

Slam Bidding with a Void

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The Wikipedia free encyclopedia states that in duplicate bridge, the **Blackwood Convention** is a popular bidding **convention** that was developed by Easley **Blackwood** in 1933. Two versions of Blackwood are common: "standard" Blackwood and "Roman Keycard Blackwood (*RKC* or *RKCB*)" named for the Italian team, which invented it.

Standard Blackwood enables one partner to count partnership aces and kings. **Keycard Blackwood** –is a slam bidding variation of the Standard Blackwood Convention, designed to increase the accuracy when considering the potential to reach a slam or grand slam by exploring the partnership's possession of aces, kings and the queen of trumps.

Blackwood and Keycard Blackwood are often initiated by the bid of 4NT (common exceptions include Kickback/Redwood, Minorwood and Crosswood, Baby Blackwood, Gerber, Keycard Gerber, Expert Gerber, and others); however, there are two versions of the Roman Keycard Blackwood called RKC 3014 and RKCB 1430.

When using the Blackwood or Keycard Blackwood there are several standard prerequisites:

- (1) You have agreed upon a trump suit
- (2) You have no useless doubleton in a suit not bid
- (3) You do not have a void
- (4) Your last bid was in a suit and not NT

What are some common mistakes?

- (1) Without suit agreement many use the last bid suit
- (2) The bid of 4NT is quantitative
- (3) The Ace only or keycard asks are made with a void or a worthless doubleton
- (4) Partner's response to the asking bid gets too high

When you have a void or a worthless doubleton (a suit off two quick tricks such as Qxx or Jx) many partnerships rely on cue bidding as a solution to investigate slam. Recall the HCP guidelines for slams are: 31-33 HCP for a small slam and 35-37 HCP for a grand slam.

Alternatively one may use specific conventions for slam investigation when having a void and when having a worthless doubleton that replaces cue bidding?

With a void (usually in a suit the opponents have bid) one may use Exclusion Keycard Blackwood (aka Voidwood) developed by Bobby Goldman and with a worthless doubleton (usually in a suit you and your partner have not bid) one may use Lackwood suggested by Eric Rodwell some 30 years ago.

Exclusion Roman Keycard Blackwood (ERKCB) or Voidwood

After AGREEING on the trump suit, the original version of the convention did not assume either RKC 301 or RKCB1430. It was initiated by a double jump bid in the void suit usually at the 5-level (at times the 4-level – e.g. 1♥-P-2♥-P-4♠ provided you do not play kickback for hearts; otherwise you must again bid 5♠ as voidwood) and asks for the number of keycards (aces and kings in the agreed trump suit and the number of aces outside the trump suit excluding the 4/5-level suit bid, and the Queen of trumps). There are exactly FOUR keycards: THE THREE ACES PLUS THE KING OF THE AGREED SUIT.

Some bidding examples

Opener	Responder
1♠	3♣* (limit raise with 4 spades)
5♣ (ERKCB) ?	

Opener	Responder
1♦	1♥
2♣	3♣
4♥ (ERKCB) ?	

Opener	Responder
2♣	2♦
2♠	4♣* (Splinter)
5♠ (ERKCB) ?	

Opener	Responder
1♣	1♥
1♠	2♠
3♣	5♦ (ERKCB)
?	

The responses are STEPS excluding the step of 5NT but including the void suit:

Version 1 (ERKC)

1st Step=0

2nd Step=1

3rd Step=2 without Queen

4th Step=2 with Queen

5th Step=3

The sequence of bids is neither RKC 3014 nor RKCB 1430.

Another Version purposed is simpler but ignores the Queen of trumps and only considers the three aces and the King of trumps again excluding the suit with the void goes:

Version 2 (Simple ERCK)

1st Step=0

2nd Step=1

3rd Step=2

4th Step=3

5th Step=4 (3Aces and the King of trumps)

A more complicated version that includes the Queen and again excludes the suit with the void goes:

Version 3 (Expanded ERCK)

1st Step=0

2nd Step=1 without Queen

3rd Step=1 with Queen

4th Step=2 without Queen

5th Step=2 with Queen

6th Step=3 without Queen (rare)

7th Step=3 with Queen (rare)

A version, which is similar to RKC 3014, and excludes the suit with the void goes:

Version 4 (3014 EKB)

1st Step=0/3

2nd Step=1/4

3rd Step=2 without Queen

4th Step=2 with Queen

A version, which is similar to RKCB 1430, and excludes the suit with the void goes:

Version 5 (1430 ERKCB)

1st Step=1/4

2nd Step=0/3

3rd Step=2 without Queen

4th Step=2 with Queen

When deciding on ERKCB it is essential to agree on the version you will use for your partnership.

