

“Easley” Misunderstood

SHARK'S POINTERS ONLINE

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Overview

Today's Shark's Pointers Online will look at the use - and abuse - of the Blackwood Convention.

We'll briefly review the history of this convention and how it has evolved.

We'll look at 4 common problem situations that frequently occur

We'll begin the discussion of some advanced slam bidding techniques. .

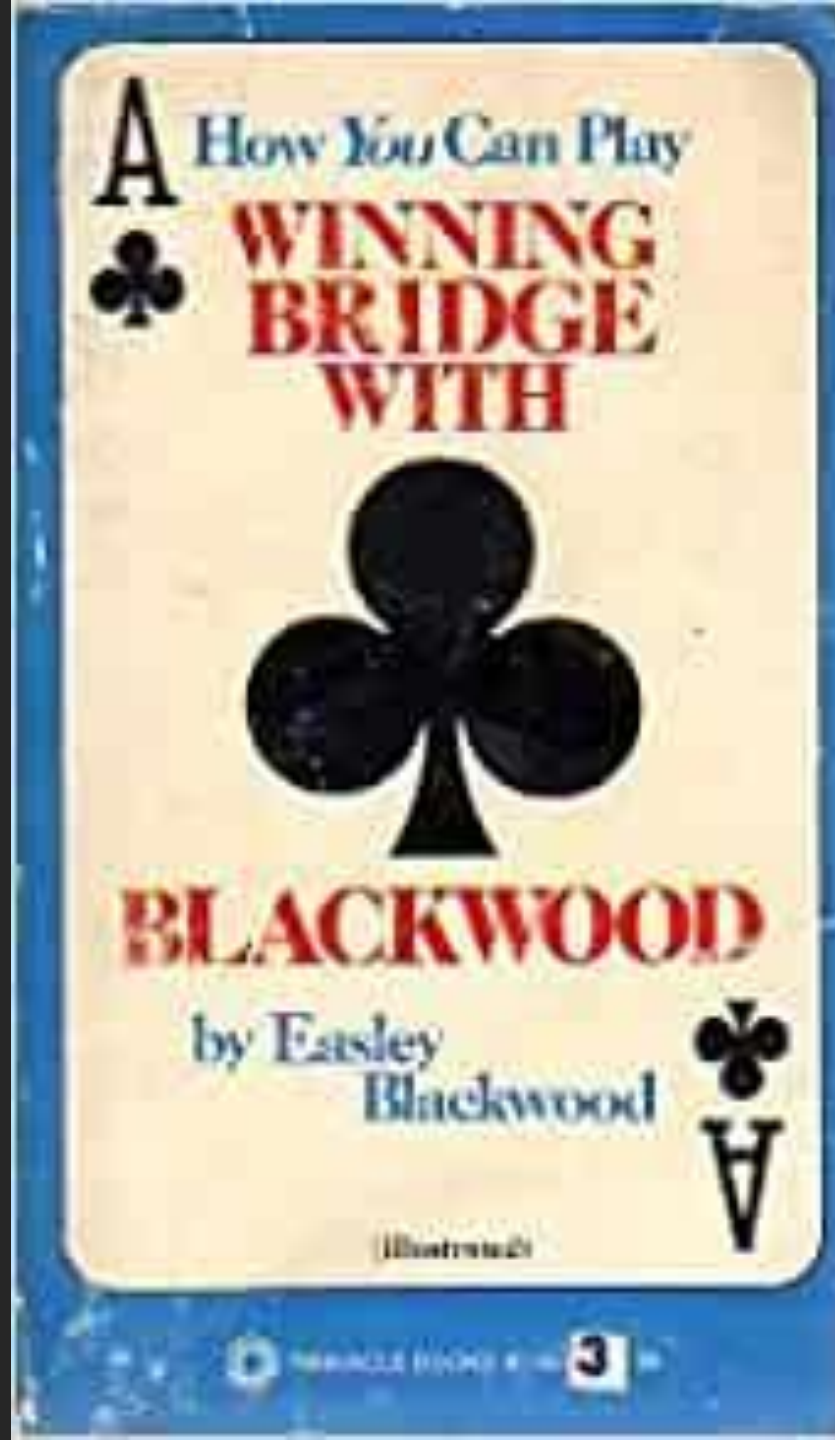
Finally, I'll share an extremely costly Blackwood misunderstanding I had this week!

