



Exclusion Roman Key-card Blackwood

THE purpose of this series of articles is to challenge and entertain you with some of the advances in bidding theory that have been developing in recent times.

Many, but not all, of you will be familiar with Roman Key-card Blackwood (RKCB), a tremendous tool used since Edwin Kantar of the US developed it many years ago. It took a while to really establish itself but it is now used in some guise or other almost universally. In essence the trump king assumes the status of a fifth ace and the trump queen also becomes very important. For slam bidding (particularly grand slams) knowledge that the trump suit does not have a dreaded hole in it is absolutely vital.

The normal structure is to play the responses to 4NT as follows:

- 5♣ = 0 or 3 key cards (the four aces and the trump king qualify here)
- 5♦ = 1 or 4 key cards
- 5♥ = 2 (or 5) key cards *without* the trump queen
- 5♠ = 2 (or 5) key cards *with* the trump queen

Please note that many partnerships now choose to switch the meanings of the 5♣ and 5♦ bids above (what is often called '1430 responses'). This is clearly a matter for individual partnerships to decide.

After hearing a 5♣ or 5♦ response the RKCB bidder can bid the next suit up (which is not the trump suit) to ask for the trump queen. There is a huge amount of work which can be done by regular

partnerships to develop these auctions but here and now is not the time or place I am afraid . . .

Let's concentrate instead on an amazing advance in bidding theory, known colloquially as 'Voidwood', or more correctly 'Exclusion Roman Key-card Blackwood'.

How Does It Work?

As when using normal Blackwood, or RKCB, there must be a trump suit agreed. Exclusion RKCB then uses a dramatic leap to the *five level or above* in a side suit to invite partner to describe the number of key cards in his hand *excluding* the ace of the bid suit. The rationale for the bid is that you hold a void in the suit specified so are only interested in the key cards in the remaining suits.

The bid must *not* be confused with splinter bids for yes, it shows a shortage as does a splinter, but operates at the five level or above and therefore can be used to ask for key cards rather than just showing a singleton or a void as per a normal splinter.

Here is a hand from a recent congress to demonstrate:

♠	K Q 10 7 5 2
♥	A K 8 7 4 3
♦	Void
♣	5

You hear partner open 1♣, followed by a 1♦ overcall. You bid 1♠ (the higher of two five- or six-card suits, remember); the next hand jumps pre-

emptively to 3♦, partner bids 3♠ and your right-hand opponent passes. What now?

Essentially all you care about are the ace of spades and the ace of clubs, with the ace of diamonds being irrelevant. Yet if you now launch into RKCB (always a bad idea with a void on general principles), you will hear a response which may include the unwanted diamond ace – in other words you will be guessing.

The solution is to jump directly to 5♦ – Exclusion RKCB' (sometimes just abbreviated to 'Exclusion').

Partner will then give a reply along these lines:

- 1st step: 0 or 3 key cards
- 2nd step: 1 or 4 key cards
- 3rd step: 2 key cards without trump queen
- 4th step: 2 key cards with trump queen

Obviously if you normally play 1430 responses, then the first two steps above will be inverted.

At the table partner held:

♠	A J 9 4
♥	6
♦	Q 7 6
♣	A J 10 7 4

So he bid 5NT (3rd step, 5♥ being the 1st and 5♠ the 2nd) in response to the 5♦ Exclusion to show two key cards, *excluding* the diamond ace, without the spade queen.

Now 7♠ could be, and indeed was, bid with some degree of confidence.

As you can see the system is marvellous to use – great fun and very exhilarating!

What if the Opponents Intervene?

What if the opponents intervene after Exclusion RKCB?

Just as I recommend having a defence if the opponents intervene after normal RKCB, I recommend having something similar here. My personal choice is to play DOPI and ROPI, though there are of course alternative treatments. Thus:

ENGLAND PLAYERS VICTORIOUS AT REJKJAVIK BRIDGE FESTIVAL

ENGLAND players were victorious at the Rejkjavik Bridge Festival, held in January. In the pairs event Andrew Robson partnered Zia Mahmood to an emphatic victory by over 4%. The Swiss teams event was won by the team of Brian Senior, Sandra Penfold, Nevena Senior and Rumen Trendafilov. The team of Janet De Botton, Artur Malinowski, Nick Sandqvist and Tom Townsend finished in joint third, adding to the strong performances by the England players.

a) **With DOPI:**

If the opponents *bid* after Exclusion RKCB then:

Double: Shows 0 or 3 key cards

Pass: Shows 1 or 4 key cards

1st Step: Shows 2 key cards without the trump queen

2nd Step: If this response does not bypass the established trump suit, then it shows 2 key cards and the trump queen

b) **With ROPI:**

If the opponents *double* your Exclusion RKCB, then:

Redouble: Shows 0 or 3 key cards

Pass: Shows 1 or 4 key cards

1st Step: Shows 2 key cards without the trump queen

2nd Step: If this response does not bypass the established trump suit, then it shows 2 key cards and the trump queen

Again, as before, if you normally play 1430 responses with your RKCB, then the first two responses in the above sequences are inverted – this is a matter for regular partnerships to agree on.

Let's look at one more example to demonstrate the system in action – once again, in an uncontested auction:

♠ A K Q 10 8 5	♠ J 4
♥ A K J 5	♥ Q 10 7 6 2
♦ K Q J	♦ A 8 3
♣ Void	♣ 7 5 2

West	East
2♣	2♦
2♠	3♥
5♠ ¹	5♥ ²
5♠ ³	7♥ ⁴

1 Exclusion RKCB

2 1 or 4 key cards (2nd step)

3 Do you have the trump queen?

4 Yes!

Here we see a lovely auction where the opener can use Exclusion over 3♥ to try to locate the vital diamond ace. The response shows one key card (*outside* of clubs, remember) so there can be no ambiguity here. The opener checks up on trump solidity by bidding the next suit up to ask for the trump queen. Without it the responder would have signed off in 6♥ but with it can jump to the cold grand slam.

Happy slam bidding!

Top Table

Brian Senior



BRIAN SENIOR plays as a professional partner or team-mate, is a bridge teacher, and a bridge journalist. While he has written many books on the game, he is perhaps best known as the editor, publisher, and a major contributor to the official world championship book each year. Brian has, at different times, represented Great Britain, England, Northern Ireland and Ireland in international competition, and has won all the major EBU teams competitions at least once.

When did you start playing bridge?

Back in my early to mid-teens, my grandmother taught me many different card games, including bridge.

How often do you play?

I play very little club bridge, but play tournaments at the weekends and, if anybody wants to take me, events overseas. One of the best things about the job I do is the opportunity to visit so many interesting places, so if anyone out there wants to employ a grumpy old bridge pro for a foreign tournament – I'm your man!

Do you always play with the same partners / team-mates?

I play with many different partners and team-mates, though I do have some regulars. What do I expect from them? That they always try their best and don't make silly mistakes out of laziness.

What do you do for a living?

As my previous answers will have suggested, I am a professional bridge player, though a substantial part of my time is also taken up with bridge journalism. I regularly work on the daily bulletins at world and zonal championships, and am the current editor and publisher of the official world championship book each year. Though the journalism pays less well than playing, it provides some variety and better all-round balance to life.

What are your favourite bridge books?

I like biographies of top players rather than books on technique or system.

What are your hobbies?

Apart from travel, I like watching sport, cricket being my number one (as should be expected of a Yorkshireman), though the sport I most go to see live is ice-hockey – I take my teenage daughter to see Notting-

ham Panthers, currently the most successful team in the UK. I also like cinema and not too heavy theatre, and read science fiction, history and biographies.

What do you like and what would you change in bridge?

I like the fact that, however serious a competition may be, there is always a social element to the game, with the opportunity to talk to many different people during a session, and when we go to a tournament we meet up with many of the same people again and again, though I am of course concerned at the shortage of new blood coming into the English tournament scene. What do I dislike? As with life in general, bridge in the UK is over-regulated. Alert this, announce that, you can't play that convention, the extended Rule of 25, two identical convention cards – I write this fresh from playing a tournament in Manila, where I think I saw one opponent in five days with a convention card, and yet there were no problems.

What's the bridge success (so far) closest to your heart?

I have won bridge events all around the world, and also lost some that I should have won. Some meant a lot at the time for one reason or another – perhaps because of who I was partnering, perhaps because I played particularly well – but if I had to choose one win it would be playing for Northern Ireland in the Camrose, back in the days when each match lasted for an entire weekend, and beating England – only the second time N. Ireland had ever done so. Since then I have also had the dubious privilege of playing for England against N. Ireland and losing. Given how rare and precious those N. Irish wins have been, that puts me in a unique position.