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Bidding (and not bidding) Slams via quantitative raises of NT.

VB#6 Y2 Slam bidding 1 SA	Contract: 6N
Date: 14/06/2014	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 1
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

North		East
♠ KJ4		♠ 632
♥ KJ6		♥ T872
♦ Q8742		♦ JT93
♣ J2		♣ 64
West		South
♠ T987		♠ AQ5
♥ Q43		♥ A95
♦ 5		♦ AK6
♣ A9753		♣ KQT8

This series is all about bidding (and avoiding) slams.

We make the assumption that you have met the Blackwood convention whereby 4NT asks for Aces. However, this convention should come with a government health warning as it asks for trouble more often than it effectively asks for useful cards. There are few conventions in bridge more abused than this one.

In this series of six deals we look at cases where 4NT is NOT Blackwood. In other words, partner is not asking for Aces, he is raising No-trumps. How can you tell what 4NT means? Well, for 4NT to be Blackwood you have to have agreed a suit between you. If not, how can you sign-off at the five-level if there are insufficient Aces?

A natural bid of 4NT is called a *quantitative raise*. Its function is to get partner to make a choice between Passing 4NT or advancing to 6NT. Think of it as being analogous to the sequence 1NT - 2NT where the response is inviting you to bid game. Essentially 2NT is a buck-passing bid to a game. 4NT as a

West	North	East	South
-	P	P	2NT
P	4NT	P	6NT
P	P	P	

Lead: ♠ T

Here you open 2NT in third seat and partner (having Passed already, remember) raises you to 4NT. These raises of No-trump opening bids are always *quantitative*; they are bids in No-trumps and ask you to bid a slam if you feel like it. Here, with a maximum for a 2NT opening bid (with anything more you'd have opened 2♣) you feel obliged to advance to 6NT.

Dummy is pretty much as you would expect. Partner has 11 points so could see that the partnership was teetering on the brink of having the magical total of 33 points, usually enough to have a dash at a No-trump slam.

A count of tricks shows there to be eleven (after the ♣A has gone) – to wit: three Spades, two Hearts, three Diamonds and three Clubs. All that is necessary for success is that Diamonds are 3-2, which isn't asking the earth.

So you take the Spade lead and try the ♦A K, wincing when West shows out on the second round. There is no use in setting up the long Diamond as that would mean conceding a trick to East – after that the defenders would have the ♣A with alacrity. You need to visit somewhere else for the twelfth trick – and that can only be Hearts.

You have to knock out the ♣A and after that it's only a question of taking your top tricks until the fateful moment. You cash the ♥A and play a Heart to the ♥J, finessing against West. Your second chance proves successful and 6NT makes.

quantitative raise is a buck-passing bid to a possible slam.

Hand 1 provides a simple example... in the bidding if not in the play.



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Bidding (and not bidding) Slams via quantitative raises of NT.

VB#6 Y2 Slam bidding 1 SA	Contract: 4N
Date: 14/06/2014	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 2
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: N / S

West	North	East	South
-	-	P	1NT
P	4NT	P	P
P			

Lead: ♠ T

Here you open 1NT after East has Passed and North raises to 4NT. Again, this is a *quantitative raise*, asking you to bid 6NT if you have a maximum for 1NT and to Pass otherwise. Well, this tatty 15 count with its 4-3-3-3 shape is a long way from being a maximum for 1NT – in fact it's a rock-bottom minimum. With that in mind you have an easy Pass.

Dummy is displayed with a 5-3-3-2 16 count and you can see partner's point of view. With 17 points in your hand the partnership would have sufficient for slam, especially with North's fine Club suit. As it is, though, 6NT is a million miles away.

There is little in the play – you play low from dummy on the ♠10 opening lead and East takes the ♠K. That gives you ten top tricks (two Spades, three Diamonds and five Clubs). The defenders could cash the next two Hearts if it suited them – by returning a Spade they merely delay matters. You might make an overtrick should East turn up with the ♥A but – as the cards lie – you have ten tricks, no more, no fewer. Accurate bidding wins the day.

North
 ♠ A42
 ♥ J42
 ♦ KT
 ♣ AKJ76

West
 ♠ T987
 ♥ AQ3
 ♦ 85
 ♣ 9854



East
 ♠ K63
 ♥ T97
 ♦ 976432
 ♣ 3

South
 ♠ QJ5
 ♥ K865
 ♦ AQJ
 ♣ QT2

Here we have an opening bid at a more modest level. The same principles apply, though...



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Bidding (and not bidding) Slams via quantitative raises of NT.

