

Kickback Blackwood

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The purpose of this article is to lay out a basic set of principles for the usage of Kickback to avoid confusion over when it applies. It does not debate the relative merits of kickback vs turbo, 1430, or other system. It assumes that you are willing to do the work needed with your favorite partner to play a good system, so no point in complaining that "it's too hard." It is hard, but given the amount of hours you spend every day reading opening lead problems, surely this is time well spent. I not only discuss kickback, but some regular Blackwood sequences with focus on "what's trump."

With this in mind I have requests from readers:

- 1) if you don't play kickback, and don't like it... write a different article, I'd like to focus this one on getting kickback agreements solid.
- 2) If you do play kickback, or want to learn, please contribute, ask questions, provide feedback
- 3) Ask me about any auction, and I will will give a yes/no answer on my opinion as to kickback applying, and will cite the basic principle that leads me to this conclusion.
- 4) I reserve the right to change my opinion on a sequence based on feedback from the community. If I do this, the article will show old and new.

Page 2, I list a basic set of principles. It starts with a simple definition, with some additional principles added for clarity.

Page 3, I enumerate many different auctions that demonstrate the principles on page 2. Warning, tedious reading. You don't have to memorize these, they follow the principles, but they make a good reference if wondering about specific auctions.

Page 4, I will add any sequences not covered in the original article, but deemed as providing additional clarity based on reader feedback and questions

Page 5, Expert treatments - RKC +1 as exclusion or inclusion keycard Blackwood, optional keycard

When is a suit bid kickback RKC? Simple definition:

4 of agreed or set suit plus 1. The priority is natural. If it can be natural it is. It is never a splinter, and it is never a Q bid. eg: 1♦ 4♥ = natural. Set trumps when you can.

Basic Principles of Kickback

Meanings of bids

I use the standard Steps 0-3, 1-4, 2 without Q. 2 with Queen. This is 0314. 1430 does not really add much once you play kickback, but the rules are very similar

Over step 1 or step 2, the next step is a Q ask - return to trump without, show lowest king with. Bid 6 with no kings with, 5N shows king of ask suit

5suit+1 asks specific kings promises all keys and invites 7. If you just want to show all the keys without inviting, bid one under at 6 level.

One under 6 of suit by asker is last train opposite unlimited response. It shows all the key cards without interest in 7 (6♥ if spades trump)

Higher than king ask requests 3rd round (6 suit=none, 6N=Qx 7suit=xx, 7ask=QJxx)

When partner shows 0-3 keys, you should make the decision and not leave it to partner. A slow signoff will get you the worst of it, just decide.

When partner shows 1-4 keys, you can sign-off and expect partner to bid again with 4 since you can't be off 2 key cards, but you should know.

Void showing: We play DONT. We don't show voids in response to RKC. Exception: See inclusion keycard. P 5. World class players mess up badly by showing voids. We don't do it.

What is trump?

1. Agreed suit. Always try to set trumps. 1♥ 4♠ - You could have set trumps with Jacoby, 4♠ is not kickback. Natural has priority.

2. 2/1 suit if next bid 4N since you can't set your own suit (1♠ 2♥ 2♠ 4N = RKC Hearts since you can set spades with 3♠)

3. Strong jump shift suit

4. Last bid suit

Is 4N keycard?

There are a lot of situations where 4N is quantitative, or takeout(in competition). I enumerate some on Page 3.

It is never RKC for clubs, and rarely for diamonds. If our fit is in a minor, 4N is a last train type Q-bid or natural depending on context.

4N is sometimes regular Blackwood if bid directly over an opening bid (1♣ 4N, 3♦ 4N)

In one case, 4N asks specific Aces (4N opener)

If they compete over kickback

DOP1 applies, Steps are X=0-3, etc. We do not play ROP1.

If they double our keycard bid, pass denies 2nd round control of the suit doubled. Redouble to reask. Bidding just shows the appropriate number of key cards and at least 2nd round control; redouble by either player is keycard. Imagine a hand where partner asked for aces, but you would have been in a better position to do so... Well, that frivolous double just let you do it.

If they double our 1st or 2nd step keycard response, redouble asks for the queen of trumps; pass asks for a control. Responses to Pass:

Redouble = control, but no queen; return to trump=no control; other = control, + Q, plus specific king (or side queen if king impossible).

Example kickback sequences

Auctions starting 1 suit

1♥ 2N - 4♠ at any point in the auction will now be kickback, and 4N a spade Q bid.

1♦ 1♠ 2♣ 4♠ 4N - Keycard for spades. Kickback is still 4 suit plus 1... in this case, 4N.

1♣ 4♦ - Keycard for clubs. No sense in 4♦ otherwise, but try to bid 2♣ to set trumps. 1♦ 4♥ natural

1♠ 2♥ 3♠ 4N - RKC spades

1♠ 2♥ 2♠ 4N - RKC hearts since no way to set hearts

1♠ 2♥ 2♠ 3♥ 3♠ 4N = RKC for spades since you bypassed your chance to RKC for hearts

1♠ 2♥ 3♥ - Hearts are now trumps. Don't psych 2♥ thinking you can get back to spades. 4♠ will be RKC for hearts.

