

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		Pass	1 ♥
Pass	3 ♥	Pass	4 ♥
All pass			

South opens a natural 1H with 5 hearts, 11 high-card points, and 2 length points. North reevaluates their hand now that they know South has 5 hearts: 8 high-card points plus 3 length points for the singleton. That allows them to bid 3H (with simplified bidding). South bids the 4H game try.

West leads a heart to eliminate North/South's trumps (thinking N/S need to ruff). South plans the hand.

There are 2 heart losers plus 4 potential diamond losers. North/South must eliminate 3 diamond losers. Here's where counting winners is also useful – there are only the 4 aces and the king of clubs. Another indicator – both hands have short suits. These are the clues that indicate that ruffing is the tool for this hand. In particular, there are ruffs available in each hand – this is called “cross-ruffing”.

So, South takes the ace of hearts, plays the ace of diamonds and ruffs a diamond. Returning with the king of clubs, South ruffs another diamond. After playing the ace of spades, South ruffs a spade and then ruffs another diamond in dummy. South leads another spade and ruffs. The spades split 5 – 3 or better (80% chance), and the diamonds split 4 – 3 (60%); together that gives about a 50% chance that the cross-ruff works. North made their ten tricks.

Moral: you don't need 26 points for a major game if shortness in both hands allows cross-ruffing.

Slam Bidding – Part 1

I plan to hold a few 15-minute “mini-lessons” on various bridge subjects in coming months at the Olney library. When I'm ready to do so, I'll let the bridge club know, and I'll put the schedule in an upcoming newsletter. In the meantime, I'll preview one of the topics – slam bidding – prior to those sessions.

First, what is “slam bidding”? That term incorporates situations in which a small slam or grand slam may be bid based on the bidding alone as well as “slam explorations” designed to find a possible slam.

There are many tools available for slam bidding, but here are the most common in use by beginners:

- 1) Bids that naturally indicate a slam is available.
- 2) Bids that determine whether the partnership will lose the first two tricks.
- 3) Bids that identify specific “control cards” needed for a slam.

Today we'll focus on item 1). Using the simplified Standard American 5-card Majors approach taught in our beginner's bridge class, there are only five bidding sequences leading directly to a slam.

First, after a 1 NT opening bid (15 – 17 high card points) by partner, bid 6 NT if you have 18+ high card points. Bid 7 NT if you have 22+ high card points.

Second, after 1 NT opening bid by partner, bid 4 NT (this is a “quantitative” bid – invitational) with 16 – 17 high card points. Partner will pass with 15 points and bid 6 NT with 17 points. With 16 points partner must guess – bid 6 NT with good structure (a good 5-card suit, extra 10's and 9's, etc.) and pass otherwise.

Third, the same approach works after a 2 NT opening bid (20 – 21 high card points) by partner, but with your response points lowered by 4 or 5 points. For example, 2NT – pass – 6NT indicates responder has 13 – 14 points (added to 20 – 21 for the 2NT gives 33 – 35 points between the two hands).

The fourth opportunity occurs after the sequence 1 of a suit – pass – 3 NT (13 – 15 high card points). If the opening bidder holds 20+ high card points and has a mostly balanced hand, they may immediately bid 6 NT.

Finally, the fifth slam scenario occurs after the sequence 1 of a suit – pass – 1 of a suit – pass – 2 NT (18 – 19 high card points). If the responder had 15+ high card points, they may raise to 6 NT directly.

In the next newsletter I'll discuss the Roman Keycard Blackwood system for determining whether a partnership has two immediate losers.

Try to Bid It

Here's a hand played on September 18, 2023 (played nationwide). This illustrates a bidding sequence that might lead directly to a slam bid. Try bidding this yourself (for both North/South and East/West) before reading the detailed discussion.

North Deals	♠ 10 7 6 4										
None Vul	♥ 10 6 4										
	♦ J 10 9 8										
	♣ 9 2										
♠ Q 2		♠ A K 3									
♥ K Q J 8 5 3	<div style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid black; background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <table style="border-collapse: collapse; margin: 0;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table> </div>		N		W		E		S		♥ A 9 2
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♦ Q		♦ K 6 4									
♣ K J 7 5		♣ A 10 8 4									
	♠ J 9 8 5										
	♥ 7										
	♦ A 7 5 3 2										
	♣ Q 6 3										

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	Pass	1 ♣	Pass
1 ♥	Pass	2 N	Pass
3 ♥	Pass	4 ♥	Pass
6 ♥	All pass		

Using the simplified bidding system taught in the beginning class, you open 1C (18 high card points is too high for a 1NT opening). West bids 1H, and East jumps to 2NT (18 – 19 high card points).

At this stage, there are many options. The given bidding is reasonable: 3H shows 5+ hearts. East raises to 4H with three supporting trumps. West, with 14 high card points raises to 6H to try for a small slam.

Alternatively, West could bid 6 NT instead of 3H! With 14 high card points opposite 18 – 19 high card points, the total of 32+ high card points is “close enough” to 33. Bid the slam! Bridge is not for the faint of heart!

It turns out that either 6NT or 6H will easily yield 12 tricks. The only loser is the ace of diamonds.

Famous Bridgies

Easley Blackwood, Sr., was an Indianapolis insurance office manager, who also played some mean bridge. He wrote a dozen bridge books and authored a popular syndicated bridge column for more than 40 years. Blackwood served as the executive secretary of the American Contract Bridge League (ACBL). As one of the nation's premier bridge experts, he spent many of his retirement years on bridge cruises, entertaining and training perhaps 10,000 bridge students in the art of bridge.

He also famous for devising the Blackwood Convention for determining a partnership's number of aces, kings, and possible the queen of trumps during slam exploration.

This convention is still used by many contract bridge players.

Note: in my upcoming slam bidding mini-lessons I plan to teach a modern variant of the Blackwood Convention: the Roman Keycard Blackwood (RKC Blackwood), which also identifies the possession of the trump king.

Blackwood learned the game at age 11 and claimed never to have played another card game. “Bridge is so superior that the bridge player gives up other games.”

Olney Bridge Club

We have formed an Olney MD Bridge Club. The primary purpose of the Olney MD Bridge Club is to teach and encourage social bridge in the areas including and surrounding Olney, Maryland.

We meet regularly (Saturdays from 2:30 – 4:30) at the Olney library for practice playing sessions.

Please feel free to send email to bridgeinfo@bridge.careytutor.com with any questions, comments, recommendations, or other correspondence for the editor. In particular, if you have a bridge article to include in a future newsletter or a suggestion of a possible topic, any such submission would be much appreciated.

Bridge Quotes

*It is not the handling of difficult hands that makes the winning player. There aren't enough of them. It is the ability to avoid messing up the easy ones. **Alan Sontag***

*If you have the slightest touch of masochism, you'll love this game. **Anonymous***

*Bridge is a great comfort in your old age. It also helps you get there faster. **Anonymous***

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