Easley
Blackwood
(1903-1992)

1934 - Introduced the ace-asking "Blackwood Convention" -the most universally adopted bidding convention of all time.

1968-1971 - Executive Secretary and General Manager of the ACBL

1995 -Inducted into ACBL Hall of Fame



The Blackwood Convention

Here is the convention that Easley Blackwood, under the nom de plume "Ernest Wormwood" introduced in an article in The Bridge World in 1934.

The Bid 4 No Trump asks, "How many aces do you have, partner?"

The answers are as follows:

5 clubs means "I have 0 or 4 aces"

5 diamonds means "I have 1 ace"

5 hearts means "I have 2 aces"

5 spades means "I have 3 aces"

Asking for Kings

The final part of the Blackwood Convention was a way to find out about kings.

It has been modified and improved over the years, but here is the way the convention was introduced. After the 4 No Trump bidder finds out how many Aces his partner has, he can ask for the number of Kings by bidding "5 No Trump".

6 clubs means "I have 0 or 4 Kings"

6 diamonds means "I have 1 King"

6 hearts means "I have 2 Kings"

6 spades means "I have 3 Kings"

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1967 - Giorgio Belladonna and Benito Garozzo - Stars of Italy's "Blue Team"

The Blackwood Convention didn't change much until the Italians introduced important modifications in the 60's to help provide clarity regarding trump suit quality.

The Italians recognized the importance of the King and Queen of the agreed upon trump suit. They added the K of trumps to the count of aces, calling it a "key card", and introduced a modification to standard Blackwood as follows:

5C = 0 or 3 of the 5 keycards

5D = 1 or 4 keycards

5H = 2 without the Queen of trumps

5S = 2 with the Queen

Here's a good hand from the ACBL's BridgeFeed that shows the advantage of keycard blackwood over the original convention.

	Partner		You
♠	A74	♠	KQ
♥	J863	♥	A742
♦	10	♦	AK85
♣	AKJ62	♣	Q98

Partner opens 1 ♣, you have 18 hcp, but decide to take it slow and bid 1 ♦.

Now partner bids 1 ♥. After a RKCB auction, following your 4NT bid, partner will bid 5 ♥ - showing 2 key cards missing the Q of ♥. It should be clear from this bidding that there are 2 probable losers, and you will pass. Without the benefit of keycard Blackwood, after partner bids 5 ♥, you will have no idea whether or not partner has good hearts and you are left to guess what to do.

“1430” and Specific Kings

Over the years, the Blackwood Convention has been further modified and adapted, but the basic concept hasn't really changed much in the past 86 years.

Today, many – but not all – bridge players have switched the 5 club and 5 diamond responses so that 5 clubs now means “1 or 4”, and the 5 diamond response means “3 or 0”. As a memory aide, it has come to be known as “1430”

In addition, instead of the number of Kings, most experts today inquire into asking about specific Kings. We'll explain in more detail later in this presentation.

“Easley Misunderstood”

Easley Blackwood would roll over in his grave, if he saw how his great bidding tool has been misused and misunderstood so frequently. Today, we are going to go over 4 of the more common disasters that occur when this convention is not used properly.

- 1) The answer gets you too high.
- 2) The answer doesn't give you the info you need.
- 3) The bidders don't know how to continue after the initial answer.
- 4) The King asker doesn't understand what this bid implies.

