

The “Grand Slam Force” and “Pick a Slam” Conventions

In the game of Contract Bridge, there are many **Methods** and **Ace-Asking Conventions** that facilitate a Partnership’s ability to explore for a possible Slam, or conversely, when necessary, to stay out of a perceived Slam, that is unlikely to be made. They include, “**Blackwood**,” “**Controls**,” “**Cue-Bidding**,” “**Exclusion Blackwood/Voidwood**,” “**Gerber**,” “**Jacoby Steps**,” “**Key-Card Blackwood**,” “**Kickback**,” “**Roman Key-Card Blackwood**,” and “**Splinter Bids**.” Each of these has its particular circumstance of best application, and all are subject to Partnership agreement as to their possible use.

There are circumstances, however, when a makeable Slam is undoubtedly “*in the cards*;” i.e., a near certainty, but it becomes patently clear that additional information has to be conveyed in order to find the “*best*” Slam, even the possibility for a Grand Slam. For this purpose, two additional conventions are available, “**Grand Slam Force**,” and “**Pick a Slam**.”



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The “Grand Slam Force” (GSF) Convention

The “**Grand Slam Force**,” developed by Ely Culbertson in 1936, is used when one Player has one top trump honor and is certain all the other suits are completely stopped, but needs to find the other two top trump honors in Partner's hand in order to count **13** tricks. *When a fit has been found or implied during the bidding*, a jump-bid to “**5 No-Trump**” may be used by one of the Players to inquire about Partner's top three trump honors, the **Ace**, **King** and **Queen**. (An alternate method which can be used is a “**jump to the 5-level**” of the agreed-upon suit, instead of the customary “**5-No-Trump**.”) Examples of some bidding sequences where the use of such a bidding tool might be applicable include, but are not limited to the following:

1S -- 3S
”5N” - ?

4D/4H “(Namyats)” – “5N”
?

1S --- 2D
3S – “5N”
?

After a Partnership discovers that a **Small Slam** is a likely certainty, and that a **Grand Slam** is a distinct possibility, an artificial bid of “**5 No-Trump**,” tendered by either of the Partners, is asking the Responder to bid a Grand Slam (7 of the agreed-upon suit), or to sign off in a Small Slam (6 of the agreed-upon suit), if he/she holds fewer than two of the top three trump honors. Thus, this Convention allows one Partner to gain information on the quality of trumps in the other Partner's hand. Either the agreed-upon suit becomes the trump suit, or the last bid suit establishes the trump suit, assuming that the trump suit has not been specifically agreed-upon during the continuing, previous auction. It is important to note that this method does **not** apply if a bid of “**5 No-Trump**” is a natural No-Trump raise, or if it is within the natural bidding order of another Ace-asking convention customarily used by the Partnership (a Blackwood “**5-NT**” re-bid, for example.)

The bid of “**5-NT**,” initiating a “**Grand Slam Force**,” is **not** alertable! According to ACBL regulation, no bids on the 4-level or higher, after the first round of the auction, are alertable.

Used mainly for the Major suits, several variations for Responder’s responses exist. One, normally accepted, is to divide the responses to a jump-call of “**5-No-Trump**” into four steps, such as:

- The First Step**, (“**6C**”), shows the **Ace** or the **King** (but not both of the top two honors).
- The Second Step**, (“**6D**”), shows *only* the **Queen** of trumps of the top three honors.
- The Third Step**, (**6 of the Trump Suit**), denies the ability to make any other response.
- The Fourth Step**, (**7 of the Trump Suit**), shows two of the top three trump honors.

The “Pick a Slam” Convention

Without a known fit, or when Opponents interfere with the auction, a jump-bid to an artificial “**5-NT**” can be used to ask Partner to pick the “**best**” slam suit. When invoked it *denies any interest* in a Grand Slam! When used, both Players are involved in the decision-making process, and the Partnership will arrive at the final contract, only after mutual agreement. Examples of two bidding sequences in which this Convention might be useful include the following:

1C --- 1S	(2D) - 3S - (4D) – “5N”
2D – “5N”	Pass -- ?
?	

Here is how the Convention works: When one of the Partners is certain that the Partnership belongs in a **Small Slam**, but doesn’t know where to play, a jump-bid to “**5-NT**” asks the Partner for a suggestion; i.e., “**Pick a Small Slam** (“**P**” “**A**” “**S**” “**S**”). Since **5-NT** is rarely a final contract that a Partnership would want to play in, a bid of “**5-NT**” is used artificially to say: “*Partner, I’d like to be in a Small Slam, but I am not sure which one - you choose – give me your opinion!*” Partner is expected to use his/her best judgment based upon the bidding up to that point. He/she can bid any suit naturally, or simply bid **6-NT** if he/she feels that a No-Trump contract is best. Responder’s answers include the following: mentioning of a new suit, showing mild support for a suit that you bid, re-bidding one of Responder’s suits when holding extra length or strength in that suit, or bidding **6-NT** when he/she has nothing or worth mentioning, or, alternatively, is certain that the hand belongs in No-Trump.

Here again, as in the case of the use of “**5-NT**” initiating a “**Grand Slam Force**,” the bid of “**5-NT**” initiating a “**Pick-a-Slam**” request is also **not** alertable! According to ACBL regulation, no bids on the 4-level or higher, after the first round of the auction, are alertable.