Warrington Bridge Club

Intermediate- Lesson 34

Slam Bidding – part 2

In Lesson 33, we looked at slams where you and partner have lots of points, and balanced(-ish) hands. Those are typically slams in NT.

In this lesson, we are going to look at the other common type of slam, where you have a shapely hand and a fit in at least one very good suit. You don't generally need quite so many high card points, as you will be relying on making extra trump tricks, often by ruffing.

But before we do, let's have a short recap on the previous lesson.

We said that to make a slam in NT, with balanced hands, there's a useful **RULE OF THUMB.** The number of high card points you need to hold between you to make

Small slam 6NT = **33**

Grand Slam 7NT = **37**

Note: this is not a guarantee – sometimes you can make a slam with one or two fewer, and sometimes a slam will fail even with the requisite number of points. But it works most of the time, and that's what's important.

We also looked at a very useful bid, when your partner has shown their point count within a small range, for example

12-14 for a 1NT opener
15-16 when they rebid 1NT after having opened 1-of-a-suit
20-22 for a 2NT opener

and you think slam will be on if they are upper end of their range, but not if they're bottom of their range.

This is the **QUANTITATIVE NT** BID.

For example: 2NT – 4NT.

Here the 4NT response is saying: "If your 2NT is minimum, pass. If you have something better than minimum, please bid 6NT"

But we know that a 4NT bid is also Blackwood, asking for aces, and we are going to come on to talk about that in this lesson.

How will you know whether a 4NT bid is QUANTITATIVE, or ACE-ASKING?

If your side is bidding NT, and the previous bid by your side is in NT (or a conventional suit bid), then 4NT is quantitative.

A conventional suit bid is one that doesn't relate to the suit being bid, such as an opening NT bid followed by a Stayman sequence, eg
1NT- 2♣ (Stayman- looking for a major suit fit) – 2♦ (I don't have more than 3 cards in either major) -4NT
Here, we are obviously interested in playing in NT, because the 2♦ bid denied a major suit fit, 2♣ wasn't saying anything about clubs, and 2♦ wasn't saying anything about diamonds. Here we can tell that the 4NT is QUANTITATIVE – we haven't found a suit fit, and we clearly aren't exploring for a slam in clubs or diamonds!

So, if 4NT is quantitative in a NT auction, how do we ask for aces in a NT auction, if we need to know?

The answer is called **Gerber**, a bid of 4♣

The response is simply a count, depending on how many aces you hold:

4♦ = 0 or 4 aces
4♥ = 1 ace
4♠ = 2 aces
4NT = 3 aces

The enquirer, the person who has bid the Gerber 4♣, will sign off in the requisite number of NT, or can ask for kings by bidding 5♣.

Have a look at these auctions (opposition passing throughout):

1. 1NT- 4♣: the 4♣ bid is Gerber, asking for aces. Opener must give her ace count.

2. 1NT- 4NT: the 4NT bid is quantitative. Opener must pass or bid 6NT.

3. 1♦- 1♠ - 2♥ – 3NT – 4♣: the 4♣ bid is Gerber, asking for aces. Responder must give her ace count.

4. 1NT – 2♣ (Stayman) – 2♦ - 4♣: the 4♣ bid is Gerber, asking for aces. Opener must give her ace count.

5. 1NT – 2♣ (Stayman) – 2♦ - 4NT: the 4NT bid is Quantitative. Opener must pass or bid 6NT.

Suit slams.

How might we recognise we might have a suit slam available?

Sometimes, you'll have a very strong hand, with both high card points and shape (a long strong suit, and shortages in other suits). Partner supports your suit, and you are immediately thinking "slam".

But sometimes, you'll have a good but not terrific hand, with some shape, and partner supports your suit, or partner bids a suit which you love.

Back in Lesson 17 we looked at LOSING TRICK COUNT - a great way of getting a handle on the trick-taking potential of your hand and partner's, together, in a suit contract.

Remember we used the mnemonic **UFO:**

U: unbalanced hand
F: we have a fit (8 or more cards in a suit, between us)
O: we are the opening side

Say partner opens 1♠, and you hold

♠Q J 10 2 ♥ 6 ♦A K 7 6 2 ♣A Q 5

You are the opening side, you have a fit in spades, you're unbalanced, and have a 5-loser hand. If you bid spades here, it will be a limit bid. If you bid 4♠, partner might well pass, and you could miss slam. You count partner with no worse than 7 losers. Your 5 makes 12, and 18-12 = 6. So even if partner doesn't have anything beyond an ordinary opening hand, you might have 6♠.
Bidding straight to 6♠ looks dodgy- your side might be missing the ♥A and the ♠A, or one ace plus the ♠K on your right, for example, and have two unavoidable losers.
What to do?

This is where we need an ace-asking bid in a suit contract.
What I'm going to recommend to you is **Roman Key Card Blackwood** (RKCB).

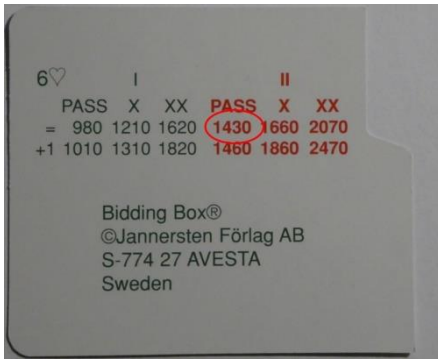
Why “Key Card”?
Because in suit slams, we are just as interested in the K of trumps as we are in the 4 aces. We deem there to be 5 “aces” or “key cards”: the 4 regular aces plus the K of trumps.
Clearly therefore we need to know what the trump suit is for a RKCB bid to be meaningful!

