

BLACKWOOD

When no suit has been shown by either partner, (as with an opening bid of 4NT), standard Blackwood is used (5♣ no aces, 5♦ one, etc.), and a "new suit" bid by the Blackwood bidder is a signoff:

Opener	Responder
4NT	5♣
5♥ - signoff	

A 5NT continuation by the Blackwood bidder asks for kings (6♣ none, 6♦ two, etc.).

Note that an opening bid of 4NT is Blackwood, not a natural bid. To bid 4NT naturally, open 2♣ and then bid 4NT. See section 6-1, The Two Club Opening. Also see section 6-8, DOPI and DEPO, for appropriate action when LHO overcalls a Blackwood bid.

Roman Key Card Blackwood

Roman Key Card Blackwood (RKCB) is an improvement on plain Blackwood. When a suit is agreed, either directly or by implication, the king of trumps is counted as an ace when responding to 4NT--it is a "key card." The responses to 4NT are:

5♣ - 1 or 4 key cards

5♦ - 0 or 3 key cards (note reversal of usual practice)

5♥ - 2 or 5 key cards, no queen of trumps

5♠ - 2 or 5 key cards, with trump queen

5NT - 2 key cards plus an important king
(i.e., king of partnership's second suit)
but lacking the trump queen

6 of agreed suit - useful void above key suit
(and normal response is five of agreed suit)

6 of lower suit - useful void in suit named
(and normal response is five of agreed suit)

Holding more cards in trump length than partner could assume, you can usually bid as if you have the queen. Whether you need one extra card or two depends upon the auction. If you know partner has at least five cards in the suit, for instance, then Jxxxx is just about as good as Qxxx if you have promised only four cards in the suit. Partner, going for seven with AKxxx or for six with Kxxxx, won't be too disappointed in either case.

With a useful void and a normal response that is not five of the agreed suit, make the normal response and then cue bid the void later or keep on bidding when partner shows signs of stopping. If the normal response would cause you to bid five of the agreed suit, and the useful void is lower in rank, bid six of the void suit. If it is higher in rank, jump to six of the agreed suit. Partner will understand how many key cards you have, knowing that your normal response would have been in the agreed suit.

If in doubt as to what the "agreed" suit is, the rule is that the last suit raised is the agreed suit, otherwise the last suit bid.

Opener	Responder
1♦	2♥
3♦	3♥
4NT - RKCB, hearts "agreed"	

Looking only at the suits bid by opener and responder on the first and second round, hearts is the last suit bid, so the agreed suit is hearts for purposes of (RKCB).

However, a secondary suit bid (usually a cue bid) on the third round doesn't count, even if it has been raised:

Opener	Responder
1♥	1♠
3♥	3♠
4♣	4NT - RKCB, spades "agreed"

Opener	Responder
1♣	2♦
3♣	3♦
3♠	4♠
4NT - RKCB, diamonds "agreed"	

With RKCB, a 5NT bid following 4NT does not ask for kings. It asks partner if he has any important feature to show--usually a king lower in rank than the agreed suit, but perhaps a singleton with lots of trumps. With more than one such feature to show, choose the one that is most likely to help partner evaluate grand slam chances. If in doubt, bid the lower ranking feature:

Opener	Responder
1♠	3♠
4♦	4♠
4NT	5♣ - 1 or 4 key cards
5NT	?

Responder bids 6♣ with the club king (denying the diamond king), 6♦ with the diamond king. With both, she bids 6♦, the suit opener has cue bid. Opener can now bid 7♠ with ♠K87432 ♥A ♦AQ932 ♣A.

When holding an "inconvenient" king in a suit higher than the agreed suit, it is sometimes possible to show it by bidding six of a suit that was used for a splinter bid. That is more useful than showing a king in the splinter suit. Similarly, Asker can bid a splinter suit at the six level to ask if responder has such a king.

When the bidding shows that it is impossible for responder to have a king not shown by RKCB, the 5NT requests asks for a significant queen. E.g., responder showed zero or one control in response to a 2♣ opening, then showed a key card (a trump king, necessarily) in response to RKCB, Then 5NT asks for the lowest-ranking queen (or a very significant queen).

The 5NT bid guarantees that all the aces and the king of trumps are held by the partnership. If the partner of the 5NT bidder can see that a grand slam is okay on the basis of this knowledge, he can just bid the grand slam instead of showing some feature. A player should bid 5NT to tell partner that all key cards are held, even with no intention of bidding seven himself. Then partner may have the stuff to bid seven.

When an opponent overcalls the 4NT bid, use DOPI or DEPO to show key cards (see section 6-8). If 4NT gets doubled, a pass shows no key cards and a redouble is to play. Otherwise the double is ignored.

If the RKCB bidder bids a new suit at the five level after partner shows key cards, and the bid could not possibly be meant as a final contract:

-- If the new suit is lower in rank than the agreed suit, he is asking about the queen of trumps:

Opener	Responder
1♠	3♠
4NT	5♦ - 0 or 3 key cards
5♥	

The 5♥ bid asks, "Do you have the queen of trumps?" Without the queen, responder signs off in 5♠. With it, she bids the next higher ranking bid other than a signoff, in this case 5NT. Extra length can count as a queen, as said before.

When there is enough bidding space below six of the agreed suit, it is possible to show one extra card when lacking the queen or "queen equivalent" by bidding one rank higher than the queen-showing bid:

Opener	Responder
1♣	3♣
4NT	5♣ - 1 or 4 key cards
5♦?	5♥ - queen or six clubs
	5♠ - five clubs, no queen
	6♣ - four clubs, no queen

The 3♣ bid does not guarantee five cards, which therefore represent "an extra card."

-- If the new suit is higher in rank than the agreed suit, he is demanding that you bid 5NT. Probably the partnership lacks two key cards and he sees that 5NT is the safest contract.

It sometimes happens that the 4NT bidder cannot ask about the queen of trumps without going to the six level. If he needs that information for a grand slam bid, he can bid six of a suit that could not possibly become the trump suit:

Opener	Responder
1♠	3♥
3♠	4NT
5♥	6♣ - asks for the queen of spades
6♦	- spade queen or extra length (seven spades in this case)
6♥	- no spade queen, six spades
6♠	- no spade queen, five spades

Exclusion Blackwood

To use this simple version of Exclusion Blackwood, a player first makes a splinter bid in a void suit, then immediately bids 4NT:

Opener	Responder
1♠	4♣ - splinter bid
4♠	4NT - Exclusion Blackwood

The responses are the same as for regular RKCB, except that the ace of the void suit is not counted as a key card. This means you cannot use regular RKCB on the next round after splintering with a singleton, but you can do so if you have made an intervening bid:

Opener	Responder
1♠	4♣ - splinter bid
4♦	4♥ - cue bid
4♠	4NT - regular RKCB

Another case of Exclusion Blackwood is an immediate 4NT bid after cue bidding an opposing suit:

South	West	North	East
2♠	3♣	4♣	Pass
4♠	Pass	4NT	- Exclusion Blackwood

South ignores the ace of clubs when responding. A 4NT bid made by a cue bidder's partner is regular RKCB, not Exclusion Blackwood.