

## ROMAN KEYCARD BLACKWOOD - THE FINAL WORD

*Eddie Kantar, 2008*

Eddie Kantar noted a weakness in the original Roman Keycard Blackwood, which we now call 3014, and suggested the change to 1430. He wrote a number of articles and books on the subject of RCKB, of which this was his last.

This book is not for the faint of heart. He spends the first 74 pages discussing major-suit auctions. This section can be adopted by most intermediate players. He then spends the next 105 pages discussing minor-suit auctions. This section is much more complicated, and he points out that much of this will be more appropriate for serious tournament players.

### Basics

1430 or 3014? The reason to have both is to maximize the frequency of the 5♣ response. This simplifies further asks, particularly the queen ask

When the *opener* asks, it is always a 1430 ask.

When the *responder* asks, it is a 1430 ask most of the time. Only if the opener has shown *extras* is it a 3014 ask, an ask that generates many 5♣ responses. Opener shows extras by opening 1NT, 2NT, or 2♣; making a jump shift, a jump raise, a splinter jump, a jump rebid, a reverse, or a jump to 2NT; or any response to Jacoby 2NT other than four of the agreed suit.

When the opener asks (always 1430), the assumption is that the opener has a decent hand and very rarely will have fewer than two keycards. Therefore, a 5♣ response to a 1430 ask, showing 1 or 4 keycards, will show 1 98% of the time.

Making a 1430 ask with only one keycard is exceptional. To justify it, opener must have the trump queen and a very distributional hand.

When the responder asks and gets a 5♣ response to a 3014 ask, the strong hand is being asked, so clearly 3, not 0, keycards are being shown.

### Major-Suit Auctions

Suppose after a major-suit agreement you decide to ask partner for keycards via 4NT and find you are missing two keycards. You sign off at the five-level and hope you can make it.

Suppose you find you are missing one keycard. If you have the queen of the agreed suit, you bid slam. If you don't, you ask partner for the queen. If partner has it, you bid slam. If partner doesn't have it, you sign off at the five-level.

Note: With a ten-card trump fit including the AK, assume you have no losers in the trump suit, queen or not. The queen will be both tripleton and offside only 11% of the time.

Odds of not losing a trump trick with a nine-card fit:

- AKxxx facing xxxx: 40%
- AKxxx facing Jxxx: 53%
- AKJxx facing xxxx: 53+%
- AKJT<sub>x</sub> facing xxxx: 58%

To bring in an eight-card fit without the queen for no losers is pretty dicey. Unless you are looking at the JT, it is probably best to forget it.

The queen ask, if needed, follows a 5♣ or 5♦ response to RKCB.

After a 5♣ response, 5♦ is the queen ask, hearts or spades agreed.

- Without the queen, or a ten-card fit, return to the trump suit. All other responses show the queen.
- With an outside king, bid the king suit.
- With two kings, bid the cheaper suit.
- Lacking a king but having any outside queen, a doubleton, or a singleton, bid 5NT. This bid shows a third-round control somewhere.
- Having the trump queen but no outside king, queen, doubleton, or singleton, bid six of the trump suit.

After a 5♦ response, 5♥ is the queen ask, hearts or spades agreed.

It may seem strange to use 5♥ as the queen ask when hearts is the agreed suit. This bid is ambiguous. What if you want to sign off in 5♥?

If the 5♦ is in response to 1430, it shows 0 or 3 keycards. If partner has 0, you usually want out in 5♥. But if partner has 3, you want to know. The solution: bid 5♥ in either case. Partner must pass with 0, but cannot pass with 3!

Similarly, after a 5♦ response to 3014, followed by 5♥, opener must pass with 1, and must bid on with 4.

Simplified responses to 5♥ queen ask and maximum number of keycards (3 or 4):

- Without the queen, bid 6♥.
- With the queen, bid 7♥.

If a next-step queen ask is a suit partner has bid but you have not supported, it is still a queen ask.

### Addendum - Hearts (*Vic Quiros*)

Bidding 4NT to ask for keycards works very well if spades is the trump suit; so-so if hearts, and not at all for the minor suits. There are two problems that can arise if hearts is the trump suit.

One is the ambiguity of 5♥ after a 5♦ response to 4NT. Is 5♥ a queen ask or a sign off?

The other problem is the scenario where responder bids 5♠, but asker has only one keycard. Kantar recommends that 4NT not be bid unless the asker also has the Q♥. But as responder might bid 5♠ knowing of a ten-card fit, this advice reduces but does not eliminate the risk of a 5♠ response.