The ace-asking enquiry is 4NT.
Why ***Roman*** Key Card? Just as ordinary Blackwood is obsolete, having been replaced in modern bidding by the more accurate Key Card Blackwood, so Key Card Blackwood has been superseded by the even more accurate Roman Key Card Blackwood, which also ***in some circumstances*** considers the Q of trumps.

I thoroughly recommend you don’t bother using regular Blackwood or ordinary Key Card Blackwood. Go straight for the best from the outset! It isn’t really any more difficult and gives better results.

Here’s how it works: in response to a 4NT Roman Key Card Blackwood bid, I’m going to suggest you use “1430” responses. It’s a great way to remember how it works, as 1430 is the score you get for bidding and making a small slam (in 6♥ or 6♠) when you're vulnerable.

Remember the back of the bidding cards in bidding boxes? Here’s the back of the 6♥ card.



So our responses to a 4NT RKCB enquiry are based on “1430”
Bid the first bid up for 1 or 4, and the next bid up for 3 or 0. ie 1-4…..3-0

The full set of responses is
5♣ – I hold 1 or 4 of the 5 key cards
5♦ – I hold 3 or 0 of the 5 key cards
5♥ – I hold 2 of the 5 key cards without the Q of trumps
5♠ – I hold 2 of the 5 key cards and the Q of trumps

The “1430” mnemonic makes it easy to remember.

Note that we ***only*** give information about the Q of trumps in the situation where we hold 2 of the 5 “aces” – quite a common circumstance. If we hold other than 2, our response to the RKCB 4NT enquiry does not say anything about the Q of trumps.

Let’s now go back to our example:
Partner opens 1♠, and you hold this lovely 5-loser hand
♠Q J 10 2 ♥ 6 ♦A K 7 6 2 ♣A Q 5
And the question was, what to do?
We don’t want to bid 4♠, as partner will probably pass, and we might miss slam.

(As you get more advanced in bridge, you will learn about Splinter bids, and Jacoby 2NT, perfect for this sort of situation. However, those are not covered in this series of lessons – they are for the Advanced series)

How then about bidding 2♦? Opener is forced to bid again, so we could then make a slam enquiry. But we have a singleton heart, and partner might well rebid 2♥. If we then bid 4NT, the assumed trump suit is hearts, and we are enquiring for the 4 aces and the ♥K. Not very useful, opposite our singleton!

Opener has at least 4 spades, so we know we have at least an 8-card major suit fit, the “holy grail”. And we are very interested in the ♠K.

Bid 4NT straight away!!

Our hand is ♠Q J 10 2 ♥6 ♦A K 7 6 2 ♣A Q 5
We hold two of the 5 Key cards – the ♦A and ♣A (and also the Q of trumps).
We want to know how many of the remaining 3 key cards partner holds. Our plan if she has only one of the remaining key cards is to end the bidding with 5♠. If she has two, we are missing 1 key card, and will bid 6♠.

But what if she bids 5♦? She is showing 0 or 3.
Is it possible that partner opened 1 spade without the A, K, and 10 of spades, and without the ♥A? It is just possible to construct such a hand, but most unlikely, and bridge is a game of probabilities. We take 5♦ as showing 3 key cards and might decide to bid 5NT to ask for kings.

In this case, here is partner's hand
♠A 9 8 6 3 ♥ A J 5 3 ♦3 ♣K 10 6
a very ordinary 12-point 1♠ opener, with 7 losers. She will reply 5♥ to your 4NT enquiry, showing two of the 5 key cards without the Q of trumps (♠Q)

When it sits opposite our 5-loser hand, we count one missing key card – it doesn't matter whether it's the ♠A, the ♠K, or the ♥A that is missing. Here it's the ♠K, ie the K of trumps.

Here is your hand:
♠Q J 10 2 ♥6 ♦A K 7 6 2 ♣A Q 5
You can see that 6♠ is going to make almost every day of the week, with a couple of heart ruffs in the short trump hand. You only have 28 points between you- it was counting your losers using Losing Trick Count, opposite an expected no worse than 7 losers from partner, that alerted you to the possibility!

Examples
Let's now look at some examples.
Partner has opened 1♥, your RH opponent has passed, and it's you to bid.
Here are three possible hands. What's your bid?

1. ♠2 ♥ Q J 10 3 2 ♦8 7 6 2 ♣A Q 5

   Only 9 points, but LTC = 7 losers. Bid 4♥!

2. ♠A Q 5 ♥ Q J 10 3 2 ♦A K 6 2 ♣ 5

   16HCP, 5 losers, at least a 9-card heart fit. Bid 4NT

3. ♠A Q J 5 4 ♥ Q J 2 ♦A K 6 2 ♣ 5

   Here you have 17HCP, but no guaranteed fit in hearts. Bid 1♠. If partner repeats hearts, or supports spades, you do have a fit, and with your 5-loser hand, bid 4NT. However, if partner bids 2♣, bid 3NT – to play.