



# Adventures in Bridge

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## *This Week in Bridge*

### **(403) 1430 Keycard Blackwood**

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Level: 3 of 10 (1 of 6)

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#### **General**

In many slam bidding auctions we use the *Blackwood Convention* to ask our partner (or partner asks us) for their number of Aces. Though Blackwood was a good invention that allowed us to avoid bidding a slam missing 2 Aces, it was not good enough. When we are investigating a slam in a suit contract, we want to know about the number of Aces that our side has as well as about our trump suit quality – the King and Queen of trump are important cards. 1430 Keycard Blackwood is an upgrade to traditional Blackwood that allows us to communicate with partner and find out about all this information. Let's see how this upgraded structure works.

#### **1430 Keycard Blackwood**

The reasons that *Keycard Blackwood* is better than *traditional Blackwood* should be obvious for anyone who has gone down in a slam because the opponents had a lot of trump tricks. But in case not, the trump suit is more important than the other suits. Thus, in this important suit (the "Key Suit") we want to know about more than just the Ace – we want to know about the King and Queen as well.

Here is how we change our Blackwood system to incorporate the King and Queen of trump. We promote the King of trump to a "fifth Ace" – which we will now call "Keycards". We treat the Queen as an extra card that we want to find out about as well. We will structure our responses to partner's 4NT bid (that used to be Blackwood and now is Keycard) to communicate information about all 5 Keycards and the trump Queen.

#### *Example 1*

1♠    2♠  
4NT    \_\_?

- Step 1: 5♣    1 or 4 Keycards
- Step 2: 5♦    3 or 0 Keycards
- Step 3: 5♥    2 Keycards without the Queen
- Step 4: 5♠    2 Keycards with the Queen



*Note: The 1430 name comes from the step answers and the score for 6M, Vulnerable: +1430! The original version of this convention had different steps, hence '1430' says which version you play.*

## Queen Ask

When partner answers 5♣ or 5♦ to our 4NT ask, we do not know if they hold of the Queen of trump. This may be important information for us to determine if slam is a good contract. If we are missing a Keycard then we do not want to bid a slam when we are also missing the trump Queen – the Keycard is one likely loser and the trump Queen would be another potential loser, not to mention avoiding losers in all the other suits. We “ask for the Queen” after a 5♣ or 5♦ answer by making the cheapest available bid that is not our trump suit. (If Asker rebids the trump suit, that is an effort to stop the auction.)

After this “Queen ask,” Shower’s rebids are as follows:

- Without the Queen, rebid the trump suit as cheaply as possible.
- With the Queen, start showing Kings (more on this below).

### Example 2

♠ KT864

♥ K4

♦ A63

♣ QJ4

♠ 953

♥ AQJ

♦ KQJ5

♣ AK4

1♠     2♦

2NT    3♠

4♠     4NT

5♥     5♠

Here we find out that we are missing a Keycard and the Queen of trump. Even though we have 33 HCP we should not bid the slam – a bad trump suit is going to give us too many losers.

## Showing Kings after an Ace-Asking (or Keycard) Auction

If the Asker, the player that bids 4NT, is interested in a Grand Slam then more information may be needed to determine if this is possible. Now that Keycards have been described, the Asker may need to know about Kings for a possible Grand Slam. 5NT is used for asking about Kings. The difference in this King ask situation (compared to Gerber or traditional Blackwood) is that we have already “promoted” the King of trump to a Keycard. Thus, there are only 3 remaining Kings to describe to partner.



There are a couple of different approaches how to answer after 5NT. The simplest is number of Kings (same method we used in Blackwood and/or Gerber).  $6\clubsuit = 0$ ,  $6\spadesuit = 1$ ,  $6\heartsuit = 2$ ,  $6\spadesuit = 3$ .

### Which Is the “Key Suit”?

One complexity that is added when we change from Blackwood to Keycard Blackwood is “which suit do we Keycard in?” That is, which King and Queen are the important ones? If we have bid and raised a suit this is straightforward, but what if we have not yet found a fit? In this case, most partnerships use a rule that assumes agreement on the last bid suit and treats the King and Queen of that suit as the important “Keycards”.

#### *Example 3*

1♠     2♥

4NT

Most partnerships would treat this 4NT bid as Keycard in Hearts!

### Conclusion

One of the most frustrating things in slam bidding is getting to slam and going down when you lose 2 trump tricks. The way players traditionally dealt with this was to be conservative about trying for slam when they had bad trump – even with a good hand. This meant that sometimes a slam was missed when partner had the good trump we needed. 1430 Keycard Blackwood is an upgrade to Blackwood that tries to overcome this problem. It allows us to ask for Aces and check on our trump suit quality at the same time. I suggest you upgrade your Ace-asking methods to Keycard as soon as you have time to discuss it with partner.