A solution to both of these heart problems is a variation of RKCB called Kickback, where instead of bidding 4NT to ask for keycards, you bid 4♠. The responses are stepwise, in the 1430 pattern. The responses that do not mention the queen, 4NT and 5♣, leave room for 5♦ as the queen ask. And if responder bids 5♥, indicating two keycards and the Q♥, and two keycards are missing, asker simply passes.

As 4NT would not be needed for RKCB, it could be used to show spade control.

If you use this, you don't need to use both 1430 and 3014 (*vide supra*). Pick one.

### The Specific King Ask and Later Asks

After a RKCB ask, hearts or spades agreed, a follow-up bid of 5NT asks for specific kings in ascending order. The 5NT bid, called the Specific King Ask (SKA), promises joint possession of the four aces and the king and queen of trump. It is a grand slam try.

- Without a king, return to the trump suit.
- With one king, bid that suit.
- With two kings, bid the cheaper.
- With three kings, jump to 6NT, or a grand slam in the trump suit (with a nine-card fit).
- Any time responder can count 13 tricks, he should jump to a grand slam.

After the 5NT bidder hears of one king, he may be interested in another. To find out if partner has the desired king, he bids that suit. Lacking the desired king, partner signs off in the trump suit. Holding the king, he jumps to a grand slam. This is the Specific Suit Ask (SSA).

Special Case: Responding to a SKA, hearts agreed, holding the K♠. When hearts is the agreed suit, the responder to a SKA of 5NT may feel a bit queasy about bidding 6♠ to show the K♠. A 6♠ bid more or less commits the partnership to a grand slam. Kantar offers these solutions:

- After a RKCB ask and response following a splinter sequence, a response to 5NT in responder's splinter suit shows the K♠.
- If there has been no splinter bid, do not show the K♠.
- If there has been a splinter bid, the splinter suit, if not a next-step queen ask, can also be used to ask for the K♠.
- If there has been no splinter bid, the asker can bid 5♠, a Specific Suit Ask, to ask about responder's spade holding. *Vide infra.*

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>	
♠A	♠K82	1. Strong two-suited hand
♥AQ8754	♥KJ2	2. 1430: opener asking
♦AQJ32	♦65	3. "2" without
♣4	♣AQ874	4. SKA looking for the K♦, not interested in the K♠
1♥	2♣	5. Do not show the K♠! There has been no splinter bid, and asker could have bid 5♠ to ask about the K♠.
3♦ <sup>1</sup>	4♥	
4NT <sup>2</sup>	5♥ <sup>3</sup>	
5NT <sup>4</sup>	6♥ <sup>5</sup>	

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>	
♠6	♠AK82	1. Splinter jump agreeing hearts
♥AJT843	♥KQ62	2. 1430: opener asking
♦A8	♦Q	3. "2" with
♣AQ54	♣T832	4. SKA
1♥	4♦ <sup>1</sup>	5. Responding to the SKA in the splinter suit, shows the K♠ and denies the K♣.
4NT <sup>2</sup>	5♠ <sup>3</sup>	6. Right colour, wrong suit
5NT <sup>4</sup>	6♦ <sup>5</sup>	
6♥ <sup>6</sup>		

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>	
♠A8	♠K75	1. Transfer
♥QT4	♥AK8632	2. Shortness, slam try
♦AQ6	♦K75	3. 1430: opener asking
♣A9754	♣2	4. "2" without
1NT	2♦ <sup>1</sup>	5. SKA
2♥	4♣ <sup>2</sup>	6. Responding in ♣ to show the K♠
		7. Do you have the K♦ as well?

4NT <sup>3</sup>	5♥ <sup>4</sup>	8. Yes!
5NT <sup>5</sup>	6♣ <sup>6</sup>	
6♦ <sup>7</sup>	7♥ <sup>8</sup>	

### The Third-Round Control Ask

A SKA asks for specific kings, but the asker may need a third-round control for a grand. The asker may have AKxx(x) and may not be able to bid seven confidently without confirmation of a third-round control. The asker may have Kxxx(x), and even though he knows partner has the ace, he needs to find Ax or AQx, not Axx(x). Third-round controls are grand-slam tries.