Next, when you are missing the Queen, how do you ask?

The **Queen Ask** IS ALWAYS THE NEXT STEP after ONLY steps '0' or '1', including the VOID suit and almost NEVER 2 (but do not include 5NT which is always the Specific King Ask (SKA) when available.

The responses to QUEEN ASK are also defined as steps:

The QUEEN-DENIAL response is always a return to the agreed upon suit at the 5/6 levels.

HOLDING the QUEEN with an outside King, bid the King suit and with two bid the suit at the cheapest level.

Lacking a king but having no outside queen, doubleton, or singleton, bid 5NT if available and if not bid 6 of the agreed upon suit.

With no outside king, queen, singleton, or doubleton, bid 6 of the agreed upon suit.

What if you have a void?

Ignore it if it is in partner first bid suit when responding and also ignore it if you have '0' keycards; the bid of 5NT shows even number (2 or 4) of keycards.

With '1' or '3' and odd number bid 6 of the void suit if of lower rank than the agreed suit. If it is in a suit of higher rank return to 6-level of your agreed upon suit.

After a void showing response, the next step by the asker, excluding the trump suit (signoff) if room permits, is the queens ask and 5NT is again the SKA.

There is usually no room for Specific Suit Asking (SSA) bids playing ERKCB. But it may at times apply as follows:

Opener	Responder
1♠	3♣* (limit raise with 4 spades)
5♦ (ERKCB)	5♠ (SSA since next step; 5♥=Queen Ask and 5NT=SKA)

What about interference?

We again use DOPI (recall X=0, Pass=1 and next step=2), ROPI or DEPO (X= 0, 2, 4 or even, pass = 1, 3 or odd), REPO again excluding the void suit. The later two are used when the rank of the interference bid is higher than the rank of your agreed upon trump suit.

Which of the FIVE Versions should you use?

If you use a version of Keycard Blackwood, then you should use Versions 4, or 5.
If you do not use Keycard Blackwood, but not the Queen asking step, use Version 1.
If you currently use "standard" Blackwood, use version 2 but exclude the King of trumps.
If you use 2NT* (RKCB) or 3NT (Baby Blackwood) as 1430/3014 use Version 3.

There is no standard agreement for Exclusion Roman Keycard Blackwood, it depends on your partnership agreement.

It is critical that you have agreed upon the trump suit when playing Exclusion Keycard Blackwood. If not some will use the last bid suit if not playing 2/1 since when playing 2/1 there is always room to agree on the trump suit, Kantar (2008, pp. 55-69).

Lackwood

Lackwood unlike Voidwood is used when you have agreed upon the trump suit and the opponents interfere and you 'Lack' a control (A/void) **in their bid suit**. Your agreed upon suit is bid at the 5-level and asks partner for a control in the opponents bid suit. 'Wood' comes from Blackwood where now RKC 3014 or RKCB 1430 responses are made; however, now as responder if you have an Ace or void in the interference suit it becomes a control when responding (excluding the bid of 5NT).

For example in the bidding sequence: 1♠-4♥-5♠=Lackwood.

The responses playing RKCB1430 and a void in the lack suit is a keycard

6♣ 1/4

6♦ 0/3

6♥ 2/5 without Q of trump

6♠ 2/5 with the Q of trump

If you play RKC 3014 the minor suit responses are interchange (6♣=0/3 and 6♦=1/4).

The 'Last Train' bid over '0' or '1' becomes the grand slam asking bid where a 6-level bid says no interest. The bid of 5NT says I do not have a control but do have Kx(x) in the lack suit which invites 6NT.

Lackwood may also be used with no interference, if you have a worthless doubleton in a suit that has not been bid or cuebid earlier in the bidding sequence. Again if you 'lack' a control in the unbid suit, a **5-level bid in your agreed** is again asking partner for a control (A/void) in the suit.

For example, a sequence from Rodwell (2019) is:

Opener	Responder
1♠	2♥
3♥	4♦
4♥	5♥=Lackwood (asking for a club control=A/Void)

With a void in clubs 5♣=Voidwood over the bid of 4♥ by the responder and not 5♠.

Lackwood with a worthless doubleton in an unbid suit facilitates the investigation for a grand slam in a suit contract or NT.

