

Hand of the week 5: Roman Key Card Blackwood

Here is a hand from the Swiss Pairs played on Thursday 13th March.



Martin opened 1♥, I responded 2♣, Erika Pickles on my left overcalled 2♦ and Martin rebid 4♥! I think Martin must have at least a 7 card heart suit with at least 2 or probably 3 honours, with my Aces we might have a slam, but I need to know how strong Martins heart suit is. So what next?

With standard Blackwood you can only show partner your holding in the Aces. Roman Key Card Blackwood allows you to give partner more information about your holding in the trump suit. In this version you can tell partner about the King and Queen of trumps, as well as your Aces. There are 5 'key cards', the 4 Aces and the King of trumps, and the responses to 4NT are:

5♣	1 or 4 key cards
5♦	0 or 3 key cards
5♥	2 key cards without Queen of trumps
5♠	2 key cards with Queen of trumps

As you can see this gives a lot more information than standard blackwood, however, you do need to have an agreed trump suit so partner knows which King and Queen to tell you about!

Note that with the minor suit responses you will need to work out which response partner means. Hopefully you wouldn't be looking for a slam without some high cards yourself but it can occasionally slip up if you are bidding on very distributional hands. I have a story about myself and Martin bidding 7♠ missing 2 Aces but I will save that for another day!

After 4NT, Martin bids 5♠ showing 2 key cards and the Queen trumps. Given that I hold the other 3 aces I know his 2 key cards must be the AK of hearts- with the Q as well we should make 7 heart tricks, the 3 aces and the King of spades to make 11 tricks to far. With the holding in my hand I only need Martin to have Q spades or K clubs for 12 tricks. He must have an outside honour or I would have expected him to open pre-emptively with 10 points or less, rather than 1♥. Even if he doesn't we still have a chance of a finesse in clubs or spades, although Erika's overcall makes her favourite to hold all the outstanding points.

I actually went on to bid 5NT asking for kings, as if Martin held 2 kings as well we could make 7NT. We ended up in 6NT. The full hand:

Dir: East
Vul: E/W

♠ 9 6 4 2
♥ 10 2
♦ Q J 9 7 2
♣ K 7

Optimum
EW 6N

♠ A K J
♥ 8 5
♦ A 10 6 3
♣ A Q 9 5

NORTH
WEST EAST
22
SOUTH

♠ Q 10 3
♥ A K Q 7 6 4 3
♦ - -
♣ 10 3 2

♠ 8 7 5
♥ J 9
♦ K 8 5 4
♣ J 8 6 4

6
18 11
5

♣	♦	♥	♠	N	
N	1	5	1	2	1
S	1	5	1	2	1
E	12	8	12	10	12
W	12	8	12	10	12

Erika (N)	Martin (E)	Jacqui (S)	Me (W)
	1♥	-	2♣
2♦	4♥	-	4NT ¹
-	5♠ ²	-	5NT ³
-	6C ⁴	-	6NT

1- Roman Key Card Blackwood

2- 2 key cards and Q hearts

3- Asking for Kings

4- 0 Kings

It would have been much more risky to bid a slam without knowing the location of the King and Queen as hearts as you might be relying on multiple finesses, so RCKB really worked well.

Congratulations to Erika and Jacqui who went on to win the Swiss Pairs.

Have a talk to partner about Roman Key Card Blackwood, as an additional tool to help your slam bidding!