

ROMAN KEY CARD BLACKWOOD (Part 1)

Blackwood convention, devised by Mr. Easley Blackwood, is one of the most widely used conventions in the world. It is one of the easiest conventions ever devised and its popularity is universal. The Blackwood convention has undergone many modifications and many variations have resulted from this one concept. One of these variations is called **Roman Key Card Blackwood (RKCB)** which is the result of constant quest for greater accuracy in Slam Bidding. RKCB has been popularized by Mr. Eddie Kantar, who has written a book and many articles on this subject. His ideas were earlier available on his web site (www.kantarbridge.com). The ideas presented in this article are from Mr. Kantar's article RKB.

Roman Key Card Blackwood (RKCB) 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 which are the four Aces and the King of the agreed trump suit. The basic reason behind this concept is that when Slam is to be played in a suit, the King of the trump suit is almost as important as an Ace and also the trump Queen is valuable.

A) Response to RKCB 4NT Bid

RKCB is used after Opener and Responder have agreed on a trump suit. There are two ways of responding to RKCB 0314 or 1430 and the difference between them is that 5C and 5D responses are inverted.

- 5C – Shows 0 or 3 Key Cards playing 0314 whereas playing 1430 it shows 1 or 4 Key Cards
- 5D – Shows 1 or 4 Key Cards playing 0314 whereas playing 1430 it shows 0 or 3 Key Cards
- 5H – Shows 2 Key Cards without the Queen of Trumps
- 5S – Shows 2 Key Cards WITH the Queen of Trumps

Out of the two methods, the one which will produce 5C response often, is better as it saves space which helps in Queen ask at a lower level. When a stronger hand asks the weaker hand, more often answer is 1 and playing 1430 produces 5C response. However when the weaker hand asks the stronger hand, more often answer is 3 and playing 0314 produces 5C response. Therefore, Eddie Kantar recommends play both!!!. That means whenever Strong hand asks play 1430 and when Weak hand asks play 0314.

Eddie Kantar's advise – For those that don't think they can handle two sets of responses, play one or the other. Then **1430 is better** as it comes more often (i.e. stronger hand asks weaker hand more often).

How to find out which hand is strong and which is weak?

In most RKCB sequences, the Opener is considered the Strong Hand unless:

1. Opener has limited his hand to a minimum opening bid (12-14) or Opener has opened preemptively.
2. Responder makes a strong jump shift response.

If a player makes a Take out double and 4NT RKCB is used, the doubler is considered the strong hand.

B) Double Keycard Ask

When two suits have been specifically bid and raised, the Double Keycard ask can be used. In Double Keycard, there are 6 key cards, the 4 aces and the 2 kings of the bid suits. The following are the responses:

- 5C – Shows 0 or 3 Key Cards playing 0314 whereas playing 1430 it shows 1 or 4 Key Cards
- 5D – Shows 1 or 4 Key Cards playing 0314 whereas playing 1430 it shows 0 or 3 Key Cards
- 5H – Shows 2 Key Cards with no Queen of agreed suits
- 5S – Shows 2 Key Cards with the lower ranking Queen
- 5N – Shows 2 Key Cards with the higher ranking Queen
- 6C – Shows 2 Key Cards with both the Queens

What Next

The most likely follow up to an RKCB Key card ask is the Queen-ask whenever the response is 5C or 5D. However in case 4NT bidder has the Queen or the response is 5H or 5S, the next auction is 5NT – King ask. The bid of 5NT confirms possession of all the 5 Key cards as well the Queen of the agreed suit. The best way to utilize 5NT is to play 5NT bid as a Specific King Ask (SKA).

We will see in action in our next month's bulletin Queen-ask and Specific King ask.

(Contributed by Sudhir Aggarwal)

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ROMAN KEY CARD BLACKWOOD (Part 2)

In the previous bulletin we have seen how responder responds to 4NT RKCB key card ask. As RKCB bidder makes his moves towards the Slam he has many more bids available to find out the required cards. The most likely follow up to an RKCB Key card ask is the Queen-ask.

C) Finding the Trump Queen

After response to RKCB 4NT bid, 4NT bidder knows the location of Trump Queen after 5H and 5S response. However 5C and 5D response do not say any thing about the Queen. In case 4NT bidder wants to know about the trump Queen, he bids the cheapest step (non trump) to ask for Queen as well as side Kings. The responder to Queen ask, bids as below:

- Signing off in the trump suit – denies the Queen.
- Jump to the 6 level in trump suit – Shows the Queen but denies a side suit King.
- 5NT – Shows the Queen of Trumps and some extra feature in the hand (this could be the Queen of 4NT bidder's first suit or responder's first bid suit or extra trump length).
- A new suit – Shows the Queen of Trumps and the King in the bid suit. With two kings, the responder shows the king that can be shown cheaply. Another method (introduced to me by Mr. T.C. Pant) suggests that a new suit bid shows the Q of Trumps and the King in the bid suit or the other two Kings.

In case 4NT bid was double Key card, then the responses to Queen-ask are as follows:

- 1st Step – No Queen, 2nd Step – Lower Queen, 3rd Step – Higher Queen, 4th Step – Both Queens

D) Specific King Ask (SKA)

After response to RKCB 4NT ask, 5NT bid asks for specific kings. The 5NT bid can also be used after a 5 level response to Queen ask bid. 5NT king ask confirms possession of all the 5 Key cards as well the Queen of the agreed suit and is a move towards grand slam. If the responder can count 13 tricks, he simply bids the grand slam otherwise he responds as below:

- If responder has no king, he bids the agreed suit.
- If responder has one king, he bids that suit.
- If responder has two kings, he bids the lower ranking king.
- If responder has three kings, he bids 6NT which is forcing to grand slam.

