

## Answers and Explanations to Partnership Bidding Practice

Do you believe that the most effective way to get to slam is to race to bid Blackwood? No way!

One key to effective slam bidding is to know when to use Blackwood and what to do when it is not appropriate. As Easley Blackwood was the first to admit, Blackwood is not the answer to all slam decisions.

The sole function of Blackwood is to discover partner's number of aces. On many hands, though, quantity is not the answer; what we seek is location, location, location.

The two best reasons to forego Blackwood are: you have a void, or a worthless suit. Let us take these one at a time. If you are void in a suit and partner's ace is in that suit, his ace is "wasted." In other words, you already had the suit under control. You would rather partner had his ace in another suit where you did have a loser.

A worthless suit, one with no A or K, for instance, needs help. If your 4NT bid reveals that you lack 1 ace, you still won't know if partner can help your weak suit. If he can't, you will be down in your slam before you know it.

Now take a look at some slam hands. Responses to 4NT are based on 1430.

	<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>	
1. ♠ AQ54	1♥	1♠	♠ KJ8732
♥ AQJ75	3♠	4♣	♥ K2
♦ 4	4♦	4NT	♦ 985
♣ Q95	5♠	6♠	♣ A3

The first 3 bids were routine. East was interested in slam after 3♠, but avoided 4NT because of his weak diamonds. If opener held the major-suit aces, East would still be at the mercy of partner's diamond holding.

East's 4♣ cuebid showed a club control; so that the opponents would not be able to take the first 2 tricks in that suit. West now reciprocated in diamonds, which was just what East needed to Blackwood into slam. Notice that we were able to cuebid and Blackwood on the same hand. How very efficient!

Now for an easy one.

	<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>	
2. ♠ KQ2	1♦	1♥	♠ 5
♥ A9	3♦	4NT	♥ KQJ54
♦ AQJ852	5♠	6♦	♦ K643
♣ 83			♣ A74

I never said that perfect Blackwood hands had become extinct. With controls in every suit, East was interested only in opener's aces. The 6♦ contract was as easy to make as it was to bid.

	<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>	
3. ♠ 9	1♥	4♦*	♠ AQ3
♥ AK10653	4NT	5♠	♥ Q987
♦ 9754	6♥	P	♦ 6
♣ KQ			♣ A7532

The key here was East's 4♦ splinter bid. When playing this convention, East's majestic double jump promised an opening bid with four-card heart support and a void or singleton in diamonds. Knowing that diamonds were under control, West needed no further encouragement.

4.	♠ AQ2	<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>	♠ KJ1076
	♥ AKJ7543	1♥	2♠	♥ Q106
	♦ 8	3♥	4♥	♦ KJ
	♣ 865	4♠	5♣	♣ AK3
		7♥	P	

I like East's 2♠ strong jump shift. When he then raises to 4♥, he showed 5 or 6 nice spades and interest in a heart slam. West has a great hand, but knows that bidding 4NT with a void is a no-no. He cuebids 4♠ and waits. This promises first-round control of spades because it is made beyond the level of game. East's 5♣ cuebid also promises the ace. This is all West needs. Knowing that spades will run, he can bid 7.

5.	♠ KQ2	<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>	♠ A103
	♥ K76	1NT	4NT	♥ A7
	♦ K10953	5♦	6♦	♦ A874
	♣ A2	P		♣ K1093

After West's obvious 1NT opening, East evaluated well by up-grading his 15 HCP. He loved his prime cards (A, K) and 2 tens and correctly invited slam with 4NT. This invitational bid is called "quantitative".

Some Wests would have declined the invitation with only 15 HCP, but this West was made of sterner stuff. He appreciated that his nice 5-card suit increased the value of this hand. He also appreciated his four prime cards. However, West did not just close his eyes and accept the invitation by bidding 6NT. He bid 5♦ to show his suit (note that 5♦ was not meant to show his one ace) and awaited developments.

The rest was easy. With his nice diamond support, East was delighted to raise to 6♦. Although a trump trick had to be lost, 6♦ made easily by ruffing a heart. 6NT was a reasonable contract, but was doomed by the diamond loser. Three spades, two hearts, four diamonds and two club tricks just do not add to 12.

Why was 6♦ laydown with two balanced hands and only 30 HCP? A Bergenism applies here which can prove helpful, "It is uncanny how well hands work out when they have very few (if any) jacks." I'm not saying that I prefer a two to a jack, but because jacks are the most overrated of honors, it bothers me to count them as a full point (especially for slam).

6.	♠ KQ7432	<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>	♠ AJ10
	♥ KJ106	1♠	2♣	♥ AQ5
	♦ Q6	2♥	3♠	♦ 93
	♣ A	4♣	4♥	♣ KQ854
		4♠	P	

The first 3 bids are quite logical, West applying the "6-4-6" principle. East's jump to 3♠ promised at least an opening bid with spade support. (If playing two-over-one game forcing, the jump shows extra values).

West was interested in slam, but was worried about diamonds. He cuebid 4♣, hoping to hear 4♦. The actual 4♥ bid said a mouthful. **Controls are cuebid up the line**, so 4♥ promised a heart control but **denied a diamond control**.

West was disappointed, but nothing plus nothing equals nothing. No diamond control, no slam. Notice that by embarking on a cuebidding sequence, both players were involved in the decision-making process.

I hope that you didn't mind ending with a nonslam. After five beautifully-bid laydown slams, I thought a dose of reality was in order. Slam on every hand is just not realistic.