There are four scenarios where a third-round control ask can be used:

- Directly after a RKCB response. If the queen ask is not needed, a follow-up bid in a non-queen-ask suit is a third-round control ask. To ask for third-round control in the queen-ask suit, jump to the six level of that suit.
- After partner shows a king in response to a queen ask. If 5NT is still available for a second-king ask, a follow-up bid at the six level instead is a third-round control ask.
- After a 5NT response to a queen ask (a response that shows at least one third-round control), a follow-up bid at the six level is a third-round control ask.
- Whenever a king-showing response to a queen ask has denied a particular king, a follow-up bid in a “king-denied” suit is a third round control ask.

Simple responses to a third-round control ask:

- Lacking a third-round control, sign off in the agreed suit.
- With a third-round control, jump in the agreed suit. This may mean jumping to a grand slam facing a six-level ask.

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>	
♠54	♠AKJ7	1. 1430: opener asking
♥AK8765	♥QJ2	2. “1”
♦AK63	♦754	3. Queen ask (next step)
♣A	♣Q84	4. Yes, with the K♠
		5. Third-round diamond control?
1♥	1♠	6. Sorry
3♦	4♥	
4NT <sup>1</sup>	5♣ <sup>2</sup>	
5♦ <sup>3</sup>	5♠ <sup>4</sup>	
6♦ <sup>5</sup>	6♥ <sup>6</sup>	

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>	
♠AQ94	♠KJT32	1. Transfer
♥AJ5	♥KQT	2. Four spades
♦A73	♦K954	3. 3014: opening bid was 2NT
♣AJ9	♣7	4. "4"
2NT	3♥ <sup>1</sup>	5. Queen ask
4♠ <sup>2</sup>	4NT <sup>3</sup>	6. Yes, but no side-suit king and no side-suit third-round control
5♦ <sup>4</sup>	5♥ <sup>5</sup>	
6♠ <sup>6</sup>		

If you had Ax or AQx(x) of diamonds, your response to the 5♥ queen ask would have been 5NT, showing at least one third-round control. Partner would bid 6♦, asking if your third-round control were in diamonds, and you would bid 7♠.

When a third-round control ask is made in a suit that the responding hand has bid but has not been supported, shortness is not an issue and the ace is a known quantity. The asker is looking for the queen, the king, or both. Responses are by steps, and the agreed suit, denying both, does not count as a step. The first step shows the queen, the second step the king, and the third step shows both.

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>	
♠Q654	♠A8	1. Or 4♥
♥AJT3	♥KQ652	2. 3014: opener has jumped
♦A	♦986	3. "3"
♣AQ32	♣KJ5	4. Ask in a previously-bid suit
1♣	1♥	5. First-step response shows the queen
3♦ <sup>1</sup>	4NT <sup>2</sup>	6. Knows a spade can be dumped on a club, as opener must have at least four clubs having a singleton diamond
5♣ <sup>3</sup>	6♣ <sup>4</sup>	
6♦ <sup>5</sup>	7♥ <sup>6</sup>	

### When There is No Agreed Suit

In general, if there is no agreed suit, 4NT should be treated as simple Blackwood, asking only for aces. This includes immediate jumps to 4NT after an opening one-level bid.

## Handling Voids

Part 1: Asking for keycards when you have a void. There are two ways to go with slam-going hands that contain a void:

- Control bidding
- Exclusion Keycard Blackwood

An unusual jump (one higher than a splinter jump) is made with a void and is an EKCB jump. EKCB jumps for major suits are jumps above the game level in any unbid suit, or in any suit an opponent has bid, but not in any suit that partner has bid. A jump in a void suit does not require prior suit agreement. The last bid suit is considered the agreed suit. (This is the exception.) You are asking partner for keycards outside of the void suit.

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
1♠	2♥
5♦	

5♦ is EKCB, hearts agreed. Note that “last-bid suit agreed” is a necessary and useful agreement. This is because the player wishing to use EKCB must do so immediately or risk not being able to do so at all. In this sequence, if opener raises to 3♥ (forcing), responder might bid 4♥. Now 5♦ would be a control bid. Thus, anticipation is a key factor when planning an EKCB ask.

Responses to EKCB are simple. The first step is zero, the most important step to remember.

- First step = 0 (or 3)
- Second step = 1
- Third step = 2 “without”
- Fourth step = 2 “with”

Consideration must be given to how much bidding space asker is leaving responder. There may not be sufficient room to respond if the void suit is close to the trump suit.

