

LOCKDOWN SEMINAR – THURSDAY, 4 FEBRUARY 2021

INTRODUCTION TO SLAM BIDDING

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Most bridge players enjoy bidding a slam but too often players get over-excited when they pick up a good hand and can visualise a slam. There is a bridge truism that many more points are lost by bidding bad slams than are gained by bidding good ones.

What is needed for accurate slam bidding?

1. **Good foundation bidding.** By this I mean that having clear agreements about when bids are forcing, are they game forcing, has partner shown or denied extra values - and so on.
2. **Partnership understanding and confidence.** So you have to discuss sequences and you don't want to be in a situation where you make a bid you believe to be forcing but are concerned that partner might pass it.
3. **Hand evaluation** - high card values and playing strength. This is particularly important when a slam in a suit contract is under consideration as you have to think about how the play of the hand might go. Will it be possible to establish a side suit or could you make extra tricks by ruffing losers in the dummy or a cross-ruff?
4. **Controls in all four suits.** Everyone knows you are unlikely to make a slam if the opponents hold two cashing aces but it is just as bad if there are two top losers in one particular suit. Sometimes, if there is an unrevealing auction, you might gamble six hoping the opponents won't find the killing lead if there is one. But if you have bid three suits and there are two losers in the fourth that is the one the opponents are likely to lead.
5. Understanding the mechanics of **control asking bids** (such as Roman Key Card Blackwood) and **control showing bids** (cue bidding).

I am not going to spend time going through the RKCB sequences as these have been covered in a previous seminar. (check out the club website)

Similarly I don't want to go through a lot of cue-bidding sequences as again I think people will understand the basic principles. Let's look at one example though:

West	East
1H	3S
4D	?

Here 3S is a splinter bid showing four card support for hearts, values for game and a singleton or void in spades. West's 4D is a cue bid showing a control in diamonds which could be the ace, king, singleton or void. It also suggests that West is not minimum and has some slam interest.

A point that is missed by some players new to cue bidding is that 4D also denies a control in clubs. This means that East must have a control in clubs to justify advancing the bidding beyond 4H.

By the way, I am assuming a style in which cue bids below game can be either first or second round controls.

I am going to move on to bidding slams in no trumps based on high card values. I expect this will be familiar to most but it does no harm to review this.

Bidding slams in no trumps by counting points

Rule of thumb opposite a 1NT opening bid (12-14)

Combined 33 HCP for 6NT, 37 for 7NT

18 HCP - raise to 3NT

19 HCP - invitational raise to 4NT

20+ HCP - raise to 6NT

Use judgement to upgrade or downgrade

Positives - good five card suit; intermediate cards in four card suits.

Negatives - 4-3-3-3 shape; two honours doubleton; most of HCP in short suits.

Adapt as appropriate for NT rebids and strong 1NT opening bids.

Next, I will consider bidding under pointed slams on hands with great playing strength based on a long solid or semi-solid suit. I have two examples.

Hand 1

S AKQJ2
H A9873
D 875
C Q

Partner opens 3NT - a solid seven card minor suit with no more than a queen outside.

Partner must have diamonds - you have the queen of clubs.

You have 12 tricks - seven clubs, four spades and the ace of hearts

If they lead clubs you have a control in that suit - singleton

Hand 2

S AKQJ2
H A9873
D K75
C 8

Partner opens 3D second in hand.

You have the agreement that pre-empts second in hand will be sound.

You have 12 tricks if partner has a reasonable 7 card diamond suit headed by the ace or a queen high suit plus the ace of clubs (7+4+1). You also have a singleton club to control that suit.

Try RKCB - bid 6D if partner has one key card.

Slam bidding in suits

I am going to do a case study using four hands. Three of these involve the Jacoby 2NT response to 1M opening bid and they are taken from the RP Bridge website. RP stands for Richard Pavlicek who is an American expert. Digressing slightly, the website is a great resource for anyone wanting to do some practice bidding with a regular partner. Practice bidding is a really good way to improve your game because you can make experimental bids your partner might not understand and discuss particular situations or bidding sequences away from an actual competition.

Hand 3

West	East	Bidding	
S J10432	S AKQ5	1NT	2C*
H K42	H A3	2S	4C*
C A4	D Q3	4D*	4NT
C A108	C KJ964	5H*	6S

I'm assuming you are playing Acol with a weak no trump so the system bid is 1NT when you have 5-3-3-2 distribution within the range.

East has 19 points and can visualise there might be a slam in either spades, clubs or no trumps. Let's assume East decides to use Stayman just in case there is a spade fit. When West admits to having four spades, East's hand is probably now strong enough to drive all the way to 6S provided there are not two key cards missing.

There is a trap here because if East bids 4NT immediately that might be interpreted by West as a quantitative raise of notrumps with no spade fit. So to avoid this problem East next bids 4C which is a cue bid agreeing spades and showing a first or second round control in clubs.