**What about the Queen ask, responses with voids, and interference with Lackwood?
One responds as we did with ERCCB.**

Before looking at 4-hand examples, I review a few unusual examples with an opener and a responder.

Example I	Opener (you)	Responder (Partner)
	♠ -	♠A104
	♥AK732	♥J865
	♦AKQ62	♦109
	♣KJ9	♣A754
	1♥	3♥ (10-12 4-card support)
	4♠ S/V EKB as	5♣ (1 keycard w/o ♠Q & exclude spades)
	5♦ (Queen ask)	5♥ No (with 5-hearts he would bid 6♥)
	6♥	Pass

Example II	Opener (you)	Responder (Partner)
	♠ AQ6	♠54
	♥ -	♥Q10932
	♦AK10954	♦87
	♣KJ952	♣AQ103
	1♣	1♥
	2♣	3♣
	4♥ (S/V EKB ask)	5♦ (1 keycard w ♣Q exclude hearts)
	6♣	Pass

In this example if you used the alternative **ERKC** you would bid 4♠= 1 (step 2) and would have to use 4NT=Queen asking. The Queen ask would also have to be used with the agreements **3014 ERKCB/1430 ERKCB**.

Example III	Opener (you)	Responder (Partner)
	♠ AK10632	♠QJ54
	♥ AK976	♥1032
	♦K10	♦A7
	♣ -	♣K973
	1♣	3♥ (10-12 w 4-spades)
	3♠	4♠
	5♣ (S/V EKB ask)	5♠ (1 keycard w ♠Q exclude clubs)
	6♥ (SSA in ♥ since 5NT=SKA) 6♠	
	Pass (have a heart loser)	

Examples: West Deals and E-W Vulnerable

	♠	J53	
	♥	J10	
	♦	10982	
	♣	10543	
♠	KQ9862	N W E S	♠ A1074
♥	KQ92		♥ 64
♦	-		♦ AJ743
♣	AK6		♣ Q8
	♠	-	
	♥	A8537	
	♦	KQ65	
	♣	J972	

West

North
East

	South		
1♠	Pass	3♠	Pass
5♦	Pass	6♣	Pass
6♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

3♠= limit raise with 4 Spades

5♦=Version 1 (ERKCB)

6♣= Step 3 Skipping 5NT (5♥=0, 5♠=1, 6♣=2 w/o ♠Q)

Since East's is the 3rd Step, all EKB Versions 1, 2, 4, yielding the same result? If you use Version 3, you respond with step 4 and also reach the spade slam.

Not playing EKC Blackwood the bidding may go:

West	North	East	South
1♠	Pass	3♠	Pass
4♥	Pass	5♦	Pass
5♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

Or the following may be used:

West	North	East	South
1♠	Pass	3♠	Pass
4♥	Pass	4NT	Pass
5NT(2 w Void)	Pass	5♠	Pass
Pass	Pass	Pass	

Not knowing partner has 6 trumps and who has the ♠Q.

After hearing a limit raise some West bidders knowing partner has 10-12 dummy points may reevaluate their hand to 15HCP + 2 length points + 6 for void = 23 points and just bid the slam. Not playing ERK Blackwood but playing Reverse Bergen, Bergen, or Combined Bergen with cue bidding some may also reach the slam, provided they can overcome a potential 3♥

Examples: West Deals and E-W Vulnerable

		♠ -	
		♥ K8537	
		♦ KQ65	
		♣ J972	
♠ KQ9862		N	♠ A1074
♥ AQ9		W E	♥ 642
♦ 3		S	♦ AJ74♣
♣ AK6			♣ Q8
		♠ J53	
		♥ J10	
		♦ 10982	
		♣ 10543	

3♠ = limit raise with 4 Spades

4♣ = cue bid with slam interest

5♣ = Lackwood – Do you have the A/Void in Hearts?

6♥ = Yes and playing RKCB 1430 2 Keycards with the ♠Q

(Skipping 5NT, 6♣=1/4, 6♦=0/3, 6♥=2/5 w ♠Q)

Without Lackwood the bidding may go:

West	North	East	South
1♠	2♥	3♠	Pass
4♣	Pass	4♦	Pass
4♥	Pass	4♠	Pass
Pass	Pass		

Eddie Kantar (2008) Roman Keycard Blackwood The Final Word, 5th Edition, Master Point Press

Eric Rowell (2019) "Erick Rodwell's Bidding Topics Book Two, Baron Barclay