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>	
♠AKQ643	♠8752	1. Waiting
♥ -	♥K865	2. Splinter raise
♦K3	♦A872	3. EKCB: don't count the A♥, partner!
♣AKQ76	♣3	4. "1"
		5. It must be the A♦!
2♣	2♦ <sup>1</sup>	
2♠	4♣ <sup>2</sup>	
5♥ <sup>3</sup>	5NT <sup>4</sup>	
7♠ <sup>5</sup>		

The next step after an EKCB response of 0 or 1, including the void suit (but not 5NT, which remains the SKA), is the queen ask.

A bid of any suit that is not the queen ask suit is a third-round control ask.

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>	
♠AK8653	♠JT42	1. Limit Raise
♥AQJ5	♥K7	2. EKCB: don't count the A♣!
♦KJ4	♦A62	3. "1" - must be the A♦
♣ -	♣Q953	4. SKA
		5. K♥. Lacking a king or with the K♣, responder would sign off in 6♠
1♠	3♠ <sup>1</sup>	
5♣ <sup>2</sup>	5♥ <sup>3</sup>	
5NT <sup>4</sup>	6♥ <sup>5</sup>	
7♠		

Rebidding the void suit after an EKCB response is the queen ask if it is the next step. If it is not the next step, rebidding the void suit is an ask in what would have been the queen-ask suit.

Reviewing the four follow-up asks after an EKCB response:

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
1♠	3♠
5♦	5♠

5♠ shows one keycard. The EKCB has the following grand-slam tries available after partner's 5♠ response:

- 5NT: SKA
- 6♣: Queen ask (first step, excluding 5NT)

- 6♦: Asking for third-round club control (the queen-ask suit)
- 6♥: Asking for third-round heart control

Finally, when responding to an EKCB with a void, do not show it.

Part 2: Responding to RKCB with a void.

- With no keycards, ignore the void and bid 0
- With two keycards, bid 5NT
- With one or three cards and a void, jump to six of the void suit. If your void suit is higher-ranking than your trump suit, bid six of the trump suit.
- After the void has been shown, asker:
  - signs off in the trump suit
  - 5NT is SKA
  - the next step not the trump suit is a queen ask

### Advanced Responses

- Response to the Second King Ask:
  - The simple response to the second king ask is to bid the grand slam if you have the asked king, and sign off if you don't.
  - The advanced responses are by steps, excluding the agreed suit, which denies the asked king:
    - First step = Kxx(x) This response may allow the auction to stop at the six level if the asker needs Kx to bid a grand.
    - Second step = Kx.
    - Raise of the asked suit = KQ and any length.

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>	
♠KQ632	♠AT74	1. Splinter Raise
♥AQ6	♥9	2. 1430
♦AQ52	♦K863	3. "2" without
♣4	♣AKT5	4. SKA
1♠	4♥ <sup>1</sup>	5. K♣
4NT <sup>2</sup>	5♥ <sup>3</sup>	6. Second King Ask
5NT <sup>4</sup>	6♣ <sup>5</sup>	7. First-step response: shows Kxx(x)
6♦ <sup>6</sup>	6♥ <sup>7</sup>	8. I knew you'd have that king!
7♠ <sup>8</sup>		

- Another answer to the  $K\spadesuit$  problem, hearts agreed, no splinter bid. If there has been a minor-suit splinter in heart-agreement auctions, the splinter suit can be used to either ask for or show the  $K\spadesuit$ . But what if there has not been a splinter bid, and asker wants to know if partner has the  $K\spadesuit$ ? Use  $5\spadesuit$  to discover partner's exact spade holding. This  $5\spadesuit$  ask is a Specific Suit Ask. The responses:
  - $5NT$  (first step) = third round control, either the queen or a doubleton
  - $6\clubsuit$  (second step) =  $Kxx(x)$
  - $6\diamond = Kx$
  - $6\heartsuit = KQ(x)$
  - $7\heartsuit$  shows a singleton
  - $6\heartsuit$  denies a second- or third-round control =  $xxx(x)$

### Minor-Suit Auctions

#### Warning: This is Very Complicated

Minor-suit RKCB is very different from major-suit RKCB. It starts at a lower level. Correspondingly, any ask made below five of the agreed minor is a small-slam invitation, because contract could end up in game after a negative response. Any ask made above five of the agreed minor is a grand-slam invitation, because the contract is destined to end up at the six level after a negative response.

Kantar assumes everyone is using inverted minors. A two-level raise of a minor can, by partnership agreement, be either game-forcing, or a limit raise. If it is game-forcing, then Crisscross can be used as a limit raise ( $1\clubsuit - 2\diamond$ ,  $1\diamond - 3\clubsuit$ ), maintaining the jump raise as weak and preemptive.

