

13.8.19 Gerber-Free Diet in your Slam Menu

4C to ask for Aces is a convention which seems to attract a lot of beginners but they hold on to it far too long. It's not a good convention.

Firstly, there is the problem of whether 4C is Ace-asking if clubs could be an agreed suit e.g.

a) 1C - 4C

it would be very unusual to have 4C as Gerber in this situation. 4C here is a defensive bid, showing long clubs and 5-9 pts.

b) 1H - 2C

3C - 4C

Is 4C Gerber here? It could be, if Responder is particularly strong (about 18pts minimum, but it could be just a try for a 5C game (so about 11-13 pts)

Secondly, the 'advantage' of Gerber that it 'keeps the bidding low' does not usually happen in practice. Let's say we have a pretty crude auction:

c) 1H - 4C

If 4C is Gerber, Responder needs a minimum of 20pts (he shouldn't just blast an Ace-asking bid anyway). With a combined 32pts between the two hands, slam may not be on because two Aces are missing but there hardly seems a need to keep the bidding at the 4-level e.g.

1H - 4C (Gerber)

4D - 4H (Sign off)

You would still expect a combined 32 pts to produce eleven tricks.

Thirdly, using 4C as Gerber probably means that you will never be able to use **cue-bidding**. That is the most important technique in slam bidding. Let's look at a hand from Tuesday:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
« Previous						Next »					

<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 5px;"> Dir: North Vul: All </div>	♠ 9 5 ♥ 5 4 3 ♦ Q 9 8 7 4 2 ♣ 8 3	<table style="width: 100%; text-align: center; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">WEST</td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">NORTH</td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">EAST</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">13</td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; font-size: 2em;">13</td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">15</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">SOUTH</td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">10</td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">10</td> </tr> </table>	WEST	NORTH	EAST	13	13	15	SOUTH	10	10	♠ A K Q J 8 6 3 ♥ Q J 7 2 ♦ J ♣ J
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SOUTH	10	10										
<table style="width: 100%; text-align: center; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">2</td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">13</td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">15</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">10</td> <td colspan="2"></td> </tr> </table>	2	13	15	10			♠ -- ♥ A K 9 8 ♦ K 10 6 ♣ 10 9 6 5 4 2					
2	13	15										
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How should the auction go? Like this:

2S
 3S 4C
 4D 4S
 P

Firstly, what is East to open? There is no alternative to 2S (strong, or 2C if you're playing Benjamin). Yes, there are only 15pts but there are certainly eight tricks in the hand – seven Spades and the Heart suit looks good for at least one trick. That has always been the criterion for a 2-level opening in standard Acol. The further consideration is that you may well miss game if you open 1S. If partner has only King of Hearts, you will have a pretty cold game on and partner won't respond with only 3 points.

East opens 2S, West should now bid 3S. Note that when Responder has trump support for a 2-level opening, it's assumed the partnership will play in game, so 2S-3S is forcing. It's actually stronger that 2S-4S, because there is more room for manoeuvre after 2S-3S (and 3S cannot be passed).

After 2S-3S, East should bid 4C. This is **not** Gerber, it's a cue-bid.

The idea is that, once a suit has been agreed and a slam seems to be on, both players show their controls (either they can win the first trick or the second trick in the side-suit). If at any point, a player, 'misses out' a suit, he is alerting partner that he has no control in the suit.

West now bids 4D. So far, so good, both minors won't lose 2 tricks as they are both controlled. But now East bids 4S, he 'by-passes' 4H and that is a clear message to partner – I have 2 losers in Hearts. As West also has 2 losers in Hearts, the auction is signed off in 4S.

Can Gerber ever be used?

Only (and that means no other time) when the previous bid was made in no-trumps e.g.

a) 1NT – 4C

b) 2NT – 4C

Bids of 4NT here are needed so that Responder can invite a 6NT slam – he is asking opener to carry on the 6NT if Opener is maximum. In this sense, they operate in a similar fashion to 1NT – 2NT