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Bridge Bidding: The Next Step · Standard American edition



CHAPTER 7

Roman Key Card Blackwood

Counting the five key cards on the way to slam

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1. Why the king of trumps matters

Ordinary Blackwood (Book 1, Chapter 11) counts aces. But the **king of trumps** is just as important: a slam missing an ace and the trump king can easily lose two tricks. **Roman Key Card Blackwood** counts five **key cards**: the four aces and the king of the agreed trump suit. It can also tell you about the **queen of trumps**.

2. The replies

Once a trump suit is agreed, **4NT** asks for key cards (the four aces and the trump king).

Reply	Shows
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

This order is called **1430**. The reply that shows "1 or 4" (or "0 or 3") is never really a puzzle: from the bidding and your own hand you will know which it is.

> Some partnerships use the order the other way round (3014 (also called 0314)). Both work equally well, but it is a disaster if you and your partner use different ones. Agree it before you play.

3. After the reply

Key cards missing	Bid
Two	sign off in five of your trump suit
One	bid the small slam
None	bid the small slam, or the grand slam if you can count thirteen tricks

The trump queen matters most when you have only eight or nine trumps between you. With ten or more, the queen will usually drop.

You	**Partner**
♠ A K J 7 4	♠ Q 10 6 3
♥ K Q 5	♥ A 7 2
♦ A Q 8 4	♦ K 6 3
♣ 6	♣ Q 7 5

1♠ – 3♠ (a limit raise) – 4NT – **5♣**. You hold three key cards (♠A, ♠K and ♦A), so partner has one, not four. One key card is missing: bid **6♠**.

Asking for kings. If all five key cards are held and you are thinking of a grand slam, 5NT asks for kings outside the trump suit: 6♣ none, 6♦ one, 6♥ two, 6♠ three. Use it only when a grand slam really is possible.

4. Summary

After 4NT (trumps agreed)	Shows
5♣	1 or 4 key cards
5♦	0 or 3 key cards
5♥	2, no trump queen
5♠	2, with trump queen

Missing	Bid
Two key cards	five of the trump suit
One key card	small slam
None	small slam, or grand if thirteen tricks

5. Test yourself

1. ♠ K 7 2
♥ A Q 8 6 4
♦ K 5
♣ Q 9 3

Hearts are agreed. Partner bids 4NT. What do you reply?

2. ♠ K 9 8 5 3
♥ A 4
♦ K Q 6
♣ A 7 2

Spades are agreed. Partner bids 4NT. What do you reply?

3. ♠ A Q 10 7 4
♥ K 3
♦ A 8 5
♣ J 6 2

Spades are agreed. Partner bids 4NT. What do you reply?

4. ♠ Q 8 5
♥ K J 9 6 3
♦ A 8 4
♣ K 7

Hearts are agreed. Partner bids 4NT. What do you reply?

5. ♠ A K Q 8 4
♥ A Q 5
♦ K Q 6
♣ 7 2

Spades are agreed. You bid 4NT and partner replies **5♦**. What now?

6. ♠ A K Q 8 4
♥ A Q 5
♦ K Q 6
♣ 7 2

Spades are agreed. You bid 4NT and partner replies **5♥**. What now?

Answers

1. 5♣. One key card (♥A). Partner will know it is one, not four.

2. 5♦. Three key cards: ♠K, ♥A and ♣A.

3. 5♠. Two key cards (♠A and ♦A) and the trump queen.

4. 5♥. Two key cards (♥K and ♦A), but not the trump queen.

5. 5♠. You have three key cards, so partner's 5♦ means none. Two are missing: stop in five.

6. 6♠. Your three key cards and partner's two make all five. Bid the small slam; a grand needs thirteen tricks you can count.

Next: Chapter 8, Control Bids. Free lessons and challenge hands to play: **bridgescorer.com/learn**

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