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Bidding (and not bidding) Slams via Blackwood.

VB#6 Y2 Slam bidding 2 SA	Contract: 6S
Date: 14/06/2014	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 1
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

North		East
♠ J842		♠ 3
♥ 86		♥ Q753
♦ KQ873		♦ AT5
♣ A7		♣ QJT32
West		South
♠ T95		♠ AKQ76
♥ JT9		♥ AK42
♦ J942		♦ 6
♣ 965		♣ K84

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

Again, we make the assumption that you have met the Blackwood convention whereby 4NT asks for Aces. In these six deals we will be bidding suits and so 4NT will be Blackwood. Having an agreed trump suit will allow you to sign off at the five-level in your trump suit should there be insufficient Aces for slam purposes.

The main problem that players have is in knowing when to wheel 4NT out into the auction. Much depends on judgement ("Is my hand worth a slam when it's put opposite what I know of partner's hand?") and that is not easy. Too many players just bid 4NT on all good hands. This is not good bridge!

We ought to point out that there are many variations of Blackwood that you may have encountered. They all have the fundamental problem, though, of knowing when to employ this bid. These deals may give you some (albeit limited) insight.

Here (Hand 1) you have a very good hand and soon discover a good fit with partner.

West	North	East	South
-	P	P	1♠
P	3♠	P	4NT
P	5♦	P	6♠
P	P	P	

Lead: H

Here, as South, you have a powerful 5-4-3-1 hand and are pleased when partner raises your 1♠ opening bid to 3♠. Just how far are you prepared to bid now?

Well, with a singleton, a useful side-suit (Hearts) and controls in all suits you ought to be very interested in a slam. If the opponents have two Aces then 6♠ would be embarrassing so you use Blackwood to check that that isn't the case. When partner shows up with an Ace you take your chances and bid 6♠. Note that chickening out at the five-level just because you are off an Ace is poor bridge. If you aren't sure what to do if you are missing an Ace you should not have used Blackwood in the first place – you should have *cue-bid* instead.

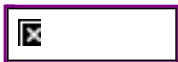
Anyway, you play in 6♠ and dummy is more or less as expected. A count of tricks shows a certain Diamond loser and nine top winners (five Spades, two Hearts and two Clubs). With twelve tricks not evident it would be unwise to draw trumps.

Your first maneuver should be to play a low Diamond, hoping West has the ♦A and that he would be in an impossible position. If he held that card then he would be on the horns of the proverbial – by taking it he would set up the ♦K Q for two discards and if he didn't take it we'd have no Diamond loser. Good plan, but thwarted when East turns up with Ace. East returns a trump and we must prepare Plan B.

This involves ruffing losers on table (remember, we can only dispose of losers by **trumping** them or **dumping** them). We can take the ♥A and ruff a Heart, then play three rounds of Clubs, ruffing. Both of these ruffs, you should notice, are taken in the *short trump hand*. We now only have one loser left – the ♥4 – and that gets **dumped** on the ♦K.

Our total of twelve tricks come from... five Spades in hand, the ♥A K, the ♦K, the ♣A K and two ruffs on table.

So have you enough to justify bidding a
slam?



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Bidding (and not bidding) Slams via Blackwood.

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

West	North	East	South
-	-	P	1♠
P	3♠	P	4♠
P	P	P	

Lead: ♥ T

You (South) open 1♠ with 19 points and an essentially balanced hand (a 5.3.3.2 shape). When partner raises to 3♠ you have to decide whether to stick at the game level or whether you hand justifies a slam investigation.

The answer is pretty well clear-cut. It is very easy to over-value these 5-3-3-2 hands – as a general rule they contain a *lot* of losers and play disappointingly. As well as points you usually need good distribution to make a slam – a singleton or a good side-suit that will provide a useful source of tricks. Here you have neither. It is worth comparing this 19-point hand with the South hand of Hand 1. There, with a powerful 5-4-3-1 hand, bidding a slam was fully justified.

Over a raise to 3♠ on this deal a *cue-bid* of 4♣ wouldn't be the worst effort ever seen and on this hand it wouldn't actually come to grief. North would sign off with 4♠ (having no Ace with which to make a return cue-bid) and that would be that; you would Pass and 4♠ would be the contract. However, 4♣ is overbidding the hand.

