

Exploring for Slam

Let's set a couple of scenarios up:

- 1) You are in a tournament and open up your hand to see 17 points and balanced distribution. Partner opens 1NT. What do you do?
- 2) You are in a club game and partner opens 1S in first chair. RHO passes and you have 18 points and 4 card support for partner with a D void. What is your plan?
- 3) You open 1 S (15 highs) with 652(no clubs), Partner bids a forcing NT. You take the low road and bid 2H and partner now bids 4H. Do you do anything?

Are you thinking on each hand, "Do I have a slam possibility?" You should be and need to take the right action to see if you should bid it.

#1 Can you go right to slam? No, bridge is a partnership game and you definitely need partner to have about the best hand he could be in slam. Bid 4NT and let partner say if he is on the top of his bid.

#2 You need to tell partner about your void and support for his suit. There is only one bid that will do this all at once, the splinter bid. So bid 4D and hear what partner says. With your 18 count you will no doubt not give up right away if he does try to close out the bidding with 4S. A cue bid would be a good next step and see if partner can cue bid or if he closes out at 5S.

#3 You open 1S with your distribution being 6-5-2-0 and 15 high card points. You open 1S and partner bids a forcing 1NT. You take the low

road and bid 2H. Now partner bids 4H. You could now try a cue bid and see if partner can cue bid or you can settle for game. Up to you.

Today we will look at your options and see if we can add a few ideas to help you get to more slams. Can you get to all slams? No, many are unbiddable and would depend on too many finesses working. You have heard people say "It is a 50% slam". This means that it depends on a finesse.

Here is your first tool to help you get to slam and it is no surprise it is **Roman Key Card Blackwood**. It will be your most used and best way to slam. Knowing how many key cards is of the utmost importance. Whether you play 1430 or 0314 is not as important as you knowing which one you and your partner are playing. Here is a hand to demonstrate 1430:

You	Partner
AK954	Q872
4	AT
A42	KQJ65
KQJ8	32

The auction:

1S	2D
3C	3S (shows fit ASAP)
4NT (1430)	5C (1)
5D (Q ask)	6D (Yes and KD)
6S	

Your second tool that will help you get to slam is the **Splinter bid**. Partner opens 1H and you have a Spade void with 5 card Heart support and 17 highs. You start with 3 Spades (showing a singleton or void) and at least 4 of his suit. If partner tries to close out with 4 Hearts, will you give up? Because you have an extra trump and very nice points you should make another move to get to slam. Try a cue bid and see what partner does. Here is a hand to demonstrate the Splinter bid:

You	Partner
KT72	AQ6543
AQ83	62
A875	42
3	AKJ

The auction:

	1S
4C (Splinter)	4S (close out)

Simple auction that tells it like it is. Opener has too many points in Clubs to consider slam.

Let's go back a bit and talk about points. They are the most important in NT. 33 for small slam and 37 for Grand Slam. These are very good guidelines and will help you know if you should even try for a NT slam. In a suit distribution is just as important. As an example, if partner splinters in a suit and you have no wasted values in that suit you may have a slam with as few as 27 points as 10 of them don't matter!

Our next tool is the much neglected and maligned **Gerber**. Gerber is used to ask for aces at the 4 level by bidding 4C and then the responses are just up the line, 0,1,2,3 and the same for Kings by bidding 5C. It should be used over NT or when the the auction is about

to end at 3NT. Even if it has been bid in the auction, it is still Gerber. It is a handy tool and doesn't give away much information about suits, so has an advantage there. I like Gerber and use it whenever I can.

Your example:

You	Partner
K53	AQ72
AJ	K652
K3	AQJ
KQJT73	98

The Auction:

You	Partner
	1NT
4C	4S(2 Aces)
6NT	

The next tool is invaluable. Beginning players are not ready for it and it seems daunting and scary at first. It is **Cue Bidding**. There are two types of cue bidding, one is to use the opponent's suit to show partner support for his suit. The one I am talking about is more of a **control showing bid**. This will help you get to slams that cannot be bid any other way. Let's say what makes a cue bid. Aces, Kings, a singleton or a void. Think of them as equal to one another. When you start cue bidding you will treat them equally and bid the next suit if you have any of these. If you do skip a suit, you deny having one of these. Your example:

You	Partner
AKJ762	QT93
Void	K432

K32
KQ3

A5
J42

The Auction:

1S
4H (control in H)
6S

3S (limit bid)
5D (control in D)

Opener knows there is no first round control in Clubs as partner bid 5D and skipped Clubs. Look at opener's hand, he is happy to go to 6S!!

Our last tool is one you are probably already using. It is the **Quantitative 4NT** bid. Some call it the "Pass the Blame Bid". Partner opens 1NT and you think "33 for small slam and 37 for Grand Slam" in your head. You hold 15. Is it enough? If you are playing 15-17, then it is a point shy of what you need. If you hold 16 or 17 you can bid 4NT and let partner decide. If you have 18 then slam seems good and you should bid it!

You
AK62
J53
AQJ2
76

Partner
QJ5
K62
KT4
AK92

The auction

1NT
P

4NT

Let's think of another auction. You open 1H and partner bids Jacoby 2NT. You happen to have a stellar hand with 18 high card points but it is balanced. Do you know your correct bid? Make sure when you are playing conventions that you memorize all the responses. So you bid 3H to show 16+ and slam interest and partner bids 4H. Do you quit? NOt yet, try 1430 and see how the key cards are before giving up.

Let's try another one. You open 1S and partner bids 3S, a limit raise with 4. This is a perfect chance for cue bidding. You have agreed on your suit and you have a little better than opening hand. So get started with your first Ace, King, void or singleton. See if partner can cue bid or has to just close out at game. If he can't cue bid and you have too many missing keys then game sounds good.

I have an agreement with one of my partners that once we have agreed on the suit we will most often cue bid on the way to game. It has helped us get to some slams that others haven't and therefore some great boards and scores! What is a slam worth that noone else reaches? Top board!

I have set up some definitions at the end in a type of glossary and in this are 4 things we did not cover but are advanced tools for slam exploring. Read them and see if they are of interest and you can pursue them by reading about them or asking more advanced players to explain them. The advanced tools are Exclusion Blackwood (or Voidwood) , Grand Slam Force, Serious 3NT, and finally FRivolous 3NT.

Next time you think "It is too much trouble to try for a slam", use these tools and get to your slam or at least try to get there! Remember you can't bid a slam if you don't try!

