

FOUR NOTRUMP - BLACKWOOD OR NATURAL?

An opening bid of 4NT is regular (not RKCB) Blackwood. With a sure ten-trick notrump hand, start with an artificial 2♣ and then bid 4NT. This policy lessens the chance that the opponents will get into the act when all you want to know about is aces. For Ace-asking and key-card asking bids following a notrump opening, see the sections 5-2 and 5-4.

Opener Responder

1♥ 2NT
3♣ 3♥/3♠
4NT

Roman Key Card Blackwood (RKCB), with last bid suit considered the trump suit for RKCB purposes.

1♠ 2NT
3♣ 3NT
4NT

Natural notrump raise. Opener still doesn't know whether responder is minimum or not--only that he has 13-15 HCP, no spade support, no heart suit. If opener wanted to ask for aces he could have bid 4♣ instead of 3♣ (which is an artificial response to the 2NT Omnibus bid. See section 6-9, Omnibus).

1♥ 3♥
4♣ 4♥
4♠ 4NT

A natural bid, showing ♦K. Limit raisers don't have a Blackwood sort of hand.

1♠ 2♣
2♥ 4♣
4NT

Natural, showing diamond strength, club shortness

1♠ 2♣
4♣ 4NT

Natural, showing minimum values for a two-over-one response:
♠2 ♥QJ93 ♦K1087 ♣AJ62

1♠ 2♥
4♥ 4NT

RKCB. The preceding applies to minors only.

1♠ 3♣
3NT 4NT

RKCB, clubs agreed. A player who makes a strong jump takeout cannot make a natural 4NT bid (and cannot use Gerber).

2♣ 2♦
4NT A sure ten-trick notrump hand. With 28-30 HCP and no assurance of winning ten tricks, bid 3NT. For Blackwood, open 4NT.

1♠ 3♣
3♠ 3NT
4NT Natural. *Opener* can raise to 4NT, even after a jump takeout response. A 4♦ bid here would be Super Gerber (section 6-10).

1♠ 3♣
3♠ 4♣
4NT RKCB. When a jump takeout responder rebids his suit, that is considered the "agreed" suit. Opener can only bid 4♠ or 5♣ to sign off.

1♥ 1♠
3♣ 3NT/4♣
4♠ 4NT RKCB, not a signoff

1♠ 2♣
2♠ 3♦
3NT 4♥/4♠ (4♥ promises a singleton heart, 4♠ denies it)
4NT RKCB, not a signoff (spades "agreed")

Responding in Competition

South West North
1♣/1♦ 1♥/1♠ 4NT RKCB--Use Omnibus with a 19-20 HCP hand

1♣/1♦ 2♥/3♥ 4NT Natural, 18-19 HCP, too good for 3NT
/4♥ (Omnibus 2NT must be a jump)

1♠ any 4NT RKCB

1♥ 3 any 4NT RKCB

1♥ 4♣/4♦ 4NT RKCB

1♣/1♦ 4♠ 4NT Takeout, two or three-suiter
/1♥

When the opposing jump is to 4♠, the takeout can be a two or three-suiter, so RKCB loses out. Consider this auction:

South	West	North
1♣	4♠	4NT

North could have ♠3♥AJ1087♦AK8742♣5 or ♠5♥KQ843♦AJ74♣K85. The 4NT bid asks South to bid another suit if he has one, otherwise to bid 5♣. North will correct 5♣ to 5♦ with the first hand, showing a red two-suiter. With the second hand North will pass 5♣. South must not jump to 6♣ unless his suit is self-sufficient. If he wants to be in slam but does not know what to bid, he can bid 5NT to show interest in both minors, or 5♠ to show interest in hearts as well as clubs.

Rebids in Competition

Unless it follows a minor suit raise, a jump rebid of 4NT is always RKCB, with the last named suit as the agreed suit. Non-jumps of 4NT by either partner are for takeout after a one-over-one response. RKCB after a stronger suit response or a major suit raise.

South	West	North	East
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1♦	Pass	1♥	4♠
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4NT - Takeout:	♠6♥KQ6♦AKJ872♣A76	or	♠6♥Q2♦AKQ87♣AKJ74
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(With the first hand, opener will correct a 5♣ bid to 5♦, thereby implying three-card heart support.)

1♦	Pass	2♣	4♠	- Now 4NT by either partner is RKCB.
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1♥	3♠	4♣/4♦	Pass
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4NT - RKCB

1♥	Pass	2♥/3♥	4♠
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4NT - RKCB

After a minor suit raise, however (even a jump), a 4NT bid (even a jump) is natural.

Four Notrump Overcalls

East	South
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1♥/1♠	4NT
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2♥/2♠	4NT
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3♥/3♠	4NT	These are all unusual notrump, asking for a minor suit preference.
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- 1♣/1♦ 4NT
 2♣/2♦ 4NT
 3♣/3♦ 4NT
 4♣/4♦ 4NT All natural, not Blackwood or unusual notrump, over a minor suit opening
- 4♥ 4NT Unusual notrump, but could have a little something in spades

4♠ 4NT Any wild two-suiter, not just the minors. Partner should bid clubs or diamonds unless he has a self-sufficient heart suit. He bids diamonds only if he prefers hearts to clubs. He therefore bids 5♣ with ♠42 ♥53 ♦J97632 ♣K84 because partner probably has hearts and clubs. With a good hand, he can bid 5NT to show both minors, 5♠ to show hearts plus a minor.