A Blackwood 4NT would be a wild effort after 1♠ – 3♠ and would propel the auction to the five-level. The auction would die in 5♣ after North denies an Ace and, on this layout, would give your side a minus score.

In terms of the play in 4♠ there are two Aces to lose off the top and there may be a second Diamond loser as well – that depends on how the Diamonds are lying. Here they are as unfriendly as it is possible to be.

You have to be careful in how you play the trump suit. If Spades are 2-2 or 3-1 it really doesn't matter what you do. Suppose, however, that they are 4-0? The way to find out (and still not to lose a trump trick no matter how they lie) is to cash the ♠A first. If everyone follows there are no worries – but if either defender shows out then the suit can be picked up without loss by taking a *marked finesse*.

Here East throws off on the ♠A (a Club - hoping you won't notice that he has no Spades!) You can now play a Spade to the ♠6 (!), draw all the trumps and try your luck in Diamonds by

North
 ♠ QT62
 ♥ K4
 ♦ J763
 ♣ KJ4

West
 ♠ J853
 ♥ T986
 ♦ A92
 ♣ 95



East
 ♠
 ♥ A732
 ♦ QT54
 ♣ 87632

South
 ♠ AK974
 ♥ QJ5
 ♦ K8
 ♣ AQT

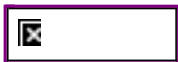
Here is another deal where you open the bidding with a good hand.

Just how good is it, though? Good enough to bid a slam?

leading to the ♦K. When West turns up with the ♦A you have to lose a second Diamond trick.

Conclusion. In the bidding it pays to be a little cautious with essentially balanced hands even if they have a lot of points. *Never mind the quantity, look at the shape.* Hand pattern at this game is as important as point-count.

In the play of the cards you should take precautions against potential bad breaks if you can. Here, you can overcome a 4-0 trump break in either hand if you find out about it. Cashing the ♠A is a *discovery play*.



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Bidding (and not bidding) Slams via Blackwood.

VB#6 Y2 Slam bidding 2 SA	Contract: 6S
Date: 14/06/2014	By: South
Dealer: South	Board #: 3
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

West	North	East	South
-	-	-	1♠
P	2♦	P	3♣
P	3♠	P	4NT
P	5♦	P	6♠
P	P	P	

Lead: ♥ J

Here, as South, you have a powerful 5-4-3-1 hand. You open 1♠ and partner bids 2♦ – not where you have your singleton (a bid which would depress your spirits) but where you have a very interesting holding of ♦A Q ×.

You rebid 3♣, which is *forcing to game* as it is a *new suit at the three-level*. From this point your partnership cannot Pass any non-game bid – the only exception would be if the opponents wander in to the auction and you could Double them for gazillions. Not very likely and irrelevant here.

Anyway, over 3♣ partner bids 3♠, returning you to your first-bid suit. This is a point of bidding theory that needs emphasis. When you are in a *game-forcing auction* (note these terms and conditions!) then the cheapest bid is often the strongest bid. If partner bid game at this point (say he bid 3NT or 4♠) he'd be making a terminal bid, showing little or no interest in higher matters. By bidding 3♠ he is giving you a chance to describe more features of your hand should you so wish – in some cases no nook nor cranny goes unexplored.

Here, the crucial point about your hand is the Diamond fit that you have. You have every reason to suspect that you have a running side-suit in this hand and hence a *source of tricks*. With that in mind you are quite justified in having a bash at a slam – via “the old Black”. 4NT elicits the information that there are not two Aces missing (although one is lurking in an opponent's hand) so you take the plunge and bid 6♠.

In playing the hand after West leads the ♥J you can count five Spades (on normal breaks) one Heart (after the ♥A has gone), five Diamonds and the ♣A. That makes twelve tricks so the order of the day is to draw trumps as quickly as possible. Although you may appear to have losing Clubs there is no need to ruff them on table – here the losers will be **dumped** on dummy's red winners.

East takes the ♥A over the ♥Q and returns a Club. You don't finesse (the all-essential **Count** has told you that you don't need to) and now

North
 ♠ A72
 ♥ KQ75
 ♦ KJT96
 ♣ 6

West
 ♠ 8
 ♥ JT92
 ♦ 8752
 ♣ KJ82



East
 ♠ J954
 ♥ A864
 ♦ 4
 ♣ 9754

South
 ♠ KQT63
 ♥ 3
 ♦ AQ3
 ♣ AQT3

Here (and in Hand 4) we use the idea of a *high-level reverse* to show a good hand.

