

## BIDDING SLAMS WITH VOIDS

We all know that we aren't supposed to use Ace-asking bids (Roman Key Card Blackwood) with a void; what are you supposed to deal with these situations?

Three options exist:

- Exclusion Key Card Blackwood (EKCB)
- Grand Slam Force
- Cue bidding until your partner uses RKCB, then showing a void

Annoyingly, each has their place too!

With the advent of EKCB, the Grand Slam Force has seen a decline, though I shall show a use for it when the opposition have interfered in your auction.

Exclusion Key Card Blackwood is a jump – often to the 5-level – in either the opponents' suit or a random suit. The suit bid is that bidder's void, and they are asking for partner's key cards outside of their void.

The recommended responses are:

STEP 1 (next bid)	0 key cards
STEP 2	1 key card, no trump Queen
STEP 3	1 key card + trump Queen
STEP 4	2 key cards, no trump Queen
STEP 5	2 key cards + trump Queen
STEP 6	3 key cards

Before using EKCB, you have to ensure that you are 'safe' should partner respond with either Step 1 or Step 2.

Here's a hand on which partner used EKCB:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
<i>Partner</i>		<i>Me</i>	
		1♥	2♠
3♣	3♠	4♥	Pass
5♠			

This 5♠ bid was EKCB. 4♠ would have been a cue bid instead. My hand:

♠ 6  
♥ A K 9 8 6 4  
♦ A 4 3 2  
♣ 6 2

North now bid 6♣, sacrificing.

It took me a moment or two, as East, to realise that the 5♠ bid was EKCB, because I was expecting a 5♥ bid instead! A voluntary bid of our suit at the 5-level asks the partner for control of the opponents' suit, and I still thought my singleton was useful. Initially I couldn't compute partner's void, meaning that North-South had a 12-card fit!

The pass of 6♠ was forward-going since we were already bidding to slam. However, think about it – I had 3 key cards, so my response to 5♠ would have been 6♠ (6 steps), forcing us to the grand slam anyway.

After my Pass, partner doubled, so we defended 6♠ X for a good score.

(I suspect I would have bid 7♥ with the ♥J, but the suit seemed somewhat tatty for my aggressive 4-level rebid.)

♠ K Q J 10 5 3	
♥ 8	
♦ J 9 6 5	
♣ 10 8	
♠ void	♠ 6
♥ Q 7 5	♥ A K 6 4 3 2
♦ K 10 8 7	♦ A 4 3 2
♣ A K 9 7 4 3	♣ 6 2
	♠ A 9 8 7 4 2
	♥ J 10 9
	♦ Q
	♣ Q J 5

After the hand, we discussed bidding options with North (and South). Given that she was prepared to save in 6♠, she should have bid more initially. Some things to consider:

- with 6-card support for a weak jump overcall, you know you have no defensive tricks in that suit;
- your hand has absolutely no defence outside of spades either, and partner must have the ♠A, so less outside defence too;
- increase the pre-empt as high as possible as quickly as possible – in line with the Law of Total Tricks.

Another hand involving EKCB:

♠ A K 10 9 6 5 3	♠ Q J 2
♥ void	♥ 6 5 4
♦ A K J 6 4	♦ Q 3
♣ 2	♣ A 7 5 4 3

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1♥
2♥ (1)	3♥	3♠	Pass
5♥ (2)	Pass	6♣ (3)	Pass
6♦ (4)	Pass	7♠	All Pass

- (1) Michaels Cue Bid showing at least 5-5 in spades and a minor. My plan was to jump rebid with 4♠ in the absence of partner bidding.
- (2) Partner freely bid 3♠, so now I was heading to slam. 5♥ was EKCB, showing a void in hearts and asking about key cards outside hearts.
- (3) Showing 1 key card + ♠Q.
- (4) We play that, once a suit has been set, a new suit at the 6-level asks for 3<sup>rd</sup>-round control in that suit – i.e. asking for a doubleton diamond or the ♦Q. With no control in the suit, we subside at the 6-level. With 3<sup>rd</sup>-round control, we jump to the grand slam. (Since we don't usually play Pairs, we haven't refined this so that we can bid 7NT rather than 7-suit!)

As you can see from these examples, the jump is usually at the 5-level, and always asks about key cards excluding the void suit.

