

Cue Bidding to Slam

In my last article, I wrote about slam bidding. I said that for a slam to be a good:-

We must not have two trump losers
 We must be able to make 12 tricks
 We won't lose the first two tricks to two aces or an AK in a side suit.

I wrote about Blackwood as a tool for bidding slams. Blackwood is great if all you want to know is whether the combined hands have two aces missing. But aces are not the only way of stopping opponents cashing tricks – voids and singletons can do that too. Look carefully at the pair of hands below. How many tricks do you think can be made playing in hearts? Can you see that despite having only two aces, thirteen tricks could be made whatever the defenders lead? Put out the cards and see how the hand will play in hearts.

♠ Q 10 9 6 2	♠ –	You	Partner
♥ A 9 7 6 4	♥ K Q J 10 2		1♥
♦ –	♦ K 5 3	3♥	?
♣ J 5 3	♣ A K Q 10 2		

Your hand may only have seven points, but when partner opens 1♥, your hand has greatly improved. You have seven losers using the Losing Trick Count and could bid 4♥ but, with so few high cards, you might feel happier bidding just 3♥.

After your 3♥ raise, partner has a good shapely hand too and would expect slam to make PROVIDED there are not two aces to lose. Suppose partner bids 4NT. Your reply of 5♦, showing one ace, indicates that there are two aces missing, but it won't say which two they are. Partner cannot tell if you hold the ♠A, which would be no use, or the ♥A or ♦A – either would be enough for slam to make. But there is a way that partner can find out about your controls. It's called **Cue Bidding**.

After a trump suit has been agreed and the partnership is definitely going to game, a cue bid can be made in a new suit. It shows that the defenders cannot cash the first trick in this suit, since a cue bid shows either an ace or a void in the cue bid suit. A cue bid can only be made at the 3♠ level or higher – below 3♠ the partnership will still be looking for the best game.

Cue Bidding Guidelines

- Cue bids can only be made when your side has an agreed trump suit. Our auction with 1♥ raised to 3♥, has clearly agreed hearts.
- The partnership must be going to game. After your 3♥ raise, any bid is certain to take us to game.
- A cue bid is a positive slam try. We must not make a slam try unless we mean it.
- The first cue bid in a suit shows a first round control, that is either an ace or a void.
- A second cue bid in the same suit shows second round control, either a singleton or a king.
- Responder cue bids a first round control, in response to opener's cue bid. Responder's cue bid is obligatory below game, but need not be made above game if responder's hand is a minimum.

Here are some examples of cue bidding that I gave to my students.

♠ A K 9 7 3	♠ J 10 6 5	Mary	John
♥ 2	♥ K Q 5 4	1♠	3♠
♦ K 3	♦ Q J 7	4♣	4♣
♣ A K Q 6 4	♣ J 7	pass	

With eight losers John raised his wife's opening 1♠ to 3♠. Mary wanted to bid 4NT to check on aces. But as we were learning cue bids she tried 4♣, hoping John could bid 4♦ or 4♥. When all he could say was 4♣, she knew to pass. Mary had done well as North had ♠ Q 8 2 and both two red aces. 5♠ would have gone one down.

♠ A K 8 7 3	♠ Q 10 6 5	West	East
♥ 2	♥ A Q 5	1♠	3♠
♦ K Q	♦ 8 7	4♣	5♣
♣ A K 9 6 4	♣ Q J 7 5	5♣	

I won't name the two whose auction went astray. When West cue bid 4♣, East raised to 5♣ to show four clubs. This was wrong – when we have found a fit in spades that suit is agreed as trumps, we don't need to find another suit to play in! East should cue bid 4♥ over 4♣ and West can bid 6♠, knowing there is only ♦A to lose.

♠ A K 9 7 3	♠ J 10 6 5 3	Jean	Gill
♥ 2	♥ A 7 5	1♠	3♠
♦ K 3	♦ A 9 7	4♣	4♦
♣ A K Q 6 4	♣ J 7	4♣	5♥
		6♣	

When Gill was worth a raise to 3♠, Jean reluctantly tried 4♣ as we were learning cue bids. Gill bid 4♦. That should have been enough to drive Jean to slam, but she is a cautious player and signed off in 4♣, Gill knew that a cue bid had to be a genuine try for slam so she showed her other ace with 5♥. Even Jean had to bid 6♣ after that!

♠ 8 6 5 3	♠ A K Q 7 4	Margaret	Peter
♥ A 4	♥ K Q J 10 2		2♣
♦ J 5 3	♦ –	2♦	2♠
♣ 8 7 5 4	♣ A K Q	3♠	4♣
		4♥	7♠

With a huge hand Peter opened 2♣. 2♦ was a negative response, but the 2♠ rebid was still game forcing. Margaret raised to 3♠ (to bid 4♠ would have been a weaker response). 4♣ and 4♥ were cue bids and Peter just bid 7♠.

♠ A Q 5 3	♠ K J 9 8 2	Robin	Guy
♥ –	♥ 9 7 3	1♦	1♠
♦ K Q 9 8 5 3	♦ A 2	3♠	4♣
♣ K 7 3	♣ A 4 2	4♥	5♦
		6♠	

When Robin raised to 3♠ Guy's hand looked good. 4♣ got a useful 4♥ reply, so Eddie showed his ♦A. Robin could now jump to 6♠, knowing Guy had the right controls. In fact 7♠ makes and can be bid, but for the moment don't worry about bidding grand slams.

♠ A Q 5 3	♠ K J 9 8 2	Expert	Sandra
♥ –	♥ 9 7 3	1♦	1♠
♦ K Q 9 8 5 3	♦ A 2	3♠	4♣
♣ K 7 3	♣ A 4 2	4♥	5♦
		5♥	6♠
		7♠	

Here is the same deal, with me bidding the hand with an expert partner. It shows how to get to the grand slam. When I could jump to 6♠ my partner knew I had good trumps and he could count 13 tricks.

Going back to our first hand:

♠ Q 10 9 6 2	♠ –	You	Partner
♥ A 9 7 6 4	♥ K Q J 10 2		1♥
♦ –	♦ K 5 3	3♥	3♠
♣ J 5 3	♣ A K Q 10 2	4♦	6♥

Partner's 3♠ shows first round control of spades.

Your 4♦ denies a first round club control but shows first round diamond control. Knowing that, partner controls diamonds, you might just jump to 6♥.

Bidding 6♥ is good but if you look carefully you will see that all thirteen tricks can be made. But just be pleased with bidding 6♥, a slam that makes, with only 25 HCP between the two hands.