

Bidding No Trump Slams

Most of my students are very reluctant to proceed beyond game when they are bidding. They regard slams as beyond them, something for the experts. But you don't have to use a lot of gadgets and complicated bidding to bid a slam, when you think you have the values, just bid it. With balanced hands we recognise a slam hand using the point count. This is easier to judge than suit slams, which we will look at next time.

Let's be clear why we bid slams – it is because there is a big bonus when they make. Twelve tricks in a non-vulnerable 3NT scores 490, whilst bidding and making 6NT scores 990. The table summarises what you need to know.

No trump slams	Tricks	Non-Vul score	Vul score	High card points
Small slam	12	990	1520	At least 33-34
Grand slam	13	1440	2220	37 or more

These hands come from a recent slam practice session.

- ♠ A Q J Lucy opened 1NT. After carefully counting her 22 points, Doreen knew they had at least 34 and so, looking very worried, she bid 6NT. Partner only had 12 points, but the contract made easily, losing only one trick to ♦A
- ♥ A Q 8
- ♦ K J 7 3
- ♣ K Q 5 ♠K 6 4 2 ♥K 9 5 ♦Q 8 ♣A 9 8 7
- 2 ♠ A K Q Robert looked quite confident when he saw he had 25 points. He consulted the crib sheet and then raised partner's 1NT to 7NT. He knew he would not have to play the hand! In fact Joe could count three tricks in each of spades, hearts and diamonds and four in clubs as he held ♠9 6 4 2 ♥K 10 9 ♦A 8 ♣A J 8 7
- ♥ A Q 8
- ♦ K Q 7 3
- ♣ K Q 5
- 3 ♠ A Q 4 John, who is always cautious, particularly when his wife is playing the hand bid 3NT, he couldn't be sure of 33+ points! Peter wasn't sure either but bid 6NT, having more faith in his wife's play. The best bid is neither of these but 4NT asking if partner has extras – just like a 2NT bid over 1NT.
- ♥ A Q 8
- ♦ K J 7 3
- ♣ K J 5

With ♠K 10 4 2 ♥K 9 5 ♦Q 8 ♣A 9 8 7 partner would pass. 4NT. Twelve tricks can always be made, as Margaret showed, by playing a club to the jack, which held. She made four spade, three hearts, two diamonds and three club tricks. If you bid a slam, it won't always be laydown any more than 3NT is. Over 1NT, the 4NT bid is not Blackwood. It is a quantitative bid, asking partner to bid 6NT with 13 or 14. With a combined 33 points we cannot be missing two aces, so there is no need to check up on them.

- 4 ♠ A 9 4 I didn't catch anyone out with this hand. They all knew that 18 points was not enough to try for slam. Even if partner has 14, it only comes to 32, just bid 3NT.
- ♥ A Q 8
- ♦ K J 7 3
- ♣ K J 5

For the second half, I kept the four hands above, but changed all the 1NT openers to a 1♣ opening bid. How should you respond to 1♣? Despite all those points, I would respond 1♦, to hear partner's next bid. There is no need to rush the bidding. Remember 1♦ is 100% forcing.

After 1♣ – 1♦, partner rebids 2♣. What now? Partner probably has six clubs and about 12-14 points, since no other suit was bid and with five clubs 1NT would be opened. If the opening were stronger partner would rebid 3♣ or 1NT. I recommend that you simply bid a slam when you think your side has enough points to make one. The slam is best bid in no trumps with the lead coming up to your strong hand. Bid 6NT with hand 1, 7NT with hand 2 (you could have bid that the round before as you are so good). On hand 3 I bid 6NT. For me 3NT would be enough on

hand four, as I am facing a minimum opener. Leave the difficult slams to the clever players and just enjoy bidding the easy ones, as my students did.