

October 2026: Extensions to Roman Key Card Blackwood

Near the start of doing hand of the week I covered Roman Key Card Blackwood (RCKB) as a way to find more information about partner's hand with a view to bidding a slam. RCKB 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

There are a couple of other options after the initial response that allows you to find more information. Consider this hand:

♠	A J 6
♥	K 9 8 7 5 3
♦	A
♣	A K 2

Sitting South, East passes, you open 1 ♥, West passes and partner responds 2 ♣

East now overcalls 2 ♠

You have a strong hand so bid 3 ♥ to which partner responds 4 ♥

You have a strong hand with only 5 losers, and partner has already shown a good response by bidding initially at the 2 level, so slam looks possible. You bid 4NT and partner responds 5 ♣ showing 1 key card. Should we bid on?

Following the overcall we are sure to be missing the King and Queen of spades, so will likely have a loser in that suit. We need to know if partner has the Q trumps otherwise the slam will have to rely on a finesse, which may well be losing based on the bidding. Just to summarise the bidding so far:

North	East	South	West
	Pass	1 ♥	Pass
2 ♣	2 ♠	3 ♥	Pass
4 ♥	Pass	4NT*	Pass
5 ♣	Pass	?	

There is space for an extra bid before going back to hearts. In this position if you bid 5 ♦ this asks partner if they have the Q ♥. They then bid 5 ♥ without the queen. If they have the queen they then bid their lowest King or 6 ♥ if they have no King. ie 5 ♠ response shows K ♠, 6 ♣ response shows K ♣ clubs without the K ♠, etc.

Dlr: East
Vul: N/S

♠ 10 2
♥ A 10
♦ Q 7 2
♣ Q J 10 8 7 5

Optimum
EW 7Dx
+1700

♠ Q 5 3
♥ J 6 4
♦ J 10 9 8 5
♣ 6 4

WEST

NORTH

18

SOUTH

EAST

♠ K 9 8 7 4
♥ Q 2
♦ K 6 4 3
♣ 9 3

	9	
4		8
	19	

♠ A J 6
♥ K 9 8 7 5 3
♦ A
♣ A K 2

	♣	♦	♥	♠	N
N	13	7	11	8	11
S	13	7	11	8	11
E	0	6	1	5	1
W	0	6	1	5	1

On this hand partner does not have Q♥, so bids 5♥ which is passed out. As can be seen there is a spade loser and a heart loser so this is the correct contract.

A similar bid can be made when looking for spade contract but here there are 2 options here as you can bid diamonds after 5♣, and hearts after a 5♦ response. Note that the 5♥/5♠ already tell you if partner holds the Q trumps.