

CONFIRMING A SLAM

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INTRODUCTION

A **control** is a holding that prevents the opponents from taking too many tricks in a suit:

- **First-Round Control**

A holding that prevents opponents from taking the first trick in the suit. An **Ace** is an obvious first-round control for any contract. For a suit contract a **void** is also a first-round control because declarer should be able to ruff the first lead in the suit. The example on the right has a first-round control in spades, the ♠A.

♠	A Q T 4
♥	9
♦	K J 5 3 2
♣	8 6 5

- **Second-Round Control**

A holding that can stop opponents from taking the second trick in the suit. Because a **King** can stop opponents from taking a second trick in the suit after the Ace is played, a King is a second-round control for any contract. For a suit contract a **singleton** is also a second-round control because declarer should be able to ruff the second lead in the suit. The example has a second-round control in hearts, the singleton, and a second-round control in diamonds, the ♦K.

In order to make a slam, a partnership needs enough strength (or strange distribution) to take the required number of tricks and the necessary controls to prevent opponents from taking enough tricks to defeat the contract:

- ✓ **Small Slam**

Declarer can afford to lose only one trick so the partnership must have at least first-round control in three suits and first or second-round control in the fourth suit.

- ✓ **Grand Slam**

Declarer can not afford to lose any tricks so the partnership must have first-round control in all four suits.

There are two main methods that a partnership can use to find out if it has the necessary controls to make a slam **in a suit contract**:

- Blackwood Convention
- Control-showing bids

BLACKWOOD CONVENTION

One of the partners, who becomes the *Blackwood bidding captain*, bids an *artificial 4NT* to initiate the convention. This bid directs the other partner to make one of the following *artificial* bids to communicate a count for Aces:

Number of Aces	0	1	2	3	4
Artificial Bid	5♣	5♦	5♥	5♠	5♣

The Blackwood bidding captain must then decide how to proceed:

- ✓ **Missing two Aces:** Any slam is unlikely. Set the final contract at the five level.
- ✓ **Missing one Ace:** A grand slam is unlikely. Bid six of the partnership's trump suit.
- ✓ **Having all four Aces:** If a decision between a small slam and a grand slam depends on the number of missing Kings, bid an *artificial 5NT* to direct partner to make one of the following *artificial* bids to communicate a count for Kings:

Number of Kings	0	1	2	3	4
Artificial Bid	6♣	6♦	6♥	6♠	6NT

Set the final contract at the six or seven level in the partnership's trump suit. In some cases you may be able to try a no trump contract to get the higher score.

Avoid Blackwood with:

- ✓ Two or more cards in an unbid suit without a first-round or second-round control in your hand.
Assume partner has first-round and/or second-round control in any suit that partner bid naturally.
- ✓ A void
You do not need to know if partner has an Ace in your void suit. Blackwood shows count, not location, of the Aces.

Do not use Blackwood to see if a slam is possible. If the bidding suggests a slam is possible, use Blackwood to verify that the possible slam is makeable.

CONTROL-SHOWING BIDS

One of the advantages of *2-Over-1 Game Force* is that the partnership can reach an agreement on the level (at least a game) and the strain (trump suit) without fear that the auction will be passed out. This usually leaves bidding space below the game level that a partnership with extra strength or unusual shape can use to exchange information about the controls that are needed to consider a slam. In some situations, this can produce slams when the partnership does not have the usual number of points required for a slam.

Once a *2-Over-1* partnership has agreed on a trump suit, the bid of any other suit is a *control-showing bid* that indicates *slow arrival* with an interest in a slam.

Consider the example on the right:

- **South:** Has 19 declarer points and opens **1♠**.
- **North:** Responds a *2-Over-1* **2♥**.
- **South:** Knows the partnership has at least 32 combined points which means a slam is possible. South rebids **2♠** to show the sixth spade.
- **North:** Replies **3♠** to promise at least two spades and show agreement on a trump suit.
- **South:** Knows that partnership has at least 32 combined points with an eight card spade fit so a slam is possible. But South does not have a control in the diamond suit which makes using Blackwood risky. So South bids a *slow arrival* **4♣** to show a club control and indicate an interest in slam.
- **North:** Cooperates by bidding **4♦** to show a control in diamonds.
- **South:** Now knows the partnership does have a control in diamonds so South can safely bid a Blackwood **4NT** to stop the control-showing process and confirm the partnership is not missing two Aces.
- **North:** Bids **5♦** to show only one Ace.
- **South:** Given three Aces and slam strength, South jumps to the **6♠** slam.

