

ROMAN KEY-CARD BLACKWOOD

ABOUT THE DEALS

You may be either Opener or Responder, but you will always be in the South position.

The first page or two of each Deal shows only your hand. The initial bidding is given and you are asked to decide what you would bid, then click **BID**. The subsequent page will then appear telling you what you should have bid and continuing the auction. On the final page of each Deal partner's hand will be shown.

Since this is about slam bidding there may be some preliminary conventions which you do not play. In particular Jacoby 2NT forcing game raises, Major suit limit raises, and control-showing bids are used quite a bit.

ROMAN KEY-CARD BLACKWOOD SUMMARY

First a quick review of why we use Blackwood at all. It is not to help us get **TO** a makeable slam, it is to keep us **OUT** of unmakeable slams. Specifically Blackwood is so we don't make a fool of ourselves by bidding a slam when we are missing two Aces. And RKCBBlackwood is an improvement to keep us from getting to a slam when we are missing the A K of trumps!

Ace-asking conventions often get abused and over-used because they are such a clever gimmick and they give the asker a great feeling of power. However, you should not ever ask a question if you don't know what to do with the answer. If that sounds cryptic, here are two specifics.

1. Do not use Blackwood when you have a void in your hand. If you do so then you won't be able to figure out if one of partner's Aces happened to be useless because it's in your void suit. Instead you should use control-showing bids when you have a void.
2. Do not use Blackwood when you have a suit with two quick losers. Unless partner's response shows you have all the Aces you won't be able to tell if you have two losers in the suit or not.

Key-Card Responses:

The foundation of RKCB is that instead of asking about the four Aces you will ask about the five Key Cards, the four Aces plus the trump King. It works pretty much like regular Blackwood, one partner says 4NT and the other gives a response that tells about the number of Key-Cards. Like this:

Responses to RKCB 4NT (1430 style)	
5♣	1 or 4 Key-Cards
5♦	0 or 3 Key-Cards
5♥	2 Key-Cards, WITHOUT the trump Queen

5♠ 2 Key-Cards, WITH the trump Queen

A comment about that cryptic "1430 style".

What it means is that 1 or 4 is ♣s, 3 or 0 is ♦s.

There are two factions on this topic, the 1430 group and the 0314 group. Of course the 0314 group just reverse the ♣ and ♦ responses.

Some of the experts argue about which version is technically better, but it seems to me that it doesn't make a lot of difference. However the 1430 mode is a lot more popular so I chose it for this lesson, and also for our own system. To help you remember 1430 all you have to do is remember that is the score for making a vulnerable Major suit slam.

Here are a few examples - in all cases ♥s are already agreed as trumps.

♠ 6 ♥ Q J 9 7 3 ♦ K Q 9 7 ♣ K 10 3

Pard	You	
4NT	5♦	You have 0 Key-Cards.

♠ 6 ♥ Q J 9 7 3 ♦ K Q 9 7 ♣ A 10 3

Pard	You	
4NT	5♣	You have 1 Key-Card, the ♣A.

♠ 6 ♥ K J 9 7 3 ♦ K Q 9 7 ♣ A 10 3

Pard	You	
4NT	5♥	You have 2 Key-Cards (♣A, ♥K) without the Queen of trumps.

♠ 6 ♥ K Q 9 7 3 ♦ K Q 9 7 ♣ A 10 3

Pard	You	
4NT	5♠	You have 2 Key-Cards (♣A, ♥K) with the Queen of trumps.

♠ 6 4 ♥ K 9 7 3 ♦ A Q 9 7 ♣ A 10 3

Pard	You	
4NT	5♦	You have 3 Key-Cards, ♥K, ♦A, ♣A.

♠ 6 4 ♥ A K 7 3 ♦ A Q 9 7 ♣ A 10 3

Pard	You	
4NT	5♣	You have 4 Key-Cards, ♥A K, ♦A, ♣A.

What's Trumps?:

The trump King is a Key-Card and the trump Queen appears in some of the responses. So obviously you have to know what suit is trumps. In regular Blackwood this isn't necessary since you are only asked about Aces in general. But to use RKCB you

absolutely **MUST** be able to identify a suit as trumps or the responses will be meaningless. Usually it is straightforward, but not always. So here are two rules to go by.

- If a suit has been agreed upon, then that suit is trump.
- If an agreement is not clear, then the last naturally bid suit is trump.

For example.

Pard	You	
1♦	1♠	
3♠	4NT	This is pretty obvious that ♠s are trump.

How about this one?

You	Pard	
1♦	1♠	
3♥	4NT	Here there is no specific agreement. Since ♥s were bid last, ♥s are trump.

Asking for Kings:

Just like in regular Blackwood, a 5NT bid asks for Kings. But remember that there are only three Kings. Since the King of trumps is counted as a Key-Card you don't also count it as a King.

Responses to RKCB 5NT	
6♣	0 Kings
6♦	1 King
6♥	2 Kings
6♠	3 Kings

By the way, if you ask for Kings you guarantee that your side has all 5 Key-Cards. This is equivalent to a 5NT bid in regular Blackwood which guarantees all 4 Aces.

The agreed suit is ♠s and this is your hand.

♠ A Q 7 6 ♥ 3 ♦ K Q 9 7 ♣ Q 7 6 3

Pard	You	
4NT	5♣	Showing 1 or 4 Key-Cards
5NT	6♦	Showing 1 King

The agreed suit is ♠s and this is your hand.

♠ K J 9 5 ♥ A K 7 3 ♦ A K ♣ J 10 3

Pard	You	
4NT	5♦	Showing 0 or 3 Key-Cards

5NT	6♥	Showing 2 Kings

The Queen Ask:

If you are just switching to RKCB you might want to defer using the Queen Ask feature until you are comfortable with the basic convention. The Queen Ask gets you more information but adds a layer of complexity.