The Answer Doesn't Give The Info You Need

Partner		You	
♠	A7432	♠	Q102
♥	K983	♥	AQJ1072
♦	J8	♦	KQ
♣	AQ	♣	K10

After 1 ♠ - 2 ♥ - 3 ♥ - 4NT - 5 ♦ * (0 or 3), you have no idea if partner has this hand in which slam has little or no play, compared to a hand with the K of ♠ instead of the J of ♦ and Q of ♣, in which case slam is cold.

The Answer Gets Us Too High

Partner	You
♠ A7432	♠ K10
♥ KQ8	♥ AJ10742
♦ QJ8	♦ AK
♣ J10	♣ Q9

After 1 ♠ - 2 ♥ - 3 ♥ You try keycard blackwood, and partner shows 2 keycards with the Q – 5 ♠!
Oops! Too high. You bid 6H, hoping partner has a club control, but the opps gleefully cash the AK of clubs to set you 1 trick. You need to anticipate every possible response. Here, you should Q-bid 4 ♦, when partner bids 4 ♥, you must pass or bid 5 ♦ to show the K or 5 ♥ – which pard will perceive to be asking for a club control. Either road gets to your stopping safely at 5 ♥.

You Don't Know How To Continue

Partner	You
♠ K6	♠ AQ1032
♥ Q983	♥ AJ1072
♦ 86	♦ A
♣ A7	♣ K10

After Pass by partner-1 ♠ - 1NT -3 ♥ - 4 ♥ -4NT-5 ♣ * (1 or 4), how do you proceed?

We'll show some rules on the next slide, but recommended auction continuation here would be 5 ♦ * (Do you have the Q of ♥) – 5 ♠ (Yes, and I have the K of ♠!) - 6 ♥ .

Asking For The Trump Queen

If the Blackwood response is 5♣ or 5♦, you won't know about the Q of trumps.

Let's say you hold AK987 KQ9 AK87 7, and you open 1♠, and your partner bids 3♠, showing 4 spades and 10-12 points in support of spades.

Let's say you bid 4NT and partner bids 5♣, which in your methods shows 1 or 4 aces. It sure would be nice to know about the Q of trumps, wouldn't it?

Good news! There is an easy way to find out! The next non trump suit bid is a Queen ask. On this hand, after partner's 5♣ bid, your bid of 5♦ is the Q ask. Partner signs off in 5♠ if he doesn't have the Q, or bids 6♠ with the Q and no Kings. Any new suit shows the Q of ♠ and the King in the suit bid.

Don't Know How To Continue

If the Q of trumps was not shown or denied by the blackwood response, the next non trump suit bid is a Queen ask, the 2nd available bid is a specific K ask.

If the Q is asked and responder has it, he responds by bidding the 1st available K (if below 6 of agreed suit) or bids 6 of agreed suit if no Kings.

If the Q of trumps was shown or denied by the blackwood response, the next non trump suit bid is a specific King ask.

What Does the King Asker Imply?

4NT asks a question, 5NT not only asks – it also tells!

4NT asks “Do you have any Aces?”

5NT asks “ Do you have any Kings?”

5NT tells “We have all the keycards and the Q of trumps”

NOTE: K ASK SHOWS GRAND SLAM INTEREST. NEVER, NEVER ASK ABOUT KINGS IF YOU DO NOT HAVE ALL THE ACES, THE KING AND QUEEN OF TRUMPS!!

BE VERY CLEAR WHAT YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE RULES AT 6 LEVEL ARE!!

Specific King Ask

Here's a good example auction that highlights what we have discussed:

	Partner		You
♠	AKQ65	♠	103
♥	QJ98	♥	AK1062
♦	A8	♦	K82
♣	A7	♣	K106

1 ♠ -2 ♥ -3 ♥ -4 ♥ -4NT-5 ♥ *(2 w/o Q)- 5 ♠ *(K ask)-6 ♣ *(♣ K)-6 ♦ (K ♦ ?)-7 ♥ *(Yes!!)