SOUTH - YOU			
♠ A K T 9 6 4			
♥ K 7			
♦ 8 7 6			
♣ A K			
South	West	North	East
1♠	Pass	2♥	Pass
2♠	Pass	3♠	Pass
4♣	Pass	4♦	Pass
4NT	Pass	5♦	Pass
6♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

If North's reply after **4NT** had been **5♣** to indicate no Aces, the partnership would be missing two Aces, a small slam would be very unlikely, and South would sign-off at **5♠**.

Now consider the change to the bidding as shown on the right.

After South bids the slow arrival, control-showing **4♣**:

- **North:** Bids **4♥** to verify a control in North's hearts.
- **South:** South knows that North's control must be the ♥A because South holds the ♥K so the partnership has three Aces. But North skipped over diamonds, so South also knows the opponents hold the ♦AK which means there is almost no chance to make a slam. South bids a sign-off **4♠** which stops the control-showing process.

South	West	North	East
1♠	Pass	2♥	Pass
2♠	Pass	3♠	Pass
4♣	Pass	4♥	Pass
4♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

Use of control-showing bids is not restricted to *2-Over-1 Game Force* auctions. It can be used anytime a partnership has agreed on a trump suit below the game level. For example, control bids can be used after:

- **1♥**→P→**2NT**→... (*Jacoby 2N, agree on heart fit*)
- **1♠**→P→**3♠**→... (*Limit raise, agree on spade fit*)
- **2♣**→P→**2♦**→P→**2♥**→P→**3♥**→... (*Strong club opening, agree on heart fit*)

However, some partnerships prefer to only *cue-bid* Aces for these auctions, especially after a limit raise.

CONTROL-SHOWING GUIDELINES

Both partners should understand and follow these guidelines when showing controls:

- ✓ Once one partner starts the control-showing process, the other partner is expected to cooperate below the game level regardless of the strength of the hand.
- ✓ Controls are rarely shown above the game level.
- ✓ Controls are typically shown *up the line*, cheapest first. Show a King before an Ace if you can bid the suit with the King at a lower level than the suit with the Ace.
- ✓ Controls are not shown in the agreed trump suit. If necessary, use Blackwood to verify first-round control in the trump suit.
- ✓ Either partner can stop the control-showing process by:
 - Bidding the agreed trump suit.
 - Jumping directly to a slam.
 - Initiating Blackwood.
- ✓ Because a control can be either first-round or second-round, use Blackwood to resolve any ambiguity about the controls.

BLACKWOOD VS CONTROL BIDS

Do not forget that your opponents are carefully listening to your bids:

- **Blackwood**

When you use Blackwood your partner's reply tells your opponents the number of suits your partner controls and the type of the control(s) (first-round or second-round) but it does not reveal the specific suits that are controlled.

- **Control-showing Bids**

When you use control-showing bids each bid tells your opponents the specific suit that is controlled and the specific hand that holds the control but it does not reveal the type of control.

The specific information broadcast by control-showing bids can help your opponents decide on which opening lead has the best chance to defeat the contract.

The following guidelines can help you make the decision:

- ✓ If you already hold first-round or second-round control in all of the suits and do not have a void, use Blackwood to confirm a possible slam is makeable.
- ✓ If you are missing two or more Aces and have an uncontrolled two-card or longer suit, use control-showing bids to see if partner can control the suit and then use Blackwood to confirm a possible slam is makeable.
- ✓ If you have a void, use control-showing bids.

Consider the following examples. Suppose your partner just bid $3\heartsuit$ to show agreement on a heart trump fit and you believe the partnership has enough to consider a slam. How should you proceed?

