bid is made. In general the cue-bidder bids his cheapest control first, i.e. the bid that keeps the bidding as low as possible. Thus in the sequence c) above West has denied the ace of clubs.*

It should be remembered that cue-bidding is a co-operative venture. A cue-bid carries the message 'I have extra strength and control of this suit, 'What do you think of our slam prospects?' The responder has several ways of continuing and with a minimum hand and no slam interest he will merely sign off in the trump suit. If he has extra values and is satisfied about the control situation he may go straight to a slam. With an in-between hand he may express interest by making a reciprocal cue-bid. Of course a responsive cue-bid that goes beyond the game level is positive acceptance of the slam try and shows a stronger hand.

*Note that a repeat cue-bid in the same suit shows second round control - a singleton or the king.*

Examples: -

a)	KQxxx	Ax	1S	2H
	<b>AKxx</b>	<b>QJxxxx</b>	4H	4S
	<b>Ax</b>	<b>KQx</b>	5D	5H
	xx	xx		

Here the club weakness becomes apparent.

b)	x	xxx	2C	2D
	<b>AKQxxx</b>	<b>Jxxx</b>	2H	3H
	<b>AKQx</b>	<b>xx</b>	4C	4H
	<b>Ax</b>	<b>Kxxx</b>	4S	5C
			6H	

East has shown support for hearts and second round club control in an otherwise weak hand but that is enough information for opener to bid the slam.

## Splinter Bids

Sometimes a slam might be made on relatively thin values, especially if the two hands fit well, and a common technique designed to find such a fit is by the use of a so-called 'Splinter Bid.' Suppose you have a hand like SK8xx **HQJxxx Dx** CAxx and partner opens 1S. Clearly you have the values for 4S but if the hands fit well there could easily be more than ten tricks available. Basically if opener held no values in diamonds – when there would be no 'wasted values', or the ace so that there are no losers in that suit, then that would be ideal. To inform partner of your holding you can bid, in the above example, 4D! *A double jump in a new suit in these circumstances shows a singleton in the suit bid or sometimes a void. It is agreeing the suit bid by opener.*

Let us see how the whole hand might be bid: -

S K865  
**H QJ854**  
**D 2**  
C A75

S AQ732  
**H AK2**  
**D 863**  
C K2

South	North
1S	4D
4NT	5H
6S	

South simply uses RKCB after the good news about the diamond suit has been received, hears about two key-cards, and bids the slam.

Sometimes opener makes the splinter bid after he hears partner's response in a new suit. For example in the sequence 1H – 1S – 4C would show a singleton club, a five-loser hand and spade agreement. A hand like SAxxx **HAKxxx DAQx** Cx would be suitable to bid in this way.

**It is recommended that Splinter Bids by responder are usually somewhere in the range 10-12 points with anything higher best dealt with by using a Jacoby response of 2NT. Also while it is obvious that a sequence that starts 1H - 3S is unusual and is a splinter showing a singleton spade and game forcing in hearts, it is perhaps easy to forget that 1S - 4H is also a splinter sequence, because it sounds so natural!**

## Jacoby 2NT

When 1S/H is raised to game on a seven loser hand, that hand can superficially range from a low-pointed distributional hand to a really strong hand in terms of high card points but with less distribution.

For example look at the following very different hands after partner opens 1S: -

a) S K x x x x  
H x  
D K Q x  
C J x x x

b) S A x x x  
H K Q x  
D A x x x  
C Q x

Both hands have seven losers and yet if you were looking for a slam you would probably prefer to hold the second hand because you need to have the right number of first and second round controls. So because it is right to bid 4S on hand a) it just cannot be in order to do so on hand b) because of the vast difference in high card strength. Because of this and also because it is never necessary to bid 2NT over an opening bid of one of a suit, Jacoby came up with the novel idea that such a response should show a high card raise to game in partner's opening suit - or more! So the correct response to an opening bid of 1S on hand b) would be 2NT.

How the opening bidder proceeds after this is largely a matter of partnership agreement but the fact remains that at least the opener will know that he is looking at an opening bid opposite.

Some play that a bid in a new suit at minimum level after 2NT shows a singleton while a jump bid in a new suit shows a void. Responder can then cue-bid if necessary and/or use RKCB.