VB#6 Y2 Slam bidding 1 SA	Contract: 4N
Date: 14/06/2014	By: South
Dealer: South	Board #: 3
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

West	North	East	South
-	-	P	1NT
P	4NT	P	P
P			

Lead: \heartsuit Q

This deal is similar (in the bidding, anyway) to Hand 2. You open 1NT as dealer and North raises to 4NT. Again, this is a *quantitative raise*, asking you to bid 6NT if you have a maximum for 1NT and to Pass otherwise.

Well, a 15 count with its 4-3-3-3 shape is a bare minimum to open 1NT. With that in mind you have an easy Pass. Do not be seduced by the fact that you have three Aces and do not even think about a Blackwood response of 5 \heartsuit . That would paint North into a corner.

Dummy is displayed with a 4-3-3-3 17 count and you can thank partner for his conservatism – there are plenty of players who would have punted 6NT over 1NT with that hand. However, two 4-3-3-3 hands facing each other frequently disappoint in the play. Here – to your surprise – there aren't even ten obvious tricks to be had. True, there are nine on top but the vital tenth trick is elusive. It would be humiliating to fail in 4NT with a combined holding of 32 points.

Salvation comes in the form of West's unfortunate opening lead. The world and his wife would lead a Diamond from that West hand but – unluckily for him – it concedes the contract by enabling you to establish the \heartsuit 8 as the vital trick.

Reading the lead to be from the \heartsuit Q J 10 you win the \heartsuit A in hand and advance the \heartsuit 9, covered by the \heartsuit 10 and \heartsuit K. You cross back to hand (this can be done with either a Heart or a Spade) and play another Diamond, through West's remaining \heartsuit J 7, towards dummy's \heartsuit 8 6. Shaking his head West can only take his \heartsuit J and concede the tenth trick to dummy's \heartsuit 8.

Ten tricks come from three Spades, three Hearts, three Diamonds and the \clubsuit A.

North
 \heartsuit KQT
 \heartsuit KJ7
 \heartsuit K862
 \heartsuit AJ3

West
 \heartsuit 7642
 \heartsuit T82
 \heartsuit QJT7
 \heartsuit 74



East
 \heartsuit 853
 \heartsuit 6543
 \heartsuit 54
 \heartsuit KQT9

South
 \heartsuit AJ9
 \heartsuit AQ9
 \heartsuit A93
 \heartsuit 8652

A similar decision to that of Hand 2. Easy? Maybe, but the play is not.



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Bidding (and not bidding) Slams via quantitative raises of NT.

VB#6 Y2 Slam bidding 1 SA	Contract: 4N
Date: 14/06/2014	By: South
Dealer: South	Board #: 4
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: All

West	North	East	South
-	-	-	1♠
P	2♦	P	2♠
P	3♣	P	3NT
P	4NT	P	P
P			

Lead: ♥ 9

This deal involves a long bidding sequence and demonstrates that you have to concentrate on all bids partner makes. You open 1♠ and partner responds 2♦. With nothing much but a six-card suit you rebid 2♠ and partner continues with 3♣.

North
 ♠ JT
 ♥ KJ
 ♦ AJT42
 ♣ AKJT

West
 ♠ 752
 ♥ 98762
 ♦ 83
 ♣ 853



East
 ♠ AK
 ♥ T543
 ♦ Q976
 ♣ 742

South
 ♠ Q98643
 ♥ AQ
 ♦ K5
 ♣ Q96

Here you have a long-winded bidding sequence. Be that as it may, partner still puts you to the test, giving you a decision. Will you get it right?

Can you play the resulting contract successfully?

The first point to note is that this bid is *forcing to game* – a new suit at the three-level commits the partnership to playing in game in something or other. With a secure double Heart stopper you try 3NT and partner surprises you with a raise to 4NT. What has he got?

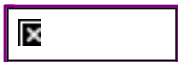
Well, he has developed slam fever, that's the first point. Secondly, he is **not** asking for Aces. Had that been his aim he could have done that a round or so earlier. Anyway – what suit has been agreed? This is a crucial question that you must ask in these cases. With no agreed suit 4NT is not Blackwood. Ever.

Here, you are being asked to bid 6NT or to Pass 4NT. With a tatty Spade suit and no extras for an opening bid you have an easy Pass. Had your hand been:

♠ K Q 9 8 7 6
 ♥ A 10 2
 ♦ K 5
 ♣ Q 9

where you have a good Spade suit and a robust opening suit that would have provided a source of tricks you would have thought about advancing to a slam.

As it is, 6NT is obviously hopeless – even 4NT is awkward with the ♥A K Q J providing a mere two tricks. After the obvious Heart lead from West you cannot afford to set up Spades. You have to play to make four Diamond tricks and play for two Hearts, four Diamonds and four Clubs. When Diamonds prove to be 4-2 (a 5-1 break would have been fatal) you are home and dry in 4NT (losing the ♦Q and the ♠A K).



