

Slam bidding

General Approach

The modern approach when you are interested in a slam is to cue bid first- and second-round controls equally and then use Roman Key-Card Blackwood (RKCB) to check that you have sufficient key cards to make a slam.

A cue bid can be a first-round control, namely an ace or void, or a second-round control, namely a king or singleton. We should not cue bid shortage **in partner's main suit** because otherwise they will not know if it is a high-card or shortage: imagine that they hold ♠KQ1095; if they hold the ace of spades, then it is a great holding but if it is a void or singleton it is not.

If we miss a suit, then we do not hold a control in that suit. If partner continues to cue bid, or bids RKCB, then partner guarantees a control in the missed suit.

For example:

West					East
♠ K7 ♥ 43 ♦ AKJ6 ♣ KQJ103		1♣	1♠		♠ AQJ54 ♥ Q2 ♦ Q2 ♣ A873
	reverse	2♦	4♣	game forcing, sets suit	
	cue bid	4♦	4♠	cue bid	
	sign-off, no heart control	5♣			

A second cue bid in a suit shows first and second round in the suit - singleton ace or both ace and king in the suit. Perhaps mention that if you show shortage (by means of a splinter) and then you cuebid the same suit again, that should be a void. (Rare, but helpful to know.)

Cue bidding is particularly valuable when you need controls in a specific suit to bid the slam or you have a void where RKCB will not help you discover if slam is a good proposition.

What RKCB will do is ensure you do not bid the slam missing two key cards.

Roman Key-Card Blackwood (RKCB)

A 4NT bid is normally Roman Key-Card Blackwood (RKCB) asking for the number of key cards, which are the four aces and king of the agreed trump suit. It is also extended to show the queen of the agreed trump suit.

RKCB Responses

If an agreed suit exists, the king of that suit counts as an ace so there are 5 key cards. I will describe 1430 RKCB where the responses are as follows:

Step 1	5♣	1 or 4 key cards
Step 2	5♦	0 or 3 key cards
Step 3	5♥	2 or 5 key cards without key suit queen
Step 4	5♠	2 or 5 key cards with key suit queen
Step 5	5NT	2 or 4 key cards with a useful void
Step 6	6X	1 or 3 key cards and a void in suit bid, if below agreed suit
Step 7	6X	1 or 3 key cards and a void in higher ranking suit, if above the agreed suit

Note that some partnerships swap the 5♣ and 5♦ responses (so they play 3041 RKCB). Obviously five key cards are rare, since the weaker hand would not be invoking RKCB without holding any key cards.

The reason RKCB 1430 is more common than RKCB 3041 is mainly due to bidding slams in the club suit, but most people just stick to the method they learn first as it does not make a significant difference.

Eddie Kantar has written two books on Roman Keycard Blackwood, just the first has 266 pages. He recommends swapping between 3041 and 1430 depending on the auction. **DO NOT DO THIS:** you will just live in a world of confusion. Pick one and stick with it!

RKCB Continuations

The continuation structure is the same after all key-card auctions. The steps are:

1. return to the trump suit = to play
2. first step (excluding trump suit) = asks for trump queen (when not known after a 5♣/5♦ response)
 - ◆ Return to the trump suit to deny the trump queen
 - ◆ If you have the trump queen, show your kings as below
3. second step = asks for kings
 - ◆ Due to the lack of space, rather than show the number of kings we should show specific kings. A suit bid shows that specific king **OR** the other two kings. See examples below.

For regular partnerships only, the following options are what Paul also plays

4. no trump = asks for specific king of suit used for general king ask
5. other suits (lowest level) = specific king ask in that suit
6. other suits (higher level) = if possible then choice of suit

Examples

West					East
♠ AQ1073 ♥ AQJ2 ♦ 4 ♣ KQJ		1♠	3♠		♠ K542 ♥ K87 ♦ J2 ♣ A873
	RKCB	4NT	5♥	Two key cards, no ♠Q	
	Missing one key card	6♠			

West					East
♠ A62 ♥ Q10 ♦ AK106432 ♣ Q		1♦ (3♣)	3♠		♠ KQJ53 ♥ A97 ♦ 87 ♣ A83
	Cue bid agreeing spades	4♣	4♥	Cue bid	
	RKCB	4NT	5♦	0 or 3 key cards	
	Asking for ♠Q	5♥	6♠	I have the queen but no outside kings	

West					East
♠ AQJ2 ♥ AJ1073 ♦ 4 ♣ KQJ		1♥	2NT	Game force with hearts	♠ K54 ♥ K872 ♦ A2 ♣ A873
	RKCB	4NT	5♦	0 or 3 key cards	
	Asking for ♥Q (1st step excl ♥)	5♠	6♥	Denies ♥Q	

West					East
♠ AQJ2 ♥ AJ1073 ♦ 4 ♣ KQJ		1♥	2NT	Game force with hearts	♠ 75 ♥ KQ72 ♦ AK2 ♣ A873
	RKCB	4NT	5♦	0 or 3 key cards	
	Asking for ♥Q (1st step)	5♠	6♦	I have the ♥Q plus EITHER ♦K OR both ♠K and ♣K	
	We are missing the ♠K.	6♥			

West					East
♠ AQJ2 ♥ AQ1073 ♦ 4 ♣ KQJ		1♥	2NT	Game force with hearts	♠ K54 ♥ K872 ♦ AK2 ♣ A73
	RKCB	4NT	5♦	0 or 3 key cards	
	King ask (2nd step)	5NT	6♣	♣K OR both ♠K and ♦K	
	I know which it is	7♥			