

19. A slam try over notrump

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♠ A43			
♥ 743			
♦ AK4			
♣ A987			
♠ 10975		♠ QJ62	
♥ K		♥ J102	
♦ J1065		♦ 9873	
♣ 10543		♣ J6	
		♠ K8	
		♥ AQ9865	
		♦ Q2	
		♣ KQ2	
W	N	E	S
	1NT	P	4♦
P	4♥	P	4NT
P	5♣	P	6♥
All Pass			
--North-South Vulnerable--			

Requirements for Slam:

As a general guideline, 33 points are required for a small slam (one more point than missing two aces) and 37 points for a grand slam (one more point than missing one ace). The required point values may change depending upon running suits, fits and flatness. With a long suit, one needs to ask for aces using either four clubs, Gerber, or 4NT, keycard Blackwood, to make sure the defense does not have the quick tricks to set the slam.

Roman Keycard Blackwood:

I introduced this gem of a bid in an earlier column. It is the same as normal Blackwood except now the king of trump is the fifth keycard in addition to the four aces. The responses to 4NT are:

- five clubs zero or three keycards
- five diamonds one or four keycards
- five hearts two keycards without the queen of trump
- five spades two keycards with the queen of trump.

If normal Blackwood is used, slam may depend upon a finesse for the king of trump. Even worse, the side could be missing ace, king and queen of trump and still arrive in slam missing only one ace.

The bidding:

North, with a balanced 15 high card points, opens 1NT. South, with 16 high card points and a six-card suit, bids four diamonds as a Texas transfer to four hearts. With a long suit, 33 points is not necessary for small slam. Even without South's queen of diamonds, slam can still be made with only 29 points. However, it then becomes critical that North has aces and kings with few or no queens and jacks. If North had 15 points with more soft values (queens and jacks), a 29-point slam would be unlikely. North has three keycards (zero is impossible from the bidding) and South places the contract in six hearts. His partner has a very good chance to make it.

The Opening Lead: Nine of diamonds

The nine of diamonds is the safest lead. Leading a spade is risky since the declaring side likely has the ace and king of spades. How many points can East estimate that his partner is holding? Not enough to help in spades.

The Play:

North has all of the tricks outside of trump, and if the king of hearts is onside (with East), seven hearts is possible (with a two-two break). However, playing for seven may jeopardize six hearts. A safety play is recommended by cashing the ace of hearts and then leading a small heart to the queen.

Result: Six hearts making for +1430

Note:

Six hearts will always go down, no matter what you do, if the king, jack and ten are all offside (with West). With the safety play, this is the only case in which the contract will go down. An overtrick is lost with the safety play if the king doubleton is onside, however, it is not wise to put the contract in jeopardy for an overtrick.