That's all well and good - but what do subsequent bids mean?

you draw trumps. With this combination the most efficient method is to cash the ♠K, then the ♠A and discover the 4-1 break onside. Now it's easy to take the marked Spade finesse, draw trumps and run the red-suit winners.

All the losing Clubs get parked on the long Diamonds and the ♥Q. 6♠ bid and made



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Bidding (and not bidding) Slams via Blackwood.

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

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

Lead: ♣ Q

This deal is a compare-and-contrast hand; you have to put this one next to Hand 3 for comparison purposes. With a powerful 5-4-3-1 hand you open 1♠ and rebid a *game-forcing* 3♣ over partner's 2♦ response. You are really optimistic about your prospects with a partial Diamond fit and lovely suits. Over 3♣ partner jumps to 4♠ – should you stick or twist?

Well, by now you know the answer. Partner is giving you a warning – he is telling that you he wants out. Let's look at it from his perspective. His honors are all in the red suits so some of them are bound to be wasted (you are sure to be short in one of Hearts or Diamonds), his trumps are lousy, he has three low Clubs. Also, he has no real source of tricks for discards. In short (a point we have made before) 4-3-3-3 hands play disappointingly and should often be downgraded. Note that partner did well not to bid a selfish 3NT – how many of your partners would have chosen that call? Although it might make on this layout of the cards it's easy to construct hands where 3NT fails and 4♠ is easy.

Now, after partner's 4♠, you have been warned not to proceed unless safe to do so. How safe would bidding on be? The answer is not very. There is likely to be a hole in the trump suit and there is a danger that you are off a trump trick. Passing 4♠ is certainly the prudent move.

When dummy is displayed you can see just why partner bid as he did. No shape, no interest. 4♠ it is and you have to careful to land even that. With a Club loser and a Heart loser it is essential not to lose two trump tricks. If you've never seen this Spade layout before it's worth remembering. To make four Spade tricks, against any 4-1 break, you need to play the ♠A and a low Spade to the ♠J. If either opponent is harboring ♠Q 10 × × you can hold him to one trick and make four trump tricks.

True, if trumps were 3-2 and someone held ♠Q × you would concede an unnecessary trick. Well, that's a small price to pay for peace of mind.

In detail: You win the ♣Q lead and play the ♠A and a Spade to the ♠J. East takes the ♠Q but

North
 ♠ J63
 ♥ KJ8
 ♦ AQJ8
 ♣ 753

West
 ♠ 4
 ♥ T963
 ♦ 7652
 ♣ QJT8



East
 ♠ QT82
 ♥ AQ742
 ♦ T4
 ♣ 94

South
 ♠ AK975
 ♥ 5
 ♦ K93
 ♣ AK62

This deal needs to be compared with Hand 3.

We have a good hand - but is it good enough to explore higher levels?


his ♠10 8 are now known to be underneath your ♠K 9. When you regain the lead (with a top Club) you can cross to dummy with a Diamond and finesse the trumps. You are safe now for four Spade tricks, four Diamonds and two Clubs. The rest are just scraps for the bird-table.



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VB#6 Y2 Slam bidding 2 SA	Contract: 6N
Date: 14/06/2014	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 5
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North	
	♠ 73	
	♥ AQJT53	
	♦ KQ5	
	♣ A2	
West		East
♠ AQ52		♠ JT984
♥ 764		♥ 2
♦ T9874		♦ J2
♣ 5		♣ T8763
	South	
	♠ K6	
	♥ K98	
	♦ A63	
	♣ KQJ94	

This deal introduces the idea of a *positional contract*.

Never heard of it? Well, you have now!

West	North	East	South
-	1♥	P	2♣
P	3♥	P	4NT
P	5♥	P	6NT
P	P	P	

Lead: ♦ T

This is an example of a *positional slam*. When you reach the right contract it is trivial to play as the tricks are all there on top.

