



Adventures in Bridge

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This Week in Bridge

(404) Specific Kings

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Level: 5 of 10 (2 of 6) +

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General

In an Ace-asking auction, when we make the follow-up bid to ask partner about their Kings, we are usually doing so to investigate a grand slam (though some partnerships do this in order to determine if 6NT is good contract). Most partnerships start with the agreement that they answer this question by showing their number of Kings. But sometimes, a grand slam is not about partner having 2 or 3 Kings, but about them having the right single King. This “right King” is often the one opposite our long suit – allowing us to produce a large number of tricks. To solve this problem, many partnerships evolved their King-showing methods from “number of Kings” to “Specific Kings”. Here we look at how we can use Specific Kings in a variety of our Ace-asking auctions.

Number of Kings – Traditional Methods

When playing number of Kings, the “Shower” describes their hand in steps similar to showing Aces or Keycards.

Example 1 – Gerber, # of Kings

- | | | |
|------|-----|----------------|
| 1NT | 4♣ | Gerber |
| 4♥ | 5♣ | Asks for Kings |
| ___? | | |
| • | 5♦ | 0 or 4 Kings |
| • | 5♥ | 1 King |
| • | 5♠ | 2 Kings |
| • | 5NT | 3 Kings |

Example 2 – 1430 Keycard, # of Kings

- | | | |
|-----|------|--------------|
| 1♠ | 3♠ | |
| 4NT | 5♥ | |
| 5NT | ___? | |
| • | 6♣ | 0 or 4 Kings |
| • | 6♦ | 1 King |
| • | 6♥ | 2 Kings |
| • | 6♠ | 3 Kings |



Modern Methods - Specific Kings

Having the answering player describe their specific Kings is a better approach than number of Kings because often a grand slam depends on which King answerer has, not just how many Kings. Let's look at this upgraded approach of showing Specific Kings through an example.

Example 3

1♠ 2NT*
4♠ 4NT
5♠ 5NT
___?

In this auction, playing Specific Kings, we show our Kings "up the line". The "Asker" (4NT bidder) is always asking the "Shower" about their Kings and not showing Kings themselves. Thus, the Asker can find out the information they need (the King they are looking for) to bid a slam. Here are Shower's responses:

- 6♣ ♣K
- 6♦ ♦K, no ♣K
- 6♥ ♥K, no ♣K or ♦K
- 6♠ No outside Kings - not ♣K, ♦K, ♥K
- 7♠ If Shower has a source of extra tricks they can just bid a grand slam knowing that 5NT guaranteed all the Keycards and they can now count 13 tricks!

Follow-Up Bidding

After we have shown a specific King, Asker can stop in a small slam, bid the grand slam, or ask for another King, if that is what they need for the grand slam.

Example 4

1♠ 4NT
5♠ 5NT
6X ___?

- After 6♣ by Opener
 - 6♦ Do you have the ♦K? ♣K was not enough for the grand slam.
 - 6♥ Do you have the ♥K? ♣K was not enough for the grand slam.
 - 6♠ Not particularly interested in grand slam, 5NT was just a courtesy bid.
- After 6♦ by Opener
 - 6♥ Do you have the ♥K? That is what I need for grand.
 - 6♠ Either needed ♣K or not particularly interested in grand.
- After 6♥ by Opener
 - 6♠ Either needed a minor King or not particularly interested in grand.



If we have the King of partner's follow-up ask, then we bid the grand slam (or 6NT if that is our special agreement) and if we do not have this King then we usually return to the trump suit (6♣ in our example.) If there is room to show another King, we can show that by bidding that suit (below our small slam).

As we can see, with this tool partner can determine exactly which Kings we have and thus more effectively bid a grand slam, not guessing if partner has the right King for us.

Note: Specific Kings can be played in both Gerber/1430 Gerber (5♣ starts the ask) and 1430 Keycard (5NT starts the ask) auctions. Whichever method of King showing we choose to play, Number of Kings or Specific Kings, it is best to play the same style in Gerber and Keycard Auctions.

Advanced Topic - 5♠ Bid in ♥ Keycard Auctions

When we are Keycarding in ♥ and subsequently bid 5NT to ask for specific Kings, then showing the ♠K occurs above 6♥ - we would have to bid 6♠ to show it and if it is not what partner needs, we will be too high. We do not go past 6♥ to show the ♠K in response to these 5NT auctions.

Instead, if partner wants to know if we have the ♠K in these auctions (and there is room) then they can use 5♠ (instead of 5NT) to start asking after specific Kings, leaving room for the ♠K. Partner usually bids the grand slam if they have the ♠K and bids another King if they do not have the ♠K.

Example 5

1♥ 4NT
5♥ 5♠

Note: We could also bid 5NT to show the ♠K and not another King over partner's 5♠ specific King ask.

Advanced Note: Sometimes there is an ambiguity about whether the 5♠ bid asks for the trump Queen or the ♠K. In this case, 5♠ asks for the trump Queen (like if partner's answer had been 5♦) because it is more important for the grand slam – it is much more often that we will want to know about a trump card than this specific ♠K.

Example 6

1♥ 4NT
5♦ 5♠

In this auction 5♥ would be to play, thus 5♠ is the "Queen ask" and is looking for the grand slam since we are already past 5♥.



Specific Kings with the “Queen Ask”

If partner asks for the trump Queen and we do not have it, we generally return to our suit.

Example 7

1♠ 4NT

5♣ 5♦

___?

If we do not have the ♠Q then we rebid 5♠. But if we do have the Queen then we need to tell partner more information. In this case, we start showing our specific Kings as cheaply as possible.

- 5♥ ♠Q plus ♥K (could have other Kings as well)
- 5NT ♠Q and no outside K
- 6♣ ♠Q and ♣K, not ♥K (could still have ♦K)
- 6♦ ♠Q and ♦K only (no other outside Kings)
- 6♠ ♠Q and no outside K (similar to 5NT, some play the two bids as different)

The bidding then continues as it would over 5NT – with partner being able to ask for other Kings to continue looking for the grand slam.

Advanced Topic – Queen Ask 5♠

When ♥ is the trump suit and Answerer’s bid to 4NT is 5♦, then there is no space to ask for the Queen of trump and keep the auction below 5♥. In this case, the Asker must guess when thinking about bidding a small slam. But if Asker is interested in playing in a grand slam, then 5♠ (the first “available” bid) is used to ask for the Queen.

Answerer bids as follows:

- Without the Queen, Answerer bids 6♥.
- With the Queen, Answerer bids their cheapest King (playing Specific Kings).
 - 5NT bid shows the trump Queen with no outside Kings.
- When the Answerer has the ♥Q and only the ♠K, then they must use their judgment about whether to bypass 6♥ and show the ♠K with a 6♠ bid. They must believe that this will be enough to make either 6NT or 7♥ a good contract.

Conclusion

When trying to judge if a grand slam (or even 6NT sometimes) is a good contract, knowing which King partner holds is an extremely valuable piece of information. Using Specific Kings, we can find out which Kings partner holds – we start with the cheapest one and work our way up from there. By getting the specific information we can more easily determine if our side has 13 tricks (no losers) and bid to our grand slams!