

Slam Bidding: When the Auction Starts with 1 of a Major

Lecture by Cheryl Mandala

Ways of Taking Tricks

High Cards: A good rule of thumb is that when both hands are balanced, it takes about 33 HCP to make slam. For example, the hand below has 33 HCP, and will make 6NT if the diamonds are 3-3, or the queen of clubs is onside.

KQJx	Axx
Qxx	AKx
KQxx	Jxx
KJx	Axxx

Long Suits: Another good rule of thumb is to count a 5-card suit as 1 extra HCP, and each card in the suit after that as 2 more HCP. The first hand below makes 6S or 6NT with 32 HCP because of the 5-card spade suit, while the second hand makes 6D with only 30 HCP because of the 6-card diamond suit.

AKJxx	Qxx	Axx	KQxx
Jx	KQxx	AQx	Jxx
Axx	KQx	AKQJxx	xxx
Kxx	Axx	x	Axx

Trumping in Dummy: When you are able to trump losers in dummy, it is possible to make a slam with a much smaller number of HCP. Hands with a 9 card or longer trump fit and good controls (aces and kings) can produce slam with as few as 25 HCP.

AKxxx	QJTxx
x	Axxxx
Axxx	x
AKx	xx

Splinters over 1 of a Major Opening

After an opening bid of 1 of a major, a Splinter is a double-jump in a new suit. It promises 4 or more trumps, a singleton or void in the suit bid, and enough HCP to force to game (at least 10 HCP plus points for shortness). Here are some example auctions:

1H	3S (shortness in spades)
1H	4C (shortness in clubs)
1S	4H (shortness in hearts)

The best hand opener can have: If the opening bidder has 0 HCP but three or four small cards in the splinter suit, slam is a definite possibility. Any slight upgrade of opener's hand above a minimum will usually be enough to produce slam: a sixth trump, a singleton of his own in another suit, or the right queen. For example, if responder has the hand on the left, any of the other three hands opener could have would produce a slam:

Responder	Opener	Opener	Opener
	Sixth Trump	Own Singleton	Right Extra Queen
KJxx	AQxxxx	AQxxx	AQxxx
x	xxx	xxx	xxx
Axxx	Kx	x	Kx
Kxxx	Ax	AQxx	AQx
	24 HCP total	23 HCP total	26 HCP total

The second-best hand opener can have: If the opening bidder has Axx or Axxx in the splinter suit, slam is still a good possibility. Hands similar to those above will need a little more HCP than the ones above to make slam:

Responder	Opener	Opener	Opener
	Sixth Trump	Own Singleton	Extra HCP
KJxx	AQxxxx	AQxxx	AQxxx
x	Axx	Axx	Axx
Axxx	xx	x	Kx
Kxxx	Ax	Axxx	Axx
	25 HCP total	25 HCP total	28 HCP total

The worst hand opener can have: If the opening bidder has honors in the splinter suit that are not the ace, making slam will require significantly extra HCP, though still not as many as it would have if both hands were balanced. Examples:

Responder	Opener	Opener	Opener
	Sixth Trump	Own Singleton	Extra HCP
KJxx	AQxxxx	AQxxx	AQxxx
x	KJx	KJx	KJx
Axxx	Kx	x	Kx
Kxxx	Ax	AQxx	AQx
	28 HCP total	27 HCP total	30 HCP total

Roman Keycard Blackwood (RKC): 1430 Variation

In order to make a slam, it is important that the opponents NOT be able to cash two quick tricks. Therefore, in most cases, the side bidding the slam needs to have at least five of the six following cards:

- The four aces
- The king of trumps
- The queen of trumps

The side bidding a grand slam would need to have all six of those cards.

The four aces and the king of trumps are referred to as “the key cards.” The queen of trumps is handled separately from the other five cards.

Roman Key Card Blackwood (RKC) is a method for finding out how many of those cards your partner has. Once a trump suit has been agreed upon, a bid of 4NT is USUALLY (NOT always, but that’s a topic for another day) asking partner how many of “the key cards” he has. The person who bids 4NT is called “the captain,” because he will make the final decision about where the contract is played. The other partner is called “the responder.”

Most experts these days play the following responses to the 4NT bid:

- 5C = 1 or 4 of the 5 key cards
- 5D = 3 or 0 of the 5 key cards
- 5H = 2 of the 5 key cards WITHOUT the queen of trumps
- 5S = 2 of the 5 key cards WITH the queen of trumps
- 5NT = 2 of the 5 key cards PLUS a useful void
- 6 of a suit below trumps = 1 key card PLUS a void in that suit
- 6 of the trump suit = 1 key card PLUS a void in a suit above trumps

This variation of Roman Key Card is called “1430” because the first response is “1 or 4,” and the second response is “3 or 0.”

RKC Continuations after 4NT and the First Response

If the RKC response is 5H or 5S, the captain will know whether or not his partner has the queen of trumps, but if the response is 5C or 5D, the captain will not know. **If the captain does not hold the queen himself, he can ask for the queen by bidding the next possible bid that isn’t the trump suit.** If 5C was the response, 5D is the queen ask (unless diamonds are trumps, in which case 5D is a sign-off showing not enough key cards for slam, and 5H is the queen ask). If 5D was the response, 5H is the queen ask (unless hearts are trumps, in which case 5H is a sign-off and 5S is the queen ask). We will talk about the responses to the queen ask in a moment.

