

The Foundation System

Slam Bidding

Introduction

The methods already described in previous chapters provide most of the structure we will need in our arsenal in order to reach good slams and avoid bad ones. Good slam bidding is the ultimate test of your grasp of the essentials of hand evaluation, and requires complete knowledge of the information about strength and distribution conveyed by each bid made by both members of a partnership, and by the opponents' bids as well, if the auction is competitive. (The next chapter will begin our discussion of competitive bidding). This chapter augments the structure from previous chapters in three major areas: (a) the strong, artificial, and forcing 2C Opening; (b) cue-bidding as a means of inviting a slam; and (c) ace-asking methods, including Blackwood, Gerber, Roman Keycard Blackwood, Kickback, Feedback RKC, and Exclusion RKC.

To make a slam, two things are essential. You must be able to win at least twelve tricks, and you must avoid losing more than one trick. It is in avoiding two losers that slam bidding differs most from ordinary game and part-score bidding. The well-known rule of thumb that a notrump slam with two balanced hands requires 33 HCP was established to insure that the opponents' combined HCP holding of 7 HCP will not include two aces (although if they hold an ace and king in the same suit, you may still lose the first two tricks). So most of the effort in evaluating slam potential will be devoted to ensuring that as a minimum your partnership has first-round control of at least three suits and second round control of the suit which lacks first-round control.

In this chapter, we will not be overly concerned with reaching 33 HCP slams with two balanced hands (either 6NT or 6 of a major with a 44 trump fit); these hands usually are easy so long as you keep in mind the HCP requirements of all bids and responses. A more typical notrump slam will often be based on a running 6+card suit plus controls and a few scattered winners in the other suits. A more typical suit slam will usually be based on a trump fit (54, 44, 64, 55 or 63 are the most common) with a runnable side suit (or one which can be established by ruffing) and controls in the other two suits. Such slams often need a combined HCP holding of 24-30, or even less with freakish distribution. The LTC can be a big help in identifying those deals with potential for distributional slams of this type, but it's main influence is in avoiding two losers rather than in identifying twelve winners. For counting winners, the French have the right idea: *cherchez la femme*. The key to these reduced HCP slams is usually possession of the queens of two long suits, because our bidding structure is designed mainly to locate aces and kings. Typically these two suits are Opener's first-bid suit and the suit first bid by Responder, but it might equally be both of Opener's suits when he has a two-suiter. The holder of two such key queens will usually take an aggressive view in the auction; the lack of both key queens usually dictates a conservative view, while holding one key queen usually suggests a neutral view. Let's see how this all works out as we complete the description of our bidding structure.

Artificial Forcing 2C Opening

Requirements for 2C Opening

The 2C Opening can be made with any of three different hand types:

- 22+HCP with a balanced hand (4333, 4432, 5332, or perhaps 5422 or 6322 with both doubletons Kx or better)
- A one-suited hand (any suit) with 9+winners (LTC = 4 or less) and an absolute minimum of 15+HCP, preferably 17+.
- A two- or three-suited hand with LTC = 3 or less, or with 23+HCP

Responses to 2C Opening

- **2D:** This shows a hand willing to play in game opposite a balanced 22+HCP, but with no slam aspirations unless Opener is substantially stronger than 22+HCP. My usual minimum requirements for this response are: any ace; a king and a queen; or three queens. This response is forcing to game. Opener can safely rebid 2NT with **any** balanced hand (including 5332s), and should do so, even with 30 HCP or so. This allows Responder to use the standard 2NT response structure (3C = Puppet Stayman, 3D & 3H = Transfers, 3S = Minor Suit Stayman) to search for a fit. A 3NT rebid by Opener denies a 4-card major and denies any interest in a slam.
- **2H:** This is the negative response (usually called a super-negative), and denies the strength to make the game-forcing 2D response. Now any minimum rebid by Opener is non-forcing and can be passed, although Responder is free to raise or bid a new suit with distributional values. If Opener rebids 2NT, Responder can pass, but if he chooses to bid, he will use the standard 2NT response structure. The only way Opener can force after the 2H response is to jump in a suit.

There is one school of thought which suggests that since the 2H response is artificial, and since Opener should be the declarer in any notrump contract, that the 2NT response to a 2C Opening should be used to show a slam try with a heart suit. I do not recommend this approach, since it leaves no convenient way for Responder to show a slam try with a balanced hand, except by jumping to 4NT.

- **All Higher Responses (2S and up)** are natural, forcing to game, and imply a strong interest in a potential slam. Any suit response shows a 5+card suit Q10xxx or better. After a 2NT response, Opener can use the standard 2NT response structure to check for a 44 fit. The usual HCP requirement for these higher responses is roughly twice as much as required for a 2D response; i.e., about 9 HCP if balanced or 8 HCP if unbalanced. An absolute minimum would be AKxxx with nothing outside.

Other Response Structures

While the 2H super-negative structure is probably currently the most popular, many other response structures are frequently encountered. This sidebar describes my preferred method, along with a brief description of several structures that