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This Week in Bridge

(315) Responding to 1NT with a Slam Invitational Hand

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Level: 2

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General

After partner opens the bidding 1NT, if we hold a hand that has more than the minimum values than is needed to bid game, then we may want to explore slam, but we should first ensure that we determine which is our best game contract. First, we look for a fit, starting with Major suit fits. Next, we determine whether our side has enough combined values to explore slam. Fit is important because it may affect our hand evaluation process. Often times, finding a fit will make slam worth exploring, and if we discover that we do not have a fit, then slam will be unlikely. Here we look at what our tools are for inviting slam after partner has opened 1NT.

Quantitative Bids

Quantitative bids ask Opener how they feel about their hand for slam. Here we are using a cooperative bidding processes to see if our side should bid a slam.

Example 1

♠ A64

♥ KQ4

♦ AJ93

♣ K83

1NT 4NT

4NT is Quantitative. This asks Opener to pass with a minimum hand or bid a small slam with a maximum hand - usually 6NT, but Opener can suggest other places to play bidding a 5-card suit at the 6-level.

Example 2

♠ A64

♥ KQ4

♦ AT93

♣ AK3

1NT 5NT

5NT is also Quantitative, but this time trying for a grand slam. Opener bids a small slam with a minimum hand and bids 7NT with a maximum hand.



Example 3 – Slam Try with a 4-card Major

♠ AT64
♥ KQ4
♦ A3
♣ KT83
1NT 2♣
2♥ 4NT

This is not an Ace-asking bid (Blackwood or Keycard). 4NT is Quantitative showing a balanced 16-17 points and a 4-card ♠ suit (just as rebidding 3NT would have implied).

Example 4 – Slam Try with a 5-card Major

♠ K9
♥ AK854
♦ K83
♣ QJ8
1NT 2♦*
2♥ 4NT

This bid is not Ace-asking (Blackwood or Keycard). Here 4NT is Quantitative, having already shown 5-card ♥.

Example 5 – Slam Try with a 6-card Major

♠ KQT952
♥ AQ7
♦ A4
♣ 93
1NT 2♥*
2♠ 4♠

This is a slam try with 6+card ♠ (since no Texas Transfer). This is a Quantitative bid.

Shortness-Showing Slam Tries (Splinters)

Another important type of auction for exploring good slams, while keeping out of bad ones, are *splinter* (shortness showing) auctions. These auctions allow the notrump Opener to re-evaluate their hand and make a decision about bidding slam or not. If Opener has lots of points opposite partner's shortness (wasted values), then Opener will decline the slam invite and try to put the brakes on the auction. If Opener has little wasted values and good "fitting cards", then Opener will bid slam aggressively. This kind of bidding is far more effective than quantitative bidding – it puts the focus more on "which points does partner have" instead of just "how many points does partner have."



Example 6 -- Splinter after Stayman

♠ KQ83
♥ A84
♦ 7
♣ AQ532
1NT 2♣
2♠ 4♦*

This auction shows a ♠ fit, shortness in ♦, and enough values to try for slam.

Example 7 – Splinter with a 6-card Suit

♠ KQT952
♥ AJT
♦ A43
♣ 3
1NT 2♥*
2♠ 4♦*

This auction shows a 6-card ♠ suit, shortness in ♦, and enough values to try for slam.

Comment on Ace Asking Bids

After partner opens 1NT, we use 4NT as Keycard when we know we have a fit and 4♣ Gerber as Ace-asking when we have not found a fit. 4NT is used as Quantitative when we do not have a fit and 4♣ as a splinter when we do have a fit.

Slam Tries with a Long Minor Suit

With a long minor suit (a 6+card suit) and no interest in a Major suit fit, we explore slam by either making a Quantitative bid or by showing our long suit and shortness.

Example 8 – Quantitative with a long minor

♠ K3
♥ Q3
♦ AQ9843
♣ A93
1NT 2NT*
3♦ 4NT

2NT is a transfer to ♦ (showing our long minor suit) and now we bid 4NT to invite slam.



Example 9 – Shortness-Showing Bid

♠ 3
♥ KQ3
♦ AQ9843
♣ A93
1NT 2NT*
3♦ 3♠*

Here we transfer to ♦, then show our shortness in ♠ by bidding 3♠*. This allows Opener to re-evaluate their hand, bidding 3NT with lots of values in ♠ or exploring slam with very few values in ♠.

Conclusion

When we have enough values to be certain we want to play slam, then all we must do is search for a fit. When we have values to be interested in slam, then we must search for a fit and find a way to invite slam. Fortunately, we have lots of bidding space available for doing this (usually all the way up to 4NT). What is important is for us to have tools that express our distribution and interest in slam while keeping the auction from getting all the way to slam. Make sure that you and your partner have a good set of tools for doing so after they open 1NT. This will help you bid good slams and stay out of bad ones!