What makes this hand interesting is the bidding. You (South, as ever) watch as partner opens 1♥ and rebids 3♥ over your 2♣ response. With 16 points, excellent Heart support and a source of tricks in that Club suit you can hardly do less than apply Blackwood. Indeed, if partner admitted to holding three Aces you might well take a pot at a grand slam. As it is, though, you learn that you are missing an Ace. You must bid a slam – but *which slam*? You don't know which Ace is missing but what does that matter? Try it out for size now that you know what partner's hand actually is.

Suppose that partner were missing the ♣A but had the ♠A:

♠ A 3
♥ A Q J 10 5 3
♦ K Q 5
♣ 7 2

Here 6NT would still make – 6♥ would most likely make except for the small possibility of a Club ruff. Still, 6NT is the better spot.

You can (virtually) count your twelve tricks in 6NT: six Hearts, five Clubs and the ♦A if partner has the ♣A and six Hearts, two Spades, the ♦A (and probable ♦K) and three Clubs if partner has the ♠A.

The whole issue – as you have probably realized by now – is that you must be declarer on the actual layout to protect the ♠K from the opening lead. If North played 6♥ a Spade lead defeats it instantly. In fact, although 6NT by you is shatterproof, even 3NT fails if played by North. Being declarer with unprotected Kings is an important part of the game.

Here, 6NT has thirteen tricks if West neglects to take his ♠A at trick one. When the left-hand opponent leads a Diamond against your slam (entirely reasonably, we may say) you have a breeze to gain an overtrick.



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Bidding (and not bidding) Slams via Blackwood.

VB#6 Y2 Slam bidding 2 SA	Contract: 5S
Date: 14/06/2014	By: West
Dealer: West	Board #: 6
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: All

West	North	East	South
1♠	P	2♦	P
3♣	P	3♣	P
4NT	P	5♣	P
5♠	P	P	P

Lead: D

Here you (South) are an innocent bystander watching as your opponents have a car-crash of an auction.

West opens 1♠ and East responds 2♦. This is classic mistake #1. Why bid a minor suit when you can show your strength and primary support for your partner's major suit by bidding 3♣? It sure beats us.

West now forces to game with 3♣ and East gives preference to 3♠. This is mistake #2. With a minimum hand for a two-level response, no Aces and side-suits of dubious worth East should be trying to dampen West's ardour with a discouraging leap to 4♠.

West, fondly imagining he is facing a decent hand, leaps into Ace-asking territory with Blackwood although that is clearly mistake #3. You should not employ Blackwood when you have uncontrolled suits - for all West knows he is missing the ♥A K. Also, what would he do if East owned up to holding just one Ace? Sign-off in 5♠ or bid the slam? It's an age-old dimemma.

Anyway, there is no problem when East denies an Ace; with slam completely out of the question West hurriedly slams on the brakes with 5♠, desperately hoping he isn't too high.

5♠ is too high, of course. 4♠ doesn't make (and is unlucky to fail) but it is especially inept to reach the five-level on this type of hand.

Now to the card-play. Your partner leads the ♦2 (an obvious singleton) and you have to get the defense right to take the maximum penalty. ♦A, Diamond ruff, Heart to the ♥A, another Diamond. North now makes another trump trick regardless of whether West trumps high, low or discards. To ensure your partner leads a Heart at trick three you should lead the ♦10 back as a *suit preference signal* at trick two. The ♦4 would ask for a Club, the ♦10 for a Heart.

Partner's ♥9 professes no interest in Hearts (*Lead Low for Like and High for Hate*) so you know to play another Diamond and not try to cash North's possible ♥Q.

North
♠ J75
♥ 98632
♦ 2
♣ 9642

West
♠ AK963
♥ QJ
♦ J5
♣ AKJ8



East
♠ T842
♥ K7
♦ KQ763
♣ Q7

South
♠ Q
♥ AT54
♦ AT984
♣ T53

Sometimes the opponents have a wheel come off in the bidding. Can you punish them for their mistakes?

In this deal you get a chance to revise some points of good defense.

Post-mortem. "I had to show you my Diamonds" whined East, pathetically as West bit angrily into his cigar. "I'd have seen them when dummy came down!" came the withering reply.

Recommended bidding on the East-West cards?

Either

West	East
1♠	3♠
4♠	Pass

or, at a pinch,

West	East
1♠	3♠
4♣	4♠
Pass	