Asking for Kings

Here's a good example auction of what happens when you don't have all the keycards -

Partner	You
♠ QJ43	♠ AK1076
♥ A9872	♥ 10
♦ K8	♦ 82
♣ A7	♣ KQJ53

1 ♥ -1 ♠ -2 ♠ -4 ♠ - 4NT -5 ♥ *(2 w/o Q) - 5NT*(K ask)** -7 ♠ - **Ooops!!

“Be Careful What You Ask For” -My Own Recent Blackwood Disaster ACBLSYC #4591– 5/12/20

There’s not a lot of literature on Blackwood responses. Playing with an old friend and expert player, Arthur Loring, we had a very different understanding of what my 6♦ bid meant.

Arthur	Me
♠ 7	♠ AK10
♥ AKQJ2	♥ 10953
♦ Q95	♦ A8742
♣ K875	♣ A

Here was the bidding: 1♥ -2NT*(GF ♥ Raise)-3♠*(0-1 ♠)- 4NT-5♠(2w/Q)- 5NT-6♣*(♣K)-6♦?-7♥**

****Oops!!**

What Do You Do With These Hands?

PARTNER OPENS 1NT. WHAT DO YOU DO WITH EACH OF THESE HANDS?

♠ QJ432

♥ AJ9

♦ K8

♣ A86

♠ AK107

♥ K10

♦ AJ2

♣ J987

♠ KQ4

♥ A95

♦ K63

♣ A106

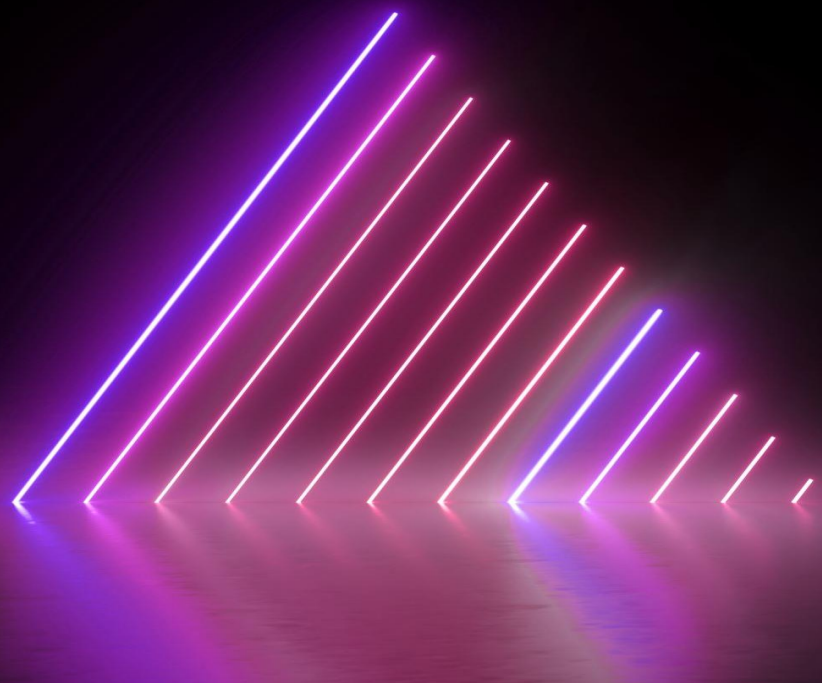
♠ AQ10762

♥ 6

♦ KQ82

♣ K3

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Summary

- Blackwood is a great bidding tool that has passed the test of time since 1934, but it must be used with caution!
- “Be careful what you ask for!”
- Make sure you and your partner understand the risks and nuances!
- 5NT is an asking bid AND a telling bid!
- Next week, we will introduce advanced slam bidding topics – how to show voids, bidding over preempts, minorwood, Baze, and bidding over Blackwood interference