One variation of this is Minorwood, where a jump to the four level in the *other* minor is RCKB.

Another variation is Redwood, where  $4\diamond$  is RKCB for clubs, and  $4\heartsuit$  is RKCB for diamonds.

Another variation is to use  $4\clubsuit$  as RKCB for either minor, making it easier to play in  $4NT$  rather than five of a minor.

- After a game-forcing two-level agreement, four of the agreed minor by either player is RKCB, competition or not. This is so that you can stop in five of the agreed minor.
- If the two-level agreement is not game-forcing, only the unlimited hand can ask for keycards.
- After a non-game-forcing two-level agreement followed by three-level interference, bidding four of the agreed minor is not forcing. To ask for keycards, jump to the cheapest unbid suit.
- After a three-level agreement in a game-forcing sequence, four of the agreed minor by either player is RKCB.
- Responses to the keycard ask are stepwise.

- If responder to 1430 shows no keycards, or responder to 3014 shows one, Kantar recommends that asker's 4NT follow-up is to play.
- The next bid is the queen ask. Responses:
  - The negative response to the queen ask (if available) is 4NT.
  - If 4NT was the queen ask, a return to the agreed suit denies the queen.
  - Bidding a side suit show the queen and the king of the side suit.
  - With two kings, bid the cheaper.
  - Bidding 5NT shows the queen, denies a king, but shows a third-round control. If the asker has bid a side suit, 5NT shows a third-round control of that suit. If asker has not bid a side suit, but responder has, 5NT shows a third-round control of responder's suit. If neither partner has bid a side suit, 5NT shows a random third-round control.
  - A return to five of the agreed suit is the weakest queen-showing response, denying a king or a third-round control.
- A new suit after a response to RKCB that is not a queen ask is a Specific Suit Ask. Responses:
  - First step = third-round control
  - Second step = Kxx(x)
  - Third step = Kx
  - Raise of the ask suit shows KQ and any length.
  - A jump in the ask suit shows a singleton
  - A return to the agreed suit show xxx(x).
- In minor-suit auctions, the only SKA is 4NT, and even that comes with disclaimers:
  - If the response to a 1430 ask is 0, a follow-up bid of 4NT is to play.
  - If the response to a 3014 ask is 1, ditto.
  - If the response to 1430 ask is 4♠, showing 1, a follow-up bid of 4NT is a queen-ask.
  - The responses to a SKA are standard.

Consider this example:

1♥	2♣ <sup>1</sup>	1. Game-forcing
3♣	4♣ <sup>2</sup>	2. RKCB
4♦ <sup>3</sup>	?	3. 1 or 4

? 4♥ would be a queen-ask. 4♠ would be a SSA for spades. But if asker knows that two keycards are missing, she has the option of bidding 4NT, to play.

### When the Opponents Interfere (*Vic Quiros*)

Case 1: The opponents bid below five of our agreed trump suit or double. We have some bidding space, so we can play D1P0 or R1P0, to be consistent with the 1430 structure.

- Double (or Redouble): 1 or 4 keycards.
- Pass: 0 or 3 keycards.
- The next suit: 2 keycards without the queen.
- The next suit: 2 keycards with the queen.

Case 2: The opponents bid above five of our agreed trump suit. Any bid of a suit commits the partnership to slam, so there are only two options. We use DEPO. Asker has to figure out the number.

- Double: an even number of keycards.
- Pass: an odd number of keycards.

### When is 4NT not RKCB?

- If no trump suit has been agreed to, 4NT is old-fashioned Blackwood.
- After an opening bid of 1NT, 2NT, or a 2NT rebid by opener, 4NT is Quantitative.
- After an opening bid of 1NT or 2NT followed by a Stayman response or a Jacoby transfer, 4NT is Quantitative.
- After a natural 3NT bid, 4NT is Quantitative.
- After an opening bid of 1NT or 2NT followed by a Texas transfer, 4NT is RKCB.
- If the agreed suit is a minor, and RKCB reveals an inadequate number of keycards, 4NT is to play. There are other sequences where 4NT is a natural signoff.
- After a 4♥ or 4♠ preemptive bid, 4NT is Unusual, showing a two-suited hand, most likely the minors.

### Extra Ideas

Modified Blackwood, to match 1430:

- 5♣: 1 or 4 aces
- 5♦: 3 or 0 aces
- 5♥: 2 aces

Modified Gerber, ditto:

- 4♦: 1 or 4 aces
- 4♥: 3 or 0 aces
- 4♠: 2 aces