1♥ 2♦ 3♦ 3♥ - Hearts are trumps, you can no longer RKC for diamonds, but having bid 4♠ RKC for hearts, you can suggest 6♦.

1♥ 2♦ 3♦ 4♥ - RKC for diamonds

1♦ 2♦ 3N 4♥ - RKC for diamonds.

1♥ 2♦ 2N 3♦ 3N 4♥ = RKC for diamonds. You could set hearts with 3♥. Make this a priority over rebidding diamonds.

1♦ 1♥ 3N 4♦ 4♥ - RKC for diamonds (can't logically want to offer hearts all the sudden).

1♥ 2♣ 2♥ 4♠ - RKC hearts - Compare with next auction

1♥ 2♣ 2♥ 4♦ - RKC clubs - Notice how kickback resolves what otherwise might be a confusion over trumps in some cases.

1♥ 1N 3N 4♦ 4♥ 4♠ - 4♠ RKC for hearts

1♣ 1♦ 1N 2♠ 3♣ 4♦ - 2♠ game forcing reverse by responder. 3♦ would be forcing, so 4♦ RKC for clubs.

1♦ 1♥ 2N 4♠ - RKC for hearts. Note that in standard RKC, it might be difficult to avoid confusion with quantitative.

1♦ 1♠ 2N 3♠ 3N 4♣ 4♠ 4N - RKC for spades. Over 3N, avoid raising directly to 4N to avoid confusion if you want RKC

1♦ 1♠ 2♣ 4♠ 4N - RKC spades

1♦ 3♦ 4♥ - RKC diamonds

If both minors are in play, over 4C then 4D = RKC clubs, 4H=RKC diamonds. If hearts are in play, then 4♥ natural)

1♦ 3N 4♣ 4♦ = RKC for clubs (4N would be signoff)

1♦ 3N 4♣ 4♥ = RKC for diamonds

Auctions after 1N or 2N

1N 2♦ 3♥ 4♠ - RKC hearts after super accept sets trumps

1N 4♦ 4♥ 4♠ - Texas sets trumps. 4♠ kickback

1N 2♠ 2N 4♦ - 2♠ transfer to clubs, 2N=like clubs, 4♦=RKC for clubs

1N 2N 3♣ 4♥ - 2N transfer to diamonds, 3♣=like diamonds, 4♥=RKC for diamonds

1N 2♦ 2♥ 3♠ 4♠ - 3♠ splinter, 4♠ RKC for hearts

2N 4♥ 4N - I play Texas over 2N is slamish rather than using Jacoby.. opener can keycard for spades in that case.

2N 3♥ 3♠ 4♥ 4N - Others play that bidding twice is slamish... Same keycard. This is not opener overriding responder.

Preemptive auctions

3♣ 4♦ = RKC clubs. 3♦ would be forcing, 4♣ preemptive, and 4N Blackwood

3any 4♣ 4any 4N - RKC. If you want straight Blackwood, bid it directly. eg: 3♦ 4♣ 4♦ 4N - RKC for diamonds

2any 4♣ = PRKC (0,1 without, 1 with, 2 without, 2 with)

Regular Blackwood (0-4, 1,2,3)

1any 4N

2any 4N

3any 4N

4N - Specific ace ask (5C = none, 5N=ace of clubs) After none, 5a=to play. After 1 ace shown, 5a=asks that ace. (No/Yes steps)

Not RKC

1N 2♦ 2♥ 4♠ - Does not exist. Use Texas if you know you want RKC. No "slow 2♥ then RKC auctions please."

2N 3♥ 3♠ 4N - Quantitative

Gerber - Always a jump. Directly over 1N or 2N, or after 1N 2♣ 2a

1N 2♣ 2♥ 4N = Quantitative without fit (4♠ would be RKC)

1N 2♣ 2♠ 4N = Quantitative without fit (Special case, if you have way to set spades and force, do it, if not, use 4♥ as RKC. I use 3♥ and 4♦ as artificial spade raises. (3♥ shortness somewhere, 4♦ balanced with fit, 4♥ RKC).

3♦ 4♥ - Natural

1♦ (X) 4♥ - Natural

1♥ (X) 4♠ - Natural

Reverse Flannery RKC sequences - Applies if you play reverse Flannery only

1♣ 2♠ 2N 3♣ 3♥ 4♥ 4♠ - 2♠ - 5-4M invitational 2N game forcing ask. 3♥ sets trumps 4♥ natural 4♠ RKC

1♦ 2♠ 2N 3♥ 3♠ 4N - RKC for spades (responder showed 5+ spades, 5 hearts with 3♥. 3♠ sets trumps)

1♦ 2♠ 2N 3♥ - 3♠ sets spades, 4♣ sets hearts. Set trump before RKC

1♣ 2♠ 2N 3♠ 4N - RKC for spades, 4♦ sets hearts (other minor). No bid sets spades, so 4N is spades.

