

Rationale

Roman Keycard Blackwood (RKC) has replaced regular blackwood as the most popular ace asking convention amongst congress players. It's advantage is that it conveys valuable information regarding the four aces, the trump king and the trump queen.

Devotees believe that, providing we are in the slam zone, holding four of the five keycards is sufficient to make slam a reasonable bet. They argue that the trump king is more valuable than other kings. Hence, its elevation in status.

• 4C remains popular as simple Gerber *when partner's last bid was NT*. When considering suit slams, it remains unpopular with congress players as the ace ask. This is because of the loss of a natural or cue bid meaning for the 4C bid.

The bids

4NT asks for the number of keycards in our agreed trump suit. If the suit agreement is not "in writing", trumps are presumed to be the last natural bid suit.

- 5C This shows 3 or 0 keycards.
- 5D This shows 4 or 1 keycards.
- 5H This shows 2 keycards without trump queen.
- 5S This shows 2 keycards with the trump queen.
- 5NT This shows 5 keycards.

- Where there is doubt about whether it is, say, 3 or 0, the 4NT bidder signs off, presuming the worst. Partner then bids the slam if holding the 3 keycards.
- After the answer to 4NT, bidding the next suit up asks for the trump queen. When not holding it, partner bids the next suit. When holding trump queen, partner skips one suit to bid the next. Note that bidding 5 of our trump suit can't be used to ask for the trump queen – partner will take it as a signoff and pass! Instead, the asker skips the trump suit to bid the next as the trump queen asking bid.
- After the answer to 4NT, 5NT is simple blackwood asking for kings, excluding the trump king. Signing off in 5NT is sometimes unavailable.
- Sometimes, the 4NT bidder has no intention of playing in the suit which partner presumes will be trumps. This can still be OK, giving the asker valuable information on partner's hand.
- It is rarely a good move to bid 4NT as your response to partner's opening bid. Common plan is to make a simple response. Opener had a planned rebid, so let him make it. Who knows? With a strong rebid from opener, you may be looking at a grand slam.

Here are some sequences:-

• 1..

1H 2C Here, a powerful responder makes a
 2H 4NT simple 2C response, allowing opener
 5S 6H to show a minimum hand with six (6)
 trumps. Responder charges on, hearing that opener
 has 2 keycards and the HQ. This commits the pair to
 6H. So, if 2 + HQ is not enough, responder shouldn't
 have been asking! In this sequence, responder would
 need to have 2 keycards in order to ask.

• 2..

1H 1S After opener shows a minimum
 1NT 4C balanced hand, simple gerber will
 determine how far we go in the bidding.

• 3..

2C 2H Opener opens with a big bid and
 3H 4NT gets a positive response & 5 hearts
 5D 5H 3H is stronger than 4H (Fast Arrival)
 6H After 4NT response, the sign off is
 raised to slam. 4 keycards must be enough!

• 4..

1H 2C Here, responder is unfazed by the
 2H 4NT prospects of zero keycards. He must
 5C 5D be looking at 4, otherwise he would
 5H P have signed off in 5H. 5D asks for
 the HQ. Opener doesn't have it either!

• 5..

1H 2C
 2H 4NT RKC in hearts
 5C 5D no keycards. What about HQ?
 5S 5NT HQ held. What about other kings?
 6D 6H one king only. There must be a
 missing king, otherwise we would be in 7H!

• 6..

1H 2C Here, opener will be answering in
 2D 4NT diamonds. 3 or 0 keycards in
 5C 5H diamonds. 5H is "to play" opposite 0.

• 7..

1H 2C
 2H 4NT RKC in hearts
 5D 5S 5H would be to play. 5S asks for HQ
 5NT 6H Opener doesn't have it. Otherwise,
 we would be in 7H!

• 8..

1NT 2C Simple Stayman.
 2H 4NT RKC in hearts. 1 keycard answer.
 5D 5S 5S asks for HQ – 5H is the sign off
 5NT P no HQ. We are probably missing 2
 keycards. This may be the last making contract!

• 9..

1H 1S
 2C 2D
 2S 4NT RKC in spades, etc
 Try bidding these hands:-

♠AK642	♠J98	1S	3S
♥KQ74	♥JT8	4NT	5D
♦KQ9	♦AT84	5H	5S
♣A	♣KQ7	P	

With perhaps just an 8 card fit and missing a keycard and SQ, slam is a low percentage.

♠AQ94	♠KT73	1C	1S
♥K9	♥AQ8	2S	4NT
♦T76	♦KQ3	5D	5H
♣KQ87	♣A92	5NT	6S

While slam is no certainty, it certainly has fair chances. If west didn't have SQ, 5H is enough

♠7	♠A982	1D	1S
♥KQ4	♥8	2C	4NT
♦AQ972	♦KT865	5D	6D
♣Q732	♣AK6		

Although we are missing a keycard and DQ is unknown, the 9 card fit is an additional chance. OK, we could be missing AQ of trumps. That would be very pessimistic! As the cards lie, it is an excellent slam, even though the heart honours opposite our singleton is usually a poor feature. CQ not needed?