West co-operates with 4D showing a control in diamonds, in this case the ace.

Now East does introduce 4NT and discovers that West has two key cards. Opposite a weak no trump, I don't think you should be looking for a grand slam so you settle for 6S.

This contract is not 100% but it is odds on to succeed.

Hand 4

West	East	Bidding	
S AQ1065	S KJ984	1S	2NT*
H AQ42	H -	3C*	3S
D J98	D A62	4H*	4NT*
C 8	C AJ943	5S*	6S

West opens 1S and East has a choice of bids.

A descriptive splinter bid of 4H is possible but the hand is a little too good for that. So take control of the auction with 2NT.

West rebids 3C. In the methods this is a singleton or void in clubs [*see footnote*] and you can also infer that West will have at least five spades, even if playing four card majors.

This is fantastic news for East because East can already visualise how the hand will play in a spade contract. There will be a cross ruff in hearts and clubs and you might be able to establish the fifth club for an extra trick if it is needed. This would require the opposing clubs to break 4-3 which is the most frequently occurring layout.

East now bids 3S. Remember this is a game forcing auction and again the idea is that West must cue bid any more controls that they have not yet shown.

If West had a void in clubs they would cue bid 4C now but on the actual hand the bid is 4H. This shows a first or second round control in hearts but because diamonds have been bypassed it denies a control in diamonds.

This is not such good news for East because East was hoping partner would be able to cue in diamonds showing the king. However if West has the ace of hearts it can be used to discard a diamond from the East hand.

So 4NT. West replies 5S showing two key cards and the queen of hearts.

East has done enough now and bids 6S.

There are only 25 HCP between the two hands but 6S is a pretty good contract.

Note: in Leeds Standard Acol the 3C rebid over the 2NT response shows a minimum hand, 11-13/14 HCP, unrelated to the club suit. To show a singleton club you would rebid 3H.

Hand 5

West	East	Bidding:	
S AK10742	S J865	1S	2NT*
H 9	H AK2	4NT*	5C*
D KQ	D A102	5NT*	6D*
C KJ75	C A109	7S	

West opens 1S and again East responds 2NT. East has 16 HCP with four card support, three aces and a king. The downside is that the distribution is the worst possible, 4-3-3-3. This is a warning sign because it limits the number of extra tricks you will be able to make by ruffing.

West could rebid 3H to show a singleton but the hand is a little too good for that. West has only four losers (a heart, a diamond and two clubs) so it looks as though an opening bid opposite a hand with at least two aces will be enough for a slam.

So West takes control of the auction with 4NT. East replies 5C showing 0 or 3 key cards. Although it is just possible for East to have 12 HCP with no aces at all it is very unlikely so let's assume East has 3.

West could ask for the queen of spades now but when you know there are ten spades between the two hands it's odds on the queen will drop under the ace and king when you play them out. However there could be a grand slam on if East has a king to go along with the aces.

So 5NT. East obliges by showing a king which you know must be the king of hearts.

Now 7S is a good bet. The two potential club losers in the West hand will go on East's ace of diamonds - provided East has at least three of that suit - and king of hearts. This can only go wrong if the trumps break badly or if East has ace of diamonds singleton or doubleton and even then there would be a chance of the club finesse.

Hand 6

West	East	Bidding:	
S KQ862	S A107	1S	2C
H K42	H AJ62	2D	2H*
D KJ92	D A106	2NT	3S
C J	C A105	4S	Pass

Mike asked me to include a hand on which bidding a slam would be a bad idea so here is one that he and Nick Woolven played recently. In the match both pairs stopped safely in game.

Mike and Nick were playing a strong no trump so I will give you the Acol sequence used by the pair at the other table.

West opened 1S and on the first round East had to invent a bid because 2H would have shown a five card suit. So East bid 2C with a three card suit.

West's 2D shows the diamond suit and East's 2H is fourth suit game forcing.

West's 2NT shows something in hearts. Then East's 3S shows spade support but a hand that was too good to jump to 4S on the previous round. Remember they are in a game forcing sequence so bidding like this leaves room for each player to make cue bids at the four level.

When West did not cue bid but instead just raised to 4S that meant she did not have any extra values. For some partnerships, it would be obligatory to cue bid in this kind of situation but that is the sort of thing you should discuss with a regular partner to be sure you are on the same wavelength.

East then decided not to bid on above 4S. Although he has 17 HCP and a fit in spades, the hand is 4-3-3-3 and has a lot of potential losers. East has already shown a really good hand by using the fourth suit sequence. For a slam to be good it really requires West to have better than a minimum opening bid.

If you study the layout, a slam would not be hopeless but you would probably need the spades to break and then avoid losing two tricks in the red suits. On the actual layout, there was a club lead and the spades broke badly so it was a struggle to even make 10 tricks.