

## Roman Keycard Blackwood (RKCB) and Variations

Roman Keycard Blackwood (RKCB) is a method of determining the viability of a possible slam contract in a suit, based on the presence (or more correctly, on the absence) of key controls. The premise is that there are actually five critical cards, and that the failure to possess at least four of these cards makes the likelihood of success low. The five Key Cards are the four aces and the king of the presumed trump suit.

As with all variations of Blackwood, the intent is **not** to look for slams, but to make certain that hands that suggest slam are not missing key controls. Blackwood should be used when distribution and honor strength suggest that twelve or thirteen tricks are attainable, and that only an absence of quick tricks or unavoidable trump losers will prevent success.

The natural call that invokes the convention, as with traditional Blackwood, is 4NT.

What is the presumed trump suit? On most auctions, the presumed trump suit is the one that has first been bid (excluding artificial bids) by both members of the partnership. If no suit has been bid naturally by both members of the partnership, the presumed trump suit is the one last bid before the convention has been invoked.

In the original version of RKCB, the responses to the 4NT inquiry are:

- 5♣ shows the holding of 0 or 3 of the key cards
- 5♦ shows the holding of 1 or 4 of the key cards
- 5♥ shows the holding of 2 of the key cards WITHOUT the queen of the trump suit
- 5♠ shows the holding of 2 of the key cards PLUS the queen of the trump suit

The information regarding the presence of the queen of the presumed trump suit will become clearer as we examine the Continuation Sequences below.

A popular variation of RKCB reverses the meaning of the 5♣ and 5♦ bids. This variation is called "1430" (referring to the meaning and order of the responses). The original version is often called "3014" to distinguish it from the variant.

Some partnerships actually play one version (3014) when the agreed-upon trump suit is clubs and the other version (1430) in all other instances.

### Continuing Sequences

After the key-card determination has been completed, there are two other possible continuations.

### King-Asking

If the 4NT bidder follows the RKCB response with a call of 5NT, he assures partner that all of the key cards are held. This 5NT call is, as with traditional Blackwood, a request

for partner's kings. There are actually two treatments of this sequence; it is important that you discuss with partner which method you wish to employ.

The simplest treatment is "number of kings" (often noted on the Convention Card as "#Ks"), **not including the king of the presumed trump suit**. The responses to 5NT using this treatment are:

- 6♣ shows 0 kings
- 6♦ shows 1 king
- 6♥ shows 2 kings
- 6♠ shows 3 kings

(Remember, there are only 3 kings available, as the king of trump has already been accounted for in the response to 4NT).

The other popular treatment is "specific king" (often noted on the Convention Card as "SKA", specific king ask). In this treatment, partner shows the lowest ranking king (not including the king of the presumed trump suit). If partner holds no kings outside of the trump suit, responder simply bids slam in the trump suit. Playing this treatment, responder should never bid past six of the agreed-upon trump suit. Before asking for kings, requestor should take this possibility into account.

In some partnerships playing SKA, if responder holds two or more kings, the lower-ranking one is bid at the 7-level, as long as that does not take the partnership past 7 of the agreed-upon trump suit. This absolutely requires partnership discussion...

### (Trump) Queen-Ask

Another very popular continuing sequence involves asking about the queen of the presumed trump suit. Since this information is already conveyed in the RKCB responses of 5♥ and 5♠, it is only needed when the response to 4NT is either 5♣ or 5♦. When this is the case, the bid of the **next sequential suit, excluding the presumed trump suit**, is conventional and asks about the trump queen. A return to the trump suit at the lowest possible level denies the queen; any other bid promises the queen and the king of the bid suit. If holding the queen and more than one outside king, always show the lowest-ranking king (cheapest bid). A **jump** to 6 of the trump suit shows the queen, but denies any outside kings (depending on the suit, a jump may not be possible). 5NT promises the queen, but denies any outside kings **lower than the agreed-upon trump suit**. There remains the possibility of an outside king higher than the agreed-upon trump suit.

Examples:

1♠ - 2♥ - 2♠ - 4♠ (establishes trump suit) - 4NT - 5♣ - 5♦ (asks about ♠Q) - 5♠ (denies queen)

1♠ - 2♥ - 2♠ - 4♠ - 4NT - 5♣ - 5♦ (asks about ♠Q) - 5NT (promises queen, denies any outside kings)

1♠ - 2♥ - 2♠ - 4♠ - 4NT - 5♣ - 5♦ (asks about ♠Q) - 5♥ (promises queen, promises ♥K)

1♠ - 2♥ - 2♠ - 4♠ - 4NT - 5♣ - 5♦ (asks about ♠Q) - 6♦ (promises queen, promises ♦K, denies ♥K, ♣K)

1♠ - 2♥ - 2♠ - 4♠ - 4NT - 5♦ - 5♥ (asks about ♠Q) - 5♠ (denies queen)

1♠ - 2♥ - 2♠ - 4♠ - 4NT - 5♦ - 5♥ (asks about ♠Q) - 5NT (promises queen, denies any outside kings)

1♠ - 2♥ - 2♠ - 4♠ - 4NT - 5♦ - 5♥ (asks about ♠Q) - 6♣ (promises queen, promises ♣K, denies ♥K)

1♥ - 2♣ - 2♥ - 4♥ - 4NT - 5♦ - 5♠ (asks about ♠Q) - 6♥ (denies queen)

1♥ - 2♣ - 2♥ - 4♥ - 4NT - 5♦ - 5♠ (asks about ♠Q) - 5NT (promises queen, denies any outside kings except possible ♠K)

1♥ - 2♣ - 2♥ - 4♥ - 4NT - 5♦ - 5♠ (asks about ♠Q) - 6♣ (promises queen, promises ♣K)

As with the specific king-ask, responder will not bid past six of the agreed-upon suit.

### Uses of RKCB in Ultimate NoTrump Contracts

Although the use of RKCB sequences are normally used to arrive at slams in a suit contract, the information so obtained will frequently permit the bidding of a notrump slam that would otherwise be unbidable.

### Exclusion RKCB (EKCB)

For those players that employ Exclusion Blackwood, it is recommended that the same responses be used as in regular RKCB. Whatever you and your partner agree upon for 4NT responses should be used in Exclusion.

If you do not currently employ Exclusion Blackwood, learn it immediately and include it in your normal tool set.