E) Repeat King Ask

After responder has shown one King in response to SKA, he can utmost have one more king. In case 4NT bidder is interested in grand slam provided responder has king of a particular suit, he bids that suit at 6 level which is a Repeat King ask, the responder bids as follows:

- Sign-off in the agreed suit at the 6 level denies the king of the ask suit or any other higher ranking king that can be shown below the six level of agreed suit.
- A bid of 6NT shows Kxx in the ask suit.
- A jump to the grand slam in the agreed suit shows Kx or a singleton with sufficient trump support.
- A raise of the ask suit shows KQ in the ask suit.

The repeat King ask bid can also be made after 6 level response to Queen ask bid showing a king along with the trump queen.

Examples:

Opener	Responder	Opener	Responder	Opener	Responder	Opener	Responder
♠ KQxxxx	♠ Axxx	1S	4C (Splinter)	♠ AQx	♠ KJ10xx	1D	1S
♥ AQx	♥ Kxx	4NT (RKCB)	5H (2)	♥ AJxx	♥ xx	2H(reverse)	3D(GF)
♦ x	♦ Axxx	5NT (SKA)	6H (H King)	♦ AJ10xx	♦ KQx	3S(support)	4NT(Double RKCB 0314)
♣ Axx	♣ x	7S		♣ x	♣ Axx	5C(0 or 3)	5H(Queen ask)
						6C(higher Q)	7S

In the next part of this series we will discuss Specific Suit Ask (SSA), which is used after response to 4NT, if 4NT bidder is only interested in finding out what responder has in a particular suit .

(Contributed by Sudhir Aggarwal)

(...to be continued)

ROMAN KEY CARD BLACKWOOD (Part 3)

In the previous bulletins, we have seen how responder responds to 4NT - RKCB Key card ask and how 4NT bidder uses Queen ask and Specific King Ask (SKA) bids. Let us see how Specific Suit Ask (SSA) is used.

F) Specific Suit Ask

After response to RKCB 4NT ask, 5NT asks for specific kings. However 4NT bidder may not be interested in specific kings, he may be interested in what the responder has in a specific suit. The asker may have losers in only one suit. That suit may be headed by AKx(x) or Axxx. If so, the asker is looking for third round control, a doubleton or queen or a singleton, Kx or KQx, to play in a grand slam.

In order to ask partner about a specific suit, called the specific suit ask (SSA), you must first go through 4NT. After response to 4NT, a new suit that is NOT the queen-ask is the SSA. That means you have to forego 5NT specific king ask to make a SSA. The SSA confirms joint possession of the four aces as well as the KQ of the agreed suit. The SSA cannot substitute for the queen-ask, the queen-ask takes precedence. The responses to SSA are as follows:

- A return to trump suit (as ever) is the weakest response. It denies 2nd or 3rd round control in the ask suit. It does not count as a step.
- 1st Step = 3rd round control (xx or the queen)
- 2nd Step = 2nd round control (specifically Kxx or longer)
- 3rd Step = Kx
- Raise of the ask suit = KQ(x)
- Jump in the trump suit = singleton

The above response to SSA are applicable in case the King of the ask suit has not already been denied. However if the responder has already denied the King of the ask suit (e.g. after a Queen-ask and a King showing response or a King denial response to 5NT), the responder responds as follows:

- A return to trump suit denies 3rd round control in the ask suit.
- 1st Step = Queen or doubleton.
- Raise of the ask suit = QJ

SSA can also be made in a previously bid suit. Responses are same but responder cannot have shortness:

- Return to trump suit denies 2nd or 3rd round control.
- 1st Step = The Queen.
- 2nd Step = The King.
- Raise of the ask suit = The KQ with any length

The frequency of an SSA is relatively low, but serves a wonderful purpose. Remember following points:

- A SSA either follows a keycard ask directly or a queen-ask.
- A 6 level SSA made in suit directly beneath the trump suit in rank shows the AKx(x) and asks for third round control for a grand. In all other cases it does not promise the King. The SSA bidder has to be prepared for any response which bypasses the six level of the agreed suit.

Examples:

Opener	Responder	Opener	Responder	Opener	Responder	Opener	Responder
♠ AQxxxx	♠ KJxx	1S	2N (Jacoby)	♠ Ax	♠ x	1D	1H
♥ AKxx	♥ xx	4NT (RKCB)	5H (2 without)	♥ Qxxx	♥ AKJxxx	2H	4NT (1430)
♦ x	♦ AKxx	6H (SSA 3 rd round control)	7S (Yes)	♦ AQxxx	♦ x	5S (2 with Q)	6C (SSA)
♣ Ax	♣ Kx			♣ xx	♣ AKJxx	6D (xx or Q)	7H

After an RKCB response, the asker has to decide what further information is needed. Is it the trump queen, a specific king, a specific 3rd round control, etc? Once that question is answered, it is easier to know how to proceed. A piece of cake. Isn't it??

There is much more to RKCB than what could be presented in these bulletins. For complete details of Mr. Eddie Kantar's RKB, you must read ROMAN KEYCARD BLACKWOOD – Slam Bidding for the 21st Century by Eddie Kantar.

(Contributed by Sudhir Aggarwal)