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Bidding (and not bidding) Slams via quantitative raises of NT.

VB#6 Y2 Slam bidding 1 SA	Contract: 6N
Date: 14/06/2014	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 5
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: N / S

West	North	East	South
-	-	P	1♠
P	2♦	P	2♥
P	3♣	P	3NT
P	4NT	P	6NT
P	P	P	

Lead: ♣ T

This deal is similar to Hand 4 and involves a long bidding sequence. You open 1♠, partner responds 2♦ and you rebid 2♥. Partner continues with 3♣, which is *forcing to game* – remember, a new suit at the three-level commits the partnership to playing in game in something or other.

You try 3NT (what else?) and partner again surprises you with a raise to 4NT. What has he got? Well, as in the previous deal he has been infected with slam fever and you have to decide whether it is infectious or not. Does partner need a bucket of cold water or a helping hand?

4NT is **not** asking for Aces, so your job is to bid a slam or to Pass out 4NT. What should you do? Often in these circumstances you should reflect on the question “How much worse could my hand have been?” To bid this way you might have held, for example,

♠ K Q 9 8 7
♥ K J 6 5
♦ 5
♣ K 5 3

which is an Aceless 12-count having nothing in partner’s suit(s). On that hand above you would Pass 4NT with great rapidity. On your actual hand (15 points and a vital “filler” in partner’s Diamond suit) you are entitled to bid a slam.

As it is, 6NT is a magnificent contract – in fact 7NT is a very good spot. On normal suit breaks there are thirteen tricks – so you actually may have undercooked the hand.

After a count of tricks you appear to have one Spade, two Hearts, six Diamonds and four Clubs. However, when playing the hand there turn out not to be six running Diamonds. A very unfortunate 5-1 Diamond break means that there are only eleven tricks. Still, it is a fairly simple matter to arrange to concede one Diamond, setting up the long Diamond as the twelfth trick.

6NT bid and made.

North
♠ 9
♥ A7
♦ AKJ763
♣ AQ64

West
♠ K83
♥ QT832
♦ 9
♣ T983



East
♠ Q752
♥ 65
♦ T8542
♣ 72

South
♠ AJT64
♥ KJ94
♦ Q
♣ KJ5

Another long bidding sequence and another decision to be made. Well, the ball is firmly in your court - how will you deal with it?



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VB#6 Y2 Slam bidding 1 SA	Contract: 6N
Date: 14/06/2014	By: South
Dealer: South	Board #: 6
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

West	North	East	South
-	-	-	1NT
P	4NT	P	6NT
P	P	P	

Lead: ♠ J

On this deal you open 1NT and partner invites you to the party with a *quantitative raise* to 4NT. By now you know what this means – do you want to bid 6NT or rest in game?

With a maximum for 1NT (17 points and a source of tricks in the form of a five-card suit) you should be eager to bid 6NT. Dummy is as expected – a 16 count with a decent five-card suit – so you have a combined 33 points. West has an automatic lead of the ♠J and you have to make sure you rake in the requisite twelve tricks.

You have ten top tricks (three Spades, two Hearts, three Diamonds and two Clubs) and a 3-2 Diamond break would see you home and dry. With that in mind you try the ♦A and ♦Q and note that East shows out. What now?

Well, Clubs are also a useful source of tricks – a 3-3 or 4-2 break there would see you making four tricks in the suit, even if you lost a trick to the ♣Q. So you play off the ♣A and finesse the ♣10. If that were to lose – no problem – all the Clubs in hand would be good. Nope. It's a *good news – bad news* position. The good news is that the Club finesse won – the bad news is that Clubs are 5-1. Will nothing break nicely on this deal?

Well, it's time for a recount. You have three Spades, two Hearts, three Diamonds and three Clubs. That's eleven tricks – setting up the thirteenth Diamond would make twelve. So you revert to Diamonds now and give West a Diamond trick. After that there is a boss Diamond on table (actually the ♦5) that will do nicely for the twelfth trick.

It is unusual to flit between suits in this manner but as the bad breaks are revealed it becomes necessary. The principle to follow here is to keep counting and recounting your tricks.

North
 ♠ A74
 ♥ K83
 ♦ KQ653
 ♣ A2

West
 ♠ JT982
 ♥ 942
 ♦ JT74
 ♣ 7



East
 ♠ 53
 ♥ QJT76
 ♦ 9
 ♣ Q9864

South
 ♠ KQ6
 ♥ A5
 ♦ A82
 ♣ KJT53

In this deal you are given an easy option in the bidding.

The play, however, may take a little longer...