Ex:-

S A 9 5 4  
H K Q 4  
D A 8 7 5  
C Q 2

S K Q 10 3 2  
H A 2  
D K Q 6 4 2  
C 3

South	North
1S	2NT
3C	3D
3H	4H
4NT	5H
6S	No

Using this method South is showing a singleton club and the ace of hearts while North is showing first round diamond control and second round heart control (the king) while denying first round club control. A check-up on Key-Cards shows that North has both the ace of diamonds and the ace of spades leaving South able to bid the slam.

*Whatever you choose to play after partner has responded 2NT it should be a matter of common sense that a direct leap to game would deny any interest in a slam and the responder would only bid on if he was very strong.*

### Example Hands for Slam Bidding

1.	SAQ765 HKQJ53 DK3 C2	SK943 HA6 DA86 C8743	1S 4NT 6S	3S 5C
2.	S875 HAQJ98 DKQJ3 CA	S3 HK654 DA108 CK8753	1H 4C 4NT 6H	3S 4D 5H No
3.	SKQ754 HAK75 DA9 C76	SA8 HQP9432 DKQ6 C82	1S 4H 5D No	2H 4S 5H
4.	SKQ7 HA9 DAKQ764 CA5	SA653 HK874 DJ932 C6	2D 3H 4C 4S 7D	3D 3S 4H 5C No
5.	SAQ987 HAK D8654 CK3	SK754 HQP85 D2 CA742	1S 4NT 6S	4D 5H No
6.	SK63 HKQ87 DAKJ CA43	SA87 HA43 DQ65 CQ752	2NT No	4NT
7.	SQJ95 HAQ754 DA2 C63	SAK632 HK2 DK975 CA5	1H 3S 5S No	1S 4NT 7S
8.	SK98 HA65 DQ54 CA875	SA3 HK2 DAK10962 CKQ2	1NT 3H 4C 4S 5S No	3D 3S 4H 4NT 7NT

These bids are Cue Bids; these bids are Roman Key-Card Blackwood;  
these bids are Splinter Bids

1)		<b>S K Q 5 4</b> <b>H A 6 3</b> <b>D J 9 7 5</b> <b>C J 2</b>	<b>South</b> <b>1S</b> <b>4C</b> <b>4NT</b> <b>7S</b>	<b>North</b> <b>3S</b> <b>4H</b> <b>5S</b> <b>No</b>
	<b>S 9 2</b> <b>H 10 5 4</b> <b>D A Q 8 6 2</b> <b>C Q 10 6</b>		<b>S 6 3</b> <b>H 9 2</b> <b>D K 10 4 3</b> <b>C 9 8 7 4 3</b>	<b>4C &amp; 4H are cue-bids and</b> <b>4NT is RKCB. 5S shows two</b> <b>key cards and the SQ.</b>
		<b>S A J 10 8 7</b> <b>H K Q J 8 7</b> <b>D none</b> <b>C A K 5</b>		

2)		<b>S A Q 7 6</b> <b>H Q 3</b> <b>D Q J 7 6</b> <b>C 8 5 3</b>	<b>South</b> <b>1S</b> <b>4C</b> <b>No</b>	<b>North</b> <b>3S</b> <b>4S</b>
	<b>S 5 2</b> <b>H A 10 8 4</b> <b>D 10 5 3</b> <b>C 10 9 4 2</b>		<b>S 9 4</b> <b>H K 9 7 5 2</b> <b>D A 9 4 2</b> <b>C 7 6</b>	<b>4C is a cue-bid but when</b> <b>North cannot cue-bid in</b> <b>return South knows there are</b> <b>aces missing.</b>
		<b>S K J 10 8 3</b> <b>H J 6</b> <b>D K 8</b> <b>C A K Q J</b>		

3)		<b>S J 8 5</b> <b>H 9 8 5 2</b> <b>D A 7 5 4 3</b> <b>C 6</b>	<b>South</b> <b>2C</b> <b>2S</b> <b>4C</b> <b>4H</b> <b>7S</b>	<b>North</b> <b>2D</b> <b>3S</b> <b>4D</b> <b>5C</b> <b>No</b>
	<b>S 7 4</b> <b>H K J 7 3</b> <b>D Q 8 2</b> <b>C Q 10 9 3</b>		<b>S 6 2</b> <b>H Q 10 6 4</b> <b>D J 10 9</b> <b>C J 8 7 4</b>	<b>North does well to support</b> <b>spades at once. 4C, 4D, 4H</b> <b>and 5C are cue-bids so South</b> <b>knows his partner has a</b> <b>singleton club.</b>
		<b>S A K Q 10 9 3</b> <b>H A</b> <b>D K 6</b> <b>C A K 5 2</b>		