The Grand Slam Force (GSF) has been usurped by EKCB, but it still has its uses, particularly when the opponents are interfering in your auction. It is a jump to 5NT without using 4NT (RKCB).

The responses have varied over the years, but essentially:

6-agreed suit	0-1 of the top 3 honours
6♣ (if available)	1 top honour with extra length
7-agreed suit	2 of the top 3 honours

Depending on the agreed suit, you can certainly add in extra steps. For instance, when spades are trumps, you can also utilise the 6♦ and 6♥ bids for whatever meaning you desire.

I don't think I've seen a GSF for about 15 years, but recall this auction:

<i>Partner</i>	<i>Me</i>
1♦	1♠
5NT (1)	6♣ (2)
7♠	

- (1) Grand Slam Force, asking about my spade suit only
- (2) 1 of the top honours with extra length

Dummy was:

♠ A Q 10 8 7  
♥ void  
♦ A K Q 8 7 6  
♣ A 2

and, obviously from the auction, I held ♠K-9-5-4-3 (hence the 'extra length').

Nowadays, most people would bid this hand:

1♦	1♠
5♥ (EKCB)	

Imagine, instead, that the auction had been:

1♦	1♥	1♠ (5+ spades)	4♥
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Now 5NT would be far more useful than a 5♥ cue bid, which may be open to misunderstanding.

Strangely enough, the day after I was typing this article a friend mentioned the following hand to me.

♠ A 10 7 6 5 2  
 ♥ void  
 ♦ A K J 8 7 5 4  
 ♣ void

This sort of hand is essentially 'unbiddable'. My friend opened 1♣ and didn't know what to bid when partner raised to 2♠. With no methods, I think a rebid of 6♠ is sensible. Imagine, though, that you and partner played the Grand Slam Force. You simply rebid 5NT, asking about the quality of their spades.

If partner shows 0-1 of the top honours, you subside in 6♠. However, when partner has both the ♠K and ♠Q, she rebids 7♠ and you've bid this grand slam in four bids! (You shouldn't worry about diamonds; either partner has three diamonds, giving you a 10-card fit, or a doubleton and you can cash the Ace and King, then plan to ruff one if necessary.)

The actual hand:

♠ A 10 7 6 5 2	♠ K Q 3
♥ void	♥ 9 7 6
♦ A K J 8 7 5 4	♦ Q 9 6 2
♣ void	♣ 10 7 3

Obviously North-South have a great save in hearts, but the 5NT bid would have meant you reach 7♠, regardless of intervention (and no save can work).

Finally, there are hands where you need to cue bid because of a void. (You shouldn't use RKCB with a void, because you don't know what to do with the response if Ace/s are missing.)

Here's an example:

♠ Q J 10 8	♠ void
♥ 2	♥ A J 8 7 6
♦ K 8 7	♦ A Q J 10 6 5
♣ K Q J 10 2	♣ A 3

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
1♣	1♦ (1)
1♠	2♥ (2)
3♦ (3)	3♥ (4)
4♣ (5)	4♦ (6)
4♥ (7)	4NT (8)_
5♦ (9)	5NT (10)
7♦ (11)	Pass

- (1) Planning to reverse into hearts, then bid hearts again, to show the 5-6 hand shape.
- (2) The plan had to 'divert' because hearts now became Fourth-Suit Forcing.
- (3) Showing 3-card diamond support.
- (4) 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> round cue bid in hearts (perhaps it was intended to show the 5-6?)
- (5) 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> round cue bid in clubs. NOTE: Opener has by-passed spades, so does not have 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> round control in spades. This means that the later use of 4NT is 'safe', because you know the response does not include the ♠A.

- (6) Since we are in a game forcing auction, this is a waiting bid, hoping to hear a heart cue bid from partner.
- (7) 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> round cue bid in hearts.
- (8) RKCB (but knowing partner will NOT be telling you about the ♠A.
- (9) 1 key card.
- (10) Showing 'all' the key cards.
- (11) Able to bid 7♦ due to the solid club suit outside – which Responder knows nothing about.

Food for thought!!

(Don't worry – we actually missed the last grand slam. Partner did not notice that the 4♣ cue bid had already by-passed spades, so she felt she couldn't bid 4NT.)

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