

Bidding Slams using Cue Bidding

After looking at how to bid slams using the point count and how to avoid bad slams by using Blackwood, I decided my students were ready to learn a third tool in the slam hunt – cue bidding. Look at these deals I gave them in a recent practice session.

- 1 ♠ A Q J 7 3 2 Some people might open 2♠ but with a low point count and little
♥ 2 defence, 1♠ is enough. Surprisingly partner raises straight to 4♠,
♦ K Q J 7 3 showing at least 12 HCP or the equivalent in playing strength. This could
♣ 2 well be a slam hand, should you make a try?

Here Blackwood works well. If partner replies 5♦, you sign off in 5♠, but over 5♥ you can bid 6♠. You hope partner has ♠K for her raise to game, if she doesn't you may need a winning spade finesse. Now change the hand very slightly.

- 2 ♠ A Q J 7 3 2 It still goes 1♠ raised to 4♠. If you try Blackwood, partner shows one
♥ 3 ace. How can you tell if it is a useful heart or diamond ace, or a waste
♦ K Q J 7 3 2 paper ♣A? Blackwood really doesn't help on this deal but cue bids do.
♣ –

The answer is to bid 5♣, showing a first round control **in** clubs. You are telling partner that if opponents lead a club, you can win the first club trick. In return you would like partner to show a first round control if they hold one. **Whenever partner replies either 5♦ showing the diamond ace or a diamond void, or 5♥ showing the ♥A or a heart void and denying the ♦A, you can happily bid the slam.** If partner has ♣A, she will realise that it is unlikely to be a useful value since you must have a void in clubs.

- 3 ♠ A K Q 10 3 Peter opened 2♠ and Margaret raised to 3♠, showing at least three or
♥ – more spades, one or more aces and other useful values. 3♠ is forcing to
♦ K Q J 3 2 game and stronger than bidding 4♠ directly. Blackwood is this couple's
♣ A 4 2 favourite convention but it won't help here.

Peter cue bid 4♣ and when Margaret bid 4♦, he could cue bid 4♥. If Margaret had nothing else to show she could sign off in 4♠, but on this deal she continued with 5♣. As first round club control has been shown, 5♣ is a second round control. That could **either be** a singleton or it could be the ♣K. Either way it is very good news. Peter bid 7♠ and was pleased when Margaret put down ♠J 9 6 4 ♥K 8 6 5 4 ♦A 9 7 ♣7. A very well bid hand, with only the very slightest prompting from me!

- 4 ♠ J 3 Linda opened 1♥ and Brenda responded 2♠ (a game force, with good
♥ A K 9 8 7 spades and 16+ points). Linda rebid 3♣ and Brenda bid 3♥. Clearly with
♦ Q 4 17 HCP, a slam is very likely, but how should the bidding proceed?
♣ A K 8 3

With hearts agreed, a 4♣ bid must be a cue bid. Brenda bid 4♠, showing ♠A. Linda's worry was that, as partner could not bid 4♦, there would be two diamonds losers. The auction strongly suggests that opponents lead diamonds, so Linda signed off in 5♥. However, if Linda had cue bid again with 5♣, showing second round control, her partner could bid 5♦, a second round control as first round has already been denied. Now 6♥ is going to make. Brenda put down ♠A K Q 7 4 ♥Q J 10 ♦K 7 3 ♣Q 6. Opponents cashed their ♦A but that was it.

- 5 ♠ Q 6 3 Pat heard her husband open 1♥. This 9 HCP hand is far too good for 2♥,
♥ Q J 8 5 3 so she correctly bid 3♥. Jack bid 3♠, which must be a cue bid, as they
♦ A 9 8 7 cannot stop below game. Pat bid 4♦ and now Jack bid 4♥. Was there any
♣ 2 Pat could do but pass?

Pass is not unreasonable, but 5♣ is better. It must show second round control, as she had not bid 4♣ over 3♠. Surely it is what partner wants to hear. Holding ♠A K J 3 ♥A K 7 6 4 2 ♦– ♣9 6 4, Jack could jump to 6♥ and only lose a trick to the ♣A.

Just one ~~point~~ final point – if Pat had bid 2♥ initially and Jack had rebid 2♠, that would not be a cue bid but a try for game, asking for help in spades.

So the key points about cue bidding are:

- ❑ We have explicitly agreed a trump suit and we are definitely going to game.
- ❑ To cue bid always implies some interest in slam. It is not just passing the time of day.
- ❑ An initial cue bid shows a first round control, either an ace or a void.
- ❑ To bypass a suit when cue bidding denies first round control in that suit.
- ❑ Having shown or denied a first round control, a subsequent cue bid shows second round control, either a king or a singleton.