4)		<b>S A 3</b> <b>H K 9 7 5</b> <b>D 10 8 7 5</b> <b>C A 7 6</b>	<b>South</b> <b>1H</b> <b>4NT</b> <b>6H</b>	<b>North</b> <b>3H</b> <b>5C</b> <b>No</b>
	<b>S K Q J 7</b> <b>H 4 3</b> <b>D A 6 4 2</b> <b>C 10 8 3</b>		<b>S 10 9 8 6 4 2</b> <b>H J</b> <b>D 9 3</b> <b>C 9 5 4 2</b>	<b>North shows three key-cards</b> <b>(it can hardly be none) but</b> <b>South does not mind which</b> <b>'ace' is missing and can bid</b> <b>the easy slam.</b>
		<b>S 5</b> <b>H A Q 10 8 6 2</b> <b>D K Q J</b> <b>C K Q J</b>		

5)	<p>SK65 HJ108 DK9 CA10763</p> <p>SQJ94 HA76 D108 CJ952</p>	<p>S10873 H9532 D5432 C4</p> <p>SA2 HKQ4 DAQJ76 CKQ8</p>	<table border="0"> <tr> <td style="text-align: right;">South</td> <td style="text-align: left;">North</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: right;">2NT</td> <td style="text-align: left;">4NT</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: right;">6NT</td> <td style="text-align: left;">No</td> </tr> </table> <p>4NT is not Blackwood but asks partner to bid 6NT with a maximum, pass with a minimum.</p>	South	North	2NT	4NT	6NT	No
South	North								
2NT	4NT								
6NT	No								

6)	<p>SAK83 H65 D1043 C9832</p>	<p>SQJ9 HQ982 DJ9 CKQ106</p> <p>S65 HAKJ107 DAKQ5 CJ7</p>	<p>S10742 H43 D8762 CA54</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td style="text-align: right;">South</td> <td style="text-align: left;">North</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: right;">1H</td> <td style="text-align: left;">3H</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: right;">4D</td> <td style="text-align: left;">4H</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: right;">No</td> <td></td> </tr> </table> <p>4D is a cue-bid and denies both black suit aces so North is not tempted to bid beyond game.</p>	South	North	1H	3H	4D	4H	No	
South	North										
1H	3H										
4D	4H										
No											

7)	<p>SQ96 HJ DJ10832 C10965</p>	<p>SA74 HQ1062 DA9 CK832</p> <p>SK3 HAK8743 D7 CAQJ7</p>	<p>SJ10852 H95 DKQ654 C4</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td style="text-align: right;">South</td> <td style="text-align: left;">North</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: right;">1H</td> <td style="text-align: left;">2NT</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: right;">3D</td> <td style="text-align: left;">3S</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: right;">4C</td> <td style="text-align: left;">4D</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: right;">4S</td> <td style="text-align: left;">5C</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: right;">7H</td> <td style="text-align: left;">No</td> </tr> </table> <p>2NT is Jacoby showing a high card raise to game. 3D shows a singleton then an exchange of cue-bids shows all key players are present.</p>	South	North	1H	2NT	3D	3S	4C	4D	4S	5C	7H	No
South	North														
1H	2NT														
3D	3S														
4C	4D														
4S	5C														
7H	No														

8)	<p>S103 HQ1095 DA4 CJ8763</p>	<p>SA762 HK4 DQJ83 CK95</p> <p>SQJ985 HAJ6 DK92 CQ2</p>	<p>SK4 H8732 D10765 CA104</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td style="text-align: right;">South</td> <td style="text-align: left;">North</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: right;">1S</td> <td style="text-align: left;">2NT</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: right;">4S</td> <td style="text-align: left;">No</td> </tr> </table> <p>North shows a good raise to game or better but with a complete minimum South signs off in game.</p>	South	North	1S	2NT	4S	No
South	North								
1S	2NT								
4S	No								