

Bidding Slams with a trump suit

In the last article we looked at bidding slams on balanced hands. These are easier to manage as no trump bidding gives quite precise point counts to various bids. We go for a small slam when we have 33+ points and a grand slam when we have 37+ points. When we have 33 points, there are only seven in the opposition hands, so we cannot be missing two aces. With 37, the opposition have only three points, so we cannot be missing one ace.

When bidding suits the partnership values are based on long suits and shortages as much as high card values. After all, holding thirteen spades guarantees all thirteen tricks if spades are trumps, but you only have ten points. Whilst we may not need 33 points, we don't want our opponents to cash two aces against our slam. We can avoid this by using an ace asking convention. Experienced players may use something complicated called Key Card Blackwood or Gerber, but Standard English strongly recommends that you use the popular Blackwood convention. In this a bid of 4NT asks partner how many aces they hold. The responses are coded:

5♣ No aces or four aces.

5♦ One ace

5♥ Two aces

5♠ Three aces

You may wonder if you will be able to tell the difference between none and four aces. Don't worry, if you sign off after a 5♣ response and partner has four aces he will bid on to slam. After asking for aces, a bid of 5NT **guarantees that our side holds all the aces** and asks for kings. The same step responses are used at the six level but partner is allowed to jump to seven in the agreed suit, knowing that all the aces are held.

You should only use Blackwood when you need to know the answer since the best way of getting to a slam is just to bid six.

The class practiced bidding slams and then playing them to check they had bid a good contract.

1 ♠ K Q J 10 3 What would you bid if partner opened 1♠? Jean thought for ages before
♥ A K Q J 10 4 bidding 4NT. When Gill bid 5♦ she knew there was an ace missing and bid
♦ A 6♠. If Gill had bid 5♥ she could have jumped to 7♠ or even 7NT. The play
♣ 2 was easy when partner held ♠A 9 7 6 5 ♥3 2 ♦K Q J 4 ♣K 5

2 ♠ A 8 When Joe raised Lisa's 1♥ opening to 4♥, she thought the hand looked
♥ A Q J 9 6 good. So she tried 4NT and bid 6♥ when Joe showed two aces with 5♦.
♦ K Q 9 8 5 She made 12 tricks as Joe held ♠Q J 8 ♥K 10 5 4 3 ♦J 2 ♣A J 9. After
♣ 4 driving out ♦A Joe's two spades were thrown on the winning diamonds.

3 ♠ A Peter realised this was a powerful hand, so when Margaret raised 1♥ to 4♥ he
♥ A Q 7 5 4 2 just bid 6♥, hoping for the best. Blackwood is no use as it is the right cards that
♦ K J 10 8 5 3 are needed, not aces. Margaret did well bidding 4♥ with ♠Q 6 3 ♥K 10 9 8 3
♣ – ♦4 ♣A J 10 5, adding value for the extra trump and her singleton diamond.

When partner makes a jump shift response to an opening bid, it should show 16+ points and often leads to a slam. My students got the next hand wrong because opener failed to appreciate the value of their hand. Whilst the hand was only twelve points, it got better when partner forced with 3♦ and then raised spades.

4 ♠ A K 8 6 5 3 After a 3♦ response to 1♠, partner raised 3♠ rebid to 4♠. Everybody passed.
♥ 2 But this hand is far too good to pass 4♠. Use Blackwood and bid 6♠ if
♦ Q 8 7 partner shows two aces. Partner had ♠Q J 2 ♥A 7 3 ♦A K J 9 5 3 ♣2. 6♠
♣ K 9 6 loses a club if they are led, or makes 13 tricks otherwise.

Make the other hand dealer and the hand would be bid quite differently.

- 5 ♠ A K 8 6 5 3 Partner opens 1♦ and rebids 3♦ over your 1♠ response, what would you do?
♥ 2 You could bid a forcing 3♠ over 3♦ and carry on with Blackwood over
♦ Q 8 7 partner's raise to 4♠. Or if you are worried partner might pass 3♠, you could
♣ K 9 6 bid Blackwood and go to 6♦ over a 5♥ response.

Next time I will tell you about cue bidding, another way to find out about controls.