At any time in the auction, the captain has the option of bidding 5NT, which promises that the partnership has ALL SIX of the important cards, including the queen of trumps, and invites the responder to bid a grand slam. The captain can bid 5NT after the first response if the queen has been shown by the responder or the captain has the queen himself; or he can bid it after he asked for the queen and the responder showed it.

Here are the possible responses to 5NT. Note that they show specific cards (kings) held by the responder, rather than the number of kings the responder has.

- 6 of a suit below trumps = have the king in the suit bid
- 6 of trump suit = no kings in suits below trumps
- 7 of trump suit = "I have my own reasons to think we will make grand slam"

If the responder shows a king below trumps, the captain can ask for another king below trumps as in the following example:

- | | |
|---------------------|---------------------------|
| 1H | 3H |
| 4NT (RKC) | 5C (1 or 4) |
| 5NT (kings?) | 6C (king of clubs) |
| 6D (got diamond K?) | 7H (yes I have diamond K) |

Going back to the queen ask, here are the possible responses:

- 5 of trump suit = no queen of trumps
- 6 of a suit below trumps = queen of trumps PLUS king in suit bid
- 6 of trump suit = queen of trumps but no king below trump suit

Here are some example auctions:

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| 1H | 3H |
| 4NT (RKC) | 5C (1 or 4) |
| 5D (got Q?) | 5H (sign off in trumps, no queen) |
| 1H | 3H |
| 4NT | 5C (1 or 4) |
| 5D (got Q?) | 6H (have queen, but no kings below trumps) |

Jacoby 2NT

We have seen that slams can be made with fewer than 33 HCP when there is a good trump fit, and one partner has a singleton. The Jacoby 2NT convention was designed for when the responder's hand has 4-card trump support but no singleton of their own, to find out if the opening bidder has a singleton. **Over a 1 of a major opening, jumping to 2NT shows 4 or more trumps and a balanced hand (no singletons or voids). If the responder has 4 or more trumps with a singleton or void, he should splinter instead.**

Here are the opener's responses to the 2NT bid:

3C = singleton or void in clubs

3D = singleton or void in diamonds

3 of trump suit = balanced hand with some extra values (maybe 14-16)

3 of other major = singleton or void in other major

3NT = balanced with even more extra values (maybe 17-19)

4 of a new suit = good 5-card suit

4 of trump suit = balanced minimum

When opener shows a singleton, responder should evaluate their holding opposite the singleton, just as the opener would do if responder had splintered:

xxx or xxxx is the best holding responder can have in opener's splinter suit

Axx or Axxx is the second-best holding

Honors that are not the ace are the worst holding

Continuations after Jacoby 2NT and a Shortness Response

There are three possible routes the responder can take after hearing opener's shortness:

If the responder has a very good holding in the shortness suit and some extra values of his own, he can go straight to RKC.

If the responder has a minimum game force and a bad holding in the shortness suit, he should sign off in 4 of the major.

If the responder has something inbetween, he should start by cuebidding an ace.

Cuebidding an ace promises at least some interest in slam, but shows that the responder does not have a good enough hand to just jump to RKC himself.

Following responder's cuebid of an ace, opener now has the same three options the responder just had: If the opener has a very good hand, he can go straight to RKC. If the opener has no extra values, he should sign off in 4 of the trump suit. If opener has something inbetween, he should cuebid his own ace to continue to explore.

Slam Bidding: When the Auction Starts with 1 of a Major Hands Bid in Class (page 1)

1. WEST DEALS

West	East
Axxx	x
KQTxxx	Axxx
x	ATxxx
Kx	Qxx

Suggested Bidding:

West	East
1H	3S (splinter)
4NT (RKC)	5H (2, no queen)
6H	

2. EAST DEALS

West	East
Kxxx	Ax
Axxx	KQJxx
KJxx	Txxx
x	Kx

Suggested Bidding:

West	East
	1H
4C (splinter)	4H

3. WEST DEALS

West	East t
AQJT9	Kxxx
xxx	-----
x	Axxxx
AQJx	Kxxx

Suggested Bidding:

West	East
1S	4H (splinter)
4NT (RKC)	5NT (2 + void)
6C (bid 7 with K)	7S

4. EAST DEALS

West	East
Axxx	KQJxxx
x	xxx
Axx	KQx
Qxxxx	A

Suggested Bidding:

West	East
	1S
4H (splinter)	4NT (RKC)
5H (2, no Q)	6S

Slam Bidding: When the Auction Starts with 1 of a Major Hands Bid in Class (page 2)

5. WEST DEALS

West	East
AQx	KJx
KQTxx	AJ9x
Kxxx	Ax
x	xxxx

Suggested Bidding:

West	East
1H	2NT (Jacoby)
3C (shortness)	3D (control bid)
3S (control bid)	4NT (RKC)
5S (2 + trump Q)	6H

6. EAST DEALS

West	East
AJxx	KQTxx
Axxx	xxx
Kx	AJx
KJx	Qx

Suggested Bidding:

West	East
	1S
2NT (Jacoby)	4S (min, no shortness)

7. WEST DEALS

West	East
AQTxx	KJxx
x	KQxx
Kxxx	xx
Kxx	AQx

Suggested Bidding:

West	East
1S	2NT (Jacoby)
3H (shortness)	4S

8. EAST DEALS

West	East
KJxx	AQxxx
Kxx	Axx
AQJx	xx
Kx	Axx

Suggested Bidding:

West	East
	1S
2NT (Jacoby)	3S (balanced, some extras)
4D (control bid)	4H (control bid)
4NT (RKC)	5D (0 or 3)
5H (Q ask)	6S (have trump Q, no kings)