Advancing an Overcall

Double or triple jumps to 4NT are RKCB. A single jump is RKCB if partner overcalls in a major, natural otherwise:

South	West	North	East	
1♣	1♠	Pass	4NT	RKCB (triple jump)
2♦	2♠	Pass	4NT	RKCB (double jump)
3♥	3♠	Pass	4NT	RKCB (single jump over a major suit)
2♥	3♦	Pass	4NT	Natural (single jump over a minor suit)

The last 4NT bid shows a hand that is too good for a 3NT bid.

If both opponents have bid a suit (i.e., North bids 3♥ in the last auction), then a jump to 4NT is RKCB even when partner has bid a minor. Natural will not be missed, since a stopper becomes much less likely.

Non-jump 4NT bids are for takeout in general, but there is an exception at matchpoints: A 4NT response to a simple overcall of 4♣ or 4♦ is natural if the opposing suit has not been raised:

South	West	North	East	
3♥	4♣/4♦	Pass	4NT	Natural at matchpoints, RKCB at IMPs
3♠	4♣/4♦	4♠	4NT	RKCB always, because of the raise.
1♠	2♦	4♠	4NT	Takeout: ♠2 ♥AJ1092 ♦Q1032 ♣A98 or: ♠2 ♥KQ873 ♦K5 ♣AQJ83 (implies hearts plus a minor)

4NT responses to a strong jump overcall are always RKCB.

Responding to a Takeout Double

The same principles apply as those applicable to partner's over-call. When 4NT asks for aces, it is regular Blackwood since the partnership has not bid a suit.

South	West	North	East	
1♠	Dbl	4♠	4NT	Takeout (over a major). West should avoid bidding a four-card heart suit unless it is very strong. Even if East has four hearts, which he might have bid, the suit may split 4-1 or 5-0 in view of the auction.
1♥	Dbl	4♥	4NT	Takeout, emphasis on the minors
3♣	Dbl	Pass	4NT	Natural (single jump over a minor)
1♣	Dbl	3♣/4♣	4NT	Blackwood (in view of the raise)
3♠	Dbl	Pass	4NT	Blackwood (jump to 4NT over a major)
4♣/4♦	Dbl	Pass	4NT	Natural at matchpoints, Blackwood at IMP scoring
4♠	Dbl	Pass	4NT	Any two-suited hand, doubler assumes minors for the moment

Four Notrump Bids by the Takeout Doubler

If partner has bid a suit, 4NT is always RKCB.

South	West	North	East
3♠	Dbl	Pass	4♣/4♦/4♥
4♠	4NT - RKCB:	♠3 ♥KQJ4 ♦KQ10 ♣AKQJ2	

If partner has bid notrump, 4NT is always a notrump raise, even if an opposing suit has been raised.

South	West	North	East
2♠	Dbl	3♠	3NT
4♠	4NT		Notrump raise, not takeout

If partner has not bid, 4NT over 4♠ is for takeout, emphasizing the minors, probably with three cards in the unbid major:

South	West	North	East
2♠	Dbl	4♠	Pass
Pass	4NT		Perhaps 1-3-4-5 distribution, big hand
	Dbl		Repeats the takeout, promises hearts

Some General Principles

A player who has made a limit bid cannot use Blackwood. This holds for most natural notrump bidders, since notrump bids are limit bids. Any exceptions are clear-cut:

Opener	Responder	but:	Opener	Responder
1NT	3♠		1♣	3NT
4NT is obviously RKCB			4♥	4NT - signoff

Opener	Responder
1♠	3♠
4♣	4♦
4♠	4NT is natural, showing ♥K and a maximum.

There is just no type of hand that responder, who has made a limit bid of 3♠, could have that would warrant RKCB.

A passed hand is a "limit bidder" for this purpose:

South	West	North	East
Pass	Pass	3♥	Dbl
Pass	4NT		

West has a good hand with two long minors. She could not have enough for Blackwood, considering her initial pass.

A player who has pulled partner's 3NT bid to four of a suit cannot change his mind and bid 4NT naturally. It has to be RKCB:

Opener	Responder
1♦	2♣
2♠	3NT
4♣	4♥
4NT - RKCB, clubs agreed	

Blackwood can seldom be used by either partner after Fourth Suit Artificial. After FSA, a 4NT by either partner is usually natural, a notrump slam try. See section 4-10, Fourth Suit Artificial.

Blackwood is not used after a forcing club raise--no exceptions!

Opener	Responder
1♣	3♦ - forcing club raise
4NT - natural, too much for a 3NT bid	

See chapter 5, Notrump Bidding, for the meaning of 4NT in bidding sequences following a notrump opening. Also see section 8-6, Getting a Preference at the Five Level.