HAND 1	
SOUTH - YOU	
♠ K 7	
♥ A K 9 4 3	
♦ K J 6	
♣ A 7 4	

HAND 1	
SOUTH - YOU	
♠ K 7 5	
♥ A K 9 4 3	
♦ J 6	
♣ A K 7	

HAND 1	
SOUTH - YOU	
♠ K Q J 5	
♥ A K T 8 6 4 3	
♦	
♣ K 4	

- **Hand 1:** You already have controls in all of the suits. All you need to know is the location of the missing Aces. Bid 4NT to initiate Blackwood.
- **Hand 2:** You have an uncontrolled doubleton diamond. If you initiate Blackwood and partner only has one Ace it would not be safe to try the slam because partner's Ace might be the ♠A. Bid a slow arrival control-showing $3\spadesuit$, the cheapest bid you can make, to show a control in spades. If partner shows a control in diamonds, use Blackwood to confirm partner has at least one Ace.
- **Hand 3:** You do not have first-round control in spades and clubs. If partner has an Ace in either suit, you can try the slam. But if you initiate Blackwood and partner only has one Ace, that Ace could be the ♦A and it would not be safe to try the slam. Instead, bid a slow arrival control-showing $3\spadesuit$.
 - ✓ If partner replies $4\clubsuit$ you know it must be the ♣A because you have the ♣K so you can try for the slam.
 - ✓ If partner replies $4\diamondsuit$ you know partner does not have the ♣A. But partner might have the ♠A. Since you should be able to make a $5\heartsuit$ contract, you can initiate Blackwood. If partner shows two Aces, one of them must be the ♠A and you can bid the slam. If not you are missing the ♣A and the ♠A. Sign-off at $5\heartsuit$.
 - ✓ If partner replies $4\heartsuit$, partner does not have the ♣A or the ♦A. But partner might have the ♠A. Initiate Blackwood. If partner has one Ace it must be the ♠A and you can bid the slam. If not sign-off at $5\heartsuit$.

EXAMPLE 1

WEST	
♠ A K T 8 6 3 2	
♥ K Q 6	
♦ K 6 4	
♣	

West	North	East	South
1♠	Pass	2♦	Pass
2♠	Pass	3♠	Pass
4♣	Pass	4♠	Pass
Pass	Pass		

EAST	
♠ Q J 7	
♥ J 9 5	
♦ Q J 9 8 3	
♣ A K	

- **West:** Has an unbalanced hand with 18 declarer points (15 HCP + 3 ♠ LSP) and opens **1♠** to describe a hand with 13-21 declarer points and at least five spades.
- **East:** With three-card support for spades East excludes the weak ♥J and values the hand at 14 dummy points (14 HCP + 1 ♣ SSP). West responds a **2-Over-1 2♦** to describe a hand with at least 13 points and at least four diamonds.
- **West:** Rebids **2♠** to promise at least six spades.
- **East:** Has a more than a minimum opening hand and replies a slow arrival **3♠** to promise at least two spades and show agreement on a trump suit.
- **West:** Is looking for a slam but should not use Blackwood with a void. West bids a slow arrival control-showing **4♣**.
- **East:** Is surprised by the **4♣** bid but realizes that West must have a void. Without any other controls, East bids **4♠**.
- **West:** Knows that East does not have the ♦A or the ♥A and must give up on the slam.

EXAMPLE 2

WEST					EAST
♠K J 8 5 4 ♥T 9 2 ♦A 6 ♣K Q J	South	West	North	East	♠A 7 ♥AKQ 8 5 ♦K 8 3 ♣7 5 2
	Pass	1♠	Pass	2♥	
	Pass	3♥	Pass	3♠	
	Pass	4♣	Pass	4NT	
	Pass	5♦	Pass	6♥	
	Pass	Pass	Pass		

- **West:** Has a balanced hand with 15 declarer points (14 HCP + 1 ♠ LSP) and opens **1♠** to describe a hand with 13-21 declarer points and at least five spades.
- **East:** Has 17 declarer points and if the partnership used standard guidelines East would probably jump-shift to **3♥**. But the partnership plays **2-Over-1** so East responds with a **2-Over-1 2♥** to describe a hand with at least 13 points and at least five hearts.
- **West:** Given support for partner's hearts, West revalues the hand to 15 dummy points, more than a minimum hand, and rebids a slow arrival **3♥** to show an agreement on a trump fit in hearts.
- **East:** With only two Aces and an unguarded club suit, East does not want to initiate Blackwood. Instead East bids a slow arrival **3♠** to show a spade control.
- **West:** Bids **4♣** to show a club control.
- **East:** Given West's club control, East bids a Blackwood **4NT** to get a count of Aces.
- **West:** Replies **1♦** to show just one Ace.
- **East:** Since the partnership is missing an Ace, East settles for a **6♥** small slam.