

ROMAN KEYCARD BLACKWOOD

This variation differs from the original concept of Mr. Easley Blackwood in that there are not only four Aces counted in the different responses, but **five Key Cards**--the **four Aces and the King of the agreed trump suit**. This feature adds a certain sense of security to the bidding process, and therefore has become popular among many bridge players.

The advantage of using Roman Key Card Blackwood for bidding slams in the Major suits is obvious. However, here is no reason to discard Roman Key Card Blackwood when deciding to bid slam in any suit. It is of the utmost importance to have agreed upon the trump suit before initiating Roman Key Card Blackwood. **If the trump suit has not been established, then Roman Key Card Blackwood should not be initiated.**

In establishing the trump suit, certain elements of the partnership agreement must be agreed upon by the partnership. In the following example, the trump suit is obvious to both partners. However, partnership agreements can contain the understanding that the agreed trump suit can be ascertained, although not specifically named in the auction, as:

1. **the suit of the opener if he opened with a strong forcing action**
2. **the suit of the responder if he jump shifts and then initiates Roman Key Card Blackwood**
3. **the last bid suit by any partner**

| North | East | South | West |
|-------|------|-------|------|
| 1 ♣ | pass | 3 ♣ | pass |
| 4 NT | pass | | |

North has decided that there are sufficient values, after the positive response of South, to explore the possibility of slam, and bids 4 No Trump, asking for the number of the five Key Cards held by South. South can show his partner the number of Key Cards he holds by bidding according to the following chart.

- 5 ♣: shows 0 or 3 Key Cards
- 5 ♦: shows 1 or 4 Key Cards
- 5 ♥: shows 2 or 5 Key Cards without the Queen of Trump
- 5 ♠: shows 2 or 5 Key Cards with the Queen of Trump

Assuming the following bidding process:

| North | South |
|-------|-------|
| 1 ♣ | 1 ♣ |
| 4 ♣ | 4 NT |
| 5 ♥ | 6 ♣ |

South has decided to attempt slam. North informs his partner that he has 2 or 5 Key Cards without the Queen of Trump. South reevaluates his hand, realizes that the Queen of trump is missing, and bids the small slam as opposed to bidding the grand slam. A bad split in the trump suit will defeat a grand slam contract, although the partnership may hold all 4 Aces and the King of trump.

Assuming the following bidding process:

| North | South |
|-------|-------|
| 1 ♣ | 1 ♣ |
| 4 ♣ | 4 NT |
| 5 ♣ | 7 ♣ |

South has decided again that slam is a possibility and initiates Roman Key Card Blackwood after establishing the trump suit. North informs his partner that he has 2 or 5 Key Cards, and also the Queen of the trump suit. South

realizes that all the Key Cards are in their proper place, knows the location of the Queen of trump, and bids the grand slam with the secure knowledge that the contract will be fulfilled. The holding of both North and South could be similar to the following:

| North | South |
|---------|----------|
| ♠ Q1076 | ♠ AK9853 |
| ♥ K8 | ♥ A4 |
| ♦ A72 | ♦ KQ9 |
| ♣ AKJ6 | ♣ 85 |

ASKING FOR KINGS

A bid of 5 No Trump asks for **outside Kings**. The most important element of this bid is that it must first of all be determined that **all five Key Cards are in the possession of the partnership** (and the Q of Trumps). The bid of 5 No Trump by the partner initiating Roman Key Card Blackwood is promising his partner that all five Key Cards are held by the partnership. The second intention of the use of the 5 No Trump bid is to ascertain the **possibility of a grand slam**, since a small slam has already been guaranteed.

| North | South |
|-------|-------|
| 1 ♣ | 1 ♠ |
| 4 ♠ | 4 NT |
| 5 ♣ | 5 NT |

North has first of all informed his partner that he has three Key Cards (or zero, but not possible on the bidding). South has determined by this response that all five Key Cards are held by the partnership, which means that South holds the Ace and Queen of Spades, and the Ace of Diamonds. South informs his partner of this fact by bidding 5 No Trump, which asks North for an unknown outside King. If North does not have any outside Kings, such as in the following example:

| North |
|---------|
| ♠ KJ108 |
| ♥ AJ7 |
| ♦ 1087 |
| ♣ A74 |

then North simply bids 6 Spades.

However, if North does have an outside King, such as in the following example:

| North |
|---------|
| ♠ K1087 |
| ♥ AK76 |
| ♦ J9 |
| ♣ A74 |

then North will cuebid his outside King with a bid of 6 Hearts.