Here's how it works.

If the response to 4NT is either 5♣ or 5♥, then you know whether Responder does/doesn't hold the Queen of trumps. It is just a little extra available information that sometimes comes in very handy. But a response of 5♣ or 5♦ tells you nothing about the trump Queen. So that's where the Queen Ask comes into play.

After a 5♣ or 5♦ response the cheapest non-trump-suit bid asks for information about the trump Queen.

There are only four situations that can occur.

After a 5♣ response: a bid of 5♦ is the Queen Ask **UNLESS** ♦s are trump.

After a 5♣ response: a bid of 5♥ is the Queen Ask **IF** ♦s are trump.

After a 5♦ response: a bid of 5♥ is the Queen Ask **UNLESS** ♥s are trump.

After a 5♦ response: a bid of 5♣ is the Queen Ask **IF** ♥s are trump.

There are a couple of cautions to make right now.

- Obviously you cannot bid 5NT to ask for Kings if you are going to bid 5 of something else to ask for the Queen of trumps. So you have to choose which piece of information will help you the most.
- Using the Queen Ask may automatically get you up to the 6-level so be careful.

Responding to Queen Ask:

In short, a quick return to the trump suit denies the Queen, any other bid confirms the Queen.

Replies to Queen Ask	
Without the Queen	Bid trump suit at the cheapest level
With Queen	Bid 6 of the agreed trump suit if you have no outside King
With Queen	Bid the suit of your cheapest outside King if you can stay below 6 of your agreed suit
With Queen	Bid 5NT if your only outside King ranks above your agreed suit.

Here are some examples:

The agreed suit is ♠s and this is your hand.

♠ A Q 7 6 ♥ 3 ♦ K Q 9 7 ♣ Q 7 6 3

Pard	You	
4NT	5♣	Showing 1 or 4 Key-Cards
5♦	6♦	Showing the trump Queen and the ♦K

The agreed suit is ♥s and this is your hand.

♠ 8 3 ♥ A J 9 7 ♦ K Q 9 7 ♣ K Q 6

Pard	You	
4NT	5♣	Showing 1 or 4 Key-Cards
5♦	5♥	No trump Queen

The agreed suit is ♥s and this is your hand.

♠ K 3 ♥ Q J 9 7 ♦ Q J 9 7 ♣ A J 9

Pard	You	
4NT	5♣	Showing 1 or 4 Key-Cards
5♦	5♠	Trump Queen and ♠K

The agreed suit is ♥s and this is your hand.

♠ 9 3 ♥ K Q 9 7 ♦ A 7 5 ♣ A K 9 4

Pard	You	
4NT	5♦	Showing 0 or 3 Key-Cards
5♠	6♣	Trump Queen and ♣K

The agreed suit is ♥s and this is your hand.

♠ 9 3 ♥ K Q 9 7 ♦ A 7 5 ♣ A Q 9 4

Pard	You	
4NT	5♦	Showing 0 or 3 Key-Cards
5♠	6♥	Trump Queen, no outside King

The agreed suit is ♥s and this is your hand.

♠ K 3 ♥ K Q 9 7 ♦ A 7 5 ♣ A 9 5 4

Pard	You	
4NT	5♦	Showing 0 or 3 Key-Cards

5♠	5NT	Trump Queen and a King higher than ♥s

Responding with a Void:

This section is not specific to RKCB, it applies to standard Blackwood equally well. This just seemed like a good place to put it.

As long as there have been Ace-asking conventions there has been confusion about how to answer when you have a void. Should you respond as if the void were another Ace or not?

NOT!

It just puts too much strain on partner to think you have an Ace which turns out to be a void. In a worst case scenario he might decide to bid 7NT only to lose the first thirteen tricks!

Nonetheless there is a way for you to show that void.

In Response to a 4NT asking bid
6 of a suit ranking below trumps shows 1 or 3 Key-Cards and a void in the bid suit
6 of the trump suit shows 1 or 3 Key-cards and a void in an unspecified higher-ranking suit
5NT shows 2 or 4 Key-Cards and a void in an unspecified suit

Here are some examples:

The agreed suit is ♥s and this is your hand.

♠ K 9 8 6 3 ♥ A Q 9 7 ♦ -- ♣ Q 7 6 3

Pard	You	
4NT	6♦	Showing 1 or 3 Key-Cards and a ♦ void

The agreed suit is ♥s and this is your hand.

♠ -- ♥ A Q 9 7 ♦ K 9 8 6 3 ♣ Q 7 6 3

Pard	You	
4NT	6♥	Showing 1 or 3 Key-Cards and a void in a higher-ranking suit which is obviously ♠s

The agreed suit is ♥s and this is your hand.

♠ A 8 6 5 ♥ A K 7 4 ♦ A 9 8 6 3 ♣ --

Pard	You	
4NT	5NT	Showing 2 or 4 Key-Cards and a void in an unspecified suit

Remember that even if you decide to use standard Blackwood these void-showing responses still apply. Just wherever it says "Key-Cards" you read it as "Aces".

One last thing - a repeat of all the responses to RKCB 4NT in one table.

Responses to RKCB 4NT (1430 style)	
5♣	1 or 4 Key-Cards
5♦	0 or 3 Key-Cards
5♥	2 Key-Cards, WITHOUT the trump Queen
5♠	2 Key-Cards, WITH the trump Queen
5NT	even number of Key-Cards and a void in some suit
6*lower*	odd number of Key-Cards and a void in the lower-ranking bid suit
6*trump*	odd number of Key-Cards and a void in some higher-ranking suit

20 examples will be worth more than another 1000 words.

Deal 1