

“Roman Key-Card Blackwood” (RKCB)

The “Roman Key-Card Blackwood” Convention is an alternate “Ace-Asking” Convention used as a means of exploring for a perceived slam with the built-in feature of avoiding it when it proves not to be feasible. Just as we don't want to bid a slam off 2 aces, neither do we want to bid a slam off an ace and the trump king. Such a slam would be at best 50-50--and there is no need to bid it. Also, we would never want to bid a grand slam off an ace. Nor, would we want to bid seven if missing the trump king. RKC is used to make sure we never reach a slam if missing too many "key" cards (aces and the trump king).

This Blackwood variation differs from the original Blackwood Convention in that there are not only 4-Aces counted in the different responses, but 5-Key-Cards which are the 4-Aces and the King of the agreed-upon trump suit. The King of the trump suit is counted as the “5th Ace”, or the “5th Key-Card”.

It is of the utmost importance to have the Partners agree upon the trump suit in the bidding process, before initiating Roman Key-Card Blackwood. Partnership agreements must contain the understanding that the agreed-upon trump suit will be either,

1. the trump suit that has been established or implied by the auction.
2. the suit named by the Opener if he/she opened with a strong forcing action.
3. the suit named by the Responder if he/she jump-shifts and then initiates Roman Key-card Blackwood.
4. the last bid suit by any Partner, if none has yet been agreed-upon.

The use of Roman Key-Card Blackwood facilitates the bidding of Slams without relying upon the traditional thirty-two or thirty-three high-card points normally deemed necessary, in that both Partners can share the descriptive information necessary about the location of certain Key Cards, resulting, often, in a Slam becoming capable of being reached, without just counting and adding the Partnership's high-card points.

The responses to a “4-NT” Roman Key-Card Blackwood inquiry, using the “0314-System” are as follows: The “1430-System” reverses the number of Key-Cards shown with the “5C” and “5D” bids.

“5C” = 0 or 3 Key Cards “5D” = 1 or 4 Key Cards
“5H” = 2 Key Cards without the Queen of Trump “5S” = 2 Key Cards with the Queen of Trump

A subsequent bid of “5-NT” asks for the number of outside Kings (exclusive of the King of Trumps, already accounted for). Once invoked, it promises Partner that all 5-Key-Cards are held by the Partnership else the bid cannot be made. The responses to “5-NT” are therefore:

“6C” = 0 outside Kings “6D” = 1 outside King
“6H” = 2 outside Kings “6S” = 3 outside Kings

Alternatively, some Partnerships agree that a bid of “5-NT” asks Partner to bid his/her cheapest Non-Trump King, as opposed to the number of outside Kings held.

The “Kickback” Convention is the variant of RKCB in accordance with the “Useful Space Principle”. This variation facilitates stopping short of a perceived Slam, should it be found to be unattainable. The Step-Responses are the same as in RKCB, but the Asking-Bid is not singularly “4NT”. It is, alternatively, the 4-level bid immediately above the agreed-upon trump suit, i.e.:

“4D” = RKCB for Clubs “4H” = RKCB for Diamonds
“4S” = RKCB for Hearts, and “4-NT” = RKCB for Spades