Set trumps otherwise Jump is RKC

1♥ 2♦ 2♥ 2!n 3♦ 4♥ - RKC diamonds

1♥ 2♦ 3♦ 4♥ - RKC diamonds. Bid 3♥ to set hearts. Never fast arrival on double fit hands.

1♥ 2♦ 3♦ 3♥ 4♠ - 3♥ set hearts as trump. 4♠ is RKC. Can no longer keycard for diamonds.

1♥ 2♦ 3♦ 3♠ 4♥ - Natural. Hearts are a playable spot and we did not jump. 3♠ was trying to get to 3N

1♥ 2♦ 3♦ 3♠ 4♦ - Natural, non-forcing. We tried to get to 3N and failed. 4♥ over this is offer.

1♦ 2♣ 3♣ 4♦ - RKC for clubs

1♦ 2♣ 3♣ 3♦ 4minor - sets trump.

1♦ 1♥ 2♦ 4♥ - Natural

1♦ 1♥ 2♦ 2♠ - Artificial game force. You can next set trumps and be forcing.

1♦ 1♥ 2♦ 2♠ 2N 3♦ 4♥ - RKC for diamonds

RKC in Competition

1♣ (4♠) 4N - Takeout

(4♥) 4N - Takeout

1♥ (4♠) 4N - RKC for hearts

1♠ 4♦ 4N - RKC for spades

(2♥) 4N - Blackwood not RKC since no suit

(2♥) X (P) 2N (P) 3♦ (P) 4♥ - 2N asks better minor 4♥ RKC for diamonds

1♠ (2♣) 4N - RKC spades

1♥ (2♣) 4N - RKC hearts. 4♠ would be natural

1♥ (P) 1♠ (2♣) 2♥ (4♣) 4♠ (P) 4N - RKC for spades

1♥ (P) 1♠ (2♣) 2♦ (4♣) 4♠ (P) 4N - RKC for spades

1N (2♠) 2N (P) 3♦ (p) 4♥ - 2N asks better minor. 3♦ shows it. 4♥ - RKC for diamonds

1N (2♠) 2N (P) 3♣ (p) 4♦ - 2N asks better minor. 3♣ shows it. 4♦ - RKC for clubs

(2♠) X (p) 2N (P) 3♦ (p) 4♥ - 2N asks better minor. 3♦ shows it. 4♥ - RKC for diamonds

Additional kickback sequences added based on reader feedback/questions..

Still soliciting feedback on this sequence

4♥ 4♠ - Natural

4♥ 4N - RKC for Hearts

Ideas from comments section:

After 0314 RKC Response for major, there are often two steps below 5 of trump suit, 1st step is Q asks, 2nd step asks clarification on 0 vs 3 keycards. - Thanks Kit for this idea.

If trump is Diamonds, and both 4N and 5♣ are available after the ace ask, 5♣ asks for the Q, and 4N is signoff.

Expert topics

Exclusion - Your partner opens 1♠ and you have a heart void and want to bid keycard. Standard exclusion is to jump to 5♥. Sadly, this uses a lot of space. Our method is to splinter to show shortness. If we want to then keycard, we can do so, and if we want to exclusion keycard, we RKC + 1.

1♥ 4♦ 4♥ 4♠ - Kickback RKC. Respond normally.

1♥ 4♦ 4♥ 4N - RKC+1 - Exclusion RKC. Respond per normal but do not count the ace of diamonds.

Note that I am 2 steps lower than normal exclusion keycard, and I can use those steps to good purpose. I also don't have to worry about partner leaving me in a void after 1♥ 5♦.

Inclusion RKC - You showed shortness, and partner decides to keycard. Normal kickback, I ignore the void. RKC+1 = Inclusion, partner please add 1 to your count if you have a void. Still only 5 possible keycards, since ace and void are mutually exclusive. Partner will not know if singleton ace or void.

1♥ 4♦ 4♠ = RKC, Don't tell me about your void (perhaps I have the ace of diamonds)

1♥ 4♦ 4N = RKC+1, Please add one to your keycard count if you are void.

When can you use RKC+1 as inclusion and exclusion? Only when you have explicitly shown shortness and we know what trump is. Splinters, singleton showing bids over Jacoby, short suit

game/slam tries, or any other time you have shown a singleton or void. It does not apply when a singleton is inferred because you bid 3 suits.

Exclusion is by the hand that showed shortness

Inclusion is by the partner of the hand that showed shortness

Wait until you are comfortable with kickback before adding this complexity. Don't show your voids in response to standard RKC.

Optional keycard - If someone has a good writeup on this, please share. Roy and Sabine use optional keycard extensively over their relay systems. Essentially they start game forcing relays with 1N, and by the 3 level they have shown pattern but not strength. Next step is optional keycard in longest suit, step+1 is optional keycard in 2nd longest suit, etc. The first step after optional keycard = "minimum range" Then they can ask again.

I play optional keycard in a very limited number of auctions, though am looking for more.

1N 3♠ 4♣ - 3♠ shows 5-5 game force, but does not have to be slam try. 4♣ optional keycard for clubs over that.

1N 3♥ 4♦ - Short spades, 5-4 minors, 4♦ optional keycard for diamonds

What are your suggestions?