And if North had two or three outside Kings, such as in the following example:

North

♠ K1087
 ♥ A10
 ♦ K98
 ♣ AK98

then North would not cuebid any outside King, but rather just bid 7 Spades, the grand slam, having the values and the location of the honors in addition to all of the other Key Cards promised by South with his bid of 5 No Trump, as in the following bidding sequence.

| North | South |
|-------|-------|
| 1 ♣ | 1 ♠ |
| 4 ♠ | 4 NT |
| 5 ♣ | 5 NT |
| 7 ♠ | |

Important Side Note

There are, however, several partnership understandings, which treat the bid of 5 No Trump differently. The understanding of the partnership is, that if the initiator of the Roman Key Card Blackwood bids 5 No Trump, then all five Key Cards are accounted for, and the 5 No Trump bid requests partner to show his **number of outside Kings, not including the King of trump, by responding according to the original version of the Blackwood convention.**

6 ♣: shows no outside King
 6 ♦: shows one outside King
 6 ♥: shows two outside Kings
 6 ♠: shows three outside Kings

The danger of exceeding the possible final contract is highly possible, and the partnership must use this partnership agreement cautiously.

FINDING THE QUEEN

If the initiator of the Roman Key Card Blackwood does not have the Queen of trump, and the response given cannot show the Queen (5C or 5D), the next higher-ranking suit is used to ask about the trump Queen. This keeps the partnership at a safer level of bidding, even though that bid may be a bid of 5 No Trump. A response of 5 Clubs or 5 Diamonds only informs the partner about the number of Key Cards, whereas the responses of 5 Hearts or 5 Spades informs the partner about the possession or non-possession of the Queen of trump. The location of the Queen of trump is deemed absolutely necessary to the success of the slam try.

This method has the great advantage.

In the following example:

| North | South |
|-------|-------|
| 1 ♣ | 1 ♠ |
| 4 ♠ | 4 NT |
| 5 ♣ | 5 ♦ |

North has informed his partner that he holds three Key Cards (or zero, but not possible on the bidding). However, since North cannot show with his bid whether he has the Queen of trump or not, this remains an unknown factor. When South bids 5 Diamonds, the next higher-ranking suit, South is informing his partner that the partnership holds all five Key Cards, but he does not possess the Queen of trump. South's bid of 5 Diamonds is asking North to bid the number of Kings he holds, and is asking North at the same time whether or not he holds the Queen of

trump. In the case that the next higher-ranking suit is the trump suit, the initiator of the Roman Key Card Blackwood may not bid the trump suit as the next higher-ranking suit to ask for Kings and the possession of the Queen of trump. The following example should make this clear.

| North | South |
|-------|-------|
| 1 ♣ | 1 ♠ |
| 4 ♣ | 4 NT |
| 5 ♣ | 5 ♠ |

The bid by South of 5 Spades becomes the escape bid, since South now knows that not all of the 5 Key Cards are in the possession of the partnership. Asking for the Queen of trump then becomes irrelevant.

The following examples should make the bidding process clear in those circumstances when the initiator of Roman Key Card Blackwood does not have the Queen of trump, but where the partner can impart information about the number of outside Kings he holds and whether or not he holds the Queen of trump.

| North | South |
|-------|-------|
| 1 ♣ | 1 ♠ |
| 4 ♣ | 4 NT |
| 5 ♣ | 5 ♦ |
| 5 ♠ | |

North's bid informs South that he does not have the Queen of trump, and no outside King.

| North | South |
|-------|-------|
| 1 ♣ | 1 ♠ |
| 4 ♣ | 4 NT |
| 5 ♣ | 5 ♦ |
| 5NT | |

North's bid informs South that he does have the Queen of trump, and no outside King.

A response of 5 Hearts informs South that North holds the Queen of trump and the King of Hearts. A response of 6 Clubs informs South that North holds the Queen of trump and the King of Clubs. A response of 6 Diamonds informs South that North holds the Queen of trump and the King of Diamonds.

In the case that North holds the Queen of trump and two outside Kings, then North should bid the cheapest King. Although this bid may show only the possession of the Queen of trump and only one outside King, the small slam is guaranteed, even though this second King has been kept secret. South is forced to bid the small slam, and North will then have the opportunity to show his second King by bidding the grand slam. Some partnerships agree to bid 7 right away if 2 or more kings are held.

Adapted from <http://www.bridgeguys.com/Conventions/RomanKCB.html>