



Bath Replays

38 Be specific!

Wednesday 12 August 2009

On a recent hand from Wednesday night, I picked up this rather nice collection. With both sides vulnerable I was 2nd in hand. North passed. I opened 1♦ and partner, as I'd secretly hoped, bid 1♥ after South's pass.

Dealer	♠ 8
WEST	♥ AKJ3
13	♦ AKQ52
EAST	♣ Q92
SOUTH	

This enabled me to make a very descriptive bid of 3♠, a splinter.

A splinter is an unnecessary jump in a new suit which shows primary support for partner and a singleton or void in the bid suit. (A bid of 2♠ would have shown a strong hand with at least 5 diamonds and 4 spades and 3♠ is therefore 'unnecessary' and can be used for this purpose.) I must have a very good hand for this bid, as partner has only promised 6 points or so and 4 hearts.

Things continued to improve when partner was able to bid 4♣. We have already agreed we are playing in hearts, and this cue-bid of 4♣ (as we play it) shows 1st or 2nd round control. So partner is promising either the ♣A or ♣K (or both) or a singleton or void.

Armed with this knowledge I know the defence won't be taking the first 2 tricks so it's safe for me to bid 4NT. We play RKCB and partner bid 5♠, bless him.

This bid shows 2 keycards (there are 5 keycards: the 4 Aces and the King of trumps). Not only that, he also promises the Queen of trumps, which a response of 5♥ would have denied.

Well it looks like the slam is almost a certainty now, but what about the grand?

Barring the sort of bad breaks that Malcolm gets on every hand he plays, we have no losers in spades, hearts or diamonds so all depends on the club suit.

I think it's fair to say that most pairs would play 5NT as asking for the *number* of Kings. This is all well and good if partner has both Kings, but what if he only has one?

The ♠K will take care of one of my club losers but unless he has the Queen as well, I have no parking place for the losing club.

I was particularly glad on this occasion that we were playing 5NT as asking for *specific* Kings. I bid 5NT and partner was there with 6C. Brilliant.

As it was pairs, I decided to punt 7NT. I can already count one spade, 4 hearts, 3 diamonds and 3 clubs. 11 tricks. If the diamonds are not worth 5 tricks in no trumps the 12th and 13th tricks could come from a 5th heart in partner's hand, the King of spades or even a 4th (5th) club. You only live once.

South led a heart and partner tabled his hand.

Thankfully, Malcolm wasn't playing the contract and the diamonds didn't break 5-0. So I was able to claim at trick 2 with 3 spades, 4 hearts, 5 diamonds and a club.

♠ AKQ10	Dealer	♠ 8
♥ Q642	WEST	♥ AKJ3
♦ J87	13	♦ AKQ52
♣ A7	EAST	♣ Q92
	SOUTH	

So what happened to the ♣K?

As this had never come up since it last happened, partner thought we were playing 5NT as asking for the number of Kings, and would still be employing the 1430 responses we use over 4NT.

So it's fair to say we were a trifle lucky, and you may well ask 'Would he not have to bid 6♠, thus taking you past 6♥, if he wants to show that specific King?'

Obviously I would not be advocating the specific King response if this impracticality existed. You have to use your judgement. If you don't have any Kings below the trump suit then you should simply bid the small slam. However, there is more to it than that. 5NT in itself confirms that all the keycards are present, and is a grand slam try. If you have an undisclosed source of tricks you can bid the grand slam without holding any Kings below the trump suit. This is particularly true when the trump suit is clubs or diamonds!

When I bid 5NT partner could still have :-

♠Axxx ♥Qxxx ♦xx ♣Ax

Partner has much more. For starters, as I've almost certainly got at least 4 hearts and 5 diamonds, he knows we have no black suit losers. Also, the ♦J - and the fact that he has 3 diamonds - is huge. I think he should bid 7NT himself and take the pressure off me. It will make whenever 7♥ is making and only won't make if I've got, say, ♦AKI0xx or ♦AQI0xx. Given my bidding to date, I would suggest I'm favourite to hold AKQxx.

Also, if we were both playing the same system, I could bid 6♦ over 6♣, which would say 'Bid the grand slam if you hold the ♦K'. So you do get a chance to show a 2nd king if you have one. If you're playing RKCB, there are only 3 Kings outstanding, so if you hold 2 including the ♠K and are worried you won't be able to show it, chances are you've got enough to bid the grand yourself.

You will be hard pushed to find examples where 5NT asking for the number of Kings is more informative than 5NT asking for specific Kings.

Paul Keightley
August 2009