

Slam Bidding - Blackwood

The most important philosophy when trying to play winning bridge is to bid game and make it as often as possible. The struggle for game contracts occurs often in every session. However, there is a further level of bidding that of slam bidding – a six level contract (a small slam) or a seven level contract (a grand slam). These hands don't come up anywhere near as often as games, but when they do they can be every bit as significant to the score.

What do we need to bid a slam

In order to bid and make a slam, we need to have two key ingredients – a **source of tricks** and **controls**. A source of tricks means either a long suit, a big fit with lots of shortages or lots and lots of High Card Points. A good rule of thumb is that you should be thinking about slam if you deduce that your side has about 33 HCPs (or 37 HCPs if you're thinking of a grand slam).

However, having identified that you have the capacity to generate a lot of tricks, you also need to be sure you have sufficient controls. There's no point bidding a six-level contract with nearly all the points if your opponents have two aces, they will lead them immediately and you'll be down before you start.

If you have determined that slam might be possible (by identifying a source of tricks) you should then check that your side have all the aces (if you're bidding a grand slam) or all the aces bar one (if you're bidding a small slam). Obviously you can count the aces you hold, but how do we learn how many aces our partner holds?

Blackwood Convention – 4NT (Ace Ask)

When we are bidding suits (not No Trump contracts) bidding Four No Trumps is a special, conventional bid. It says: "I have at least one ace. How many do you have?"

We use Blackwood when we have already decided that we have probably got enough *tricks* to make a six or seven level contract, we are just checking we have enough *controls*.

The responses are relatively straightforward:

Five Clubs = I have zero aces (or four!)
Five Diamonds = I have one ace
Five Hearts = I have two aces
Five Spades = I have three aces

You can now add the number of aces you have to the number of aces your partner has. If you have at least three you can bid a six level contract.

Following on from Blackwood – 5NT (King Ask)

If we learn that we have a good source of tricks and that we have all the aces, we may be able to make all thirteen tricks and bid at the seven level. In order to do this, we should be sure we have all the Kings as well as all of the Aces.

After we have bid 4NT and received our answer, 5NT is another special, convention bid. It says: "We have all the aces, I am interested in bidding seven. How many Kings do you have?"

You get no prize for guessing the responses:

Six Clubs = I have zero kings (or four!)
Six Diamonds = I have one king
Six Hearts = I have two kings
Six Spades = I have three kings

The person who bid Blackwood should now be in a position to decide whether to bid at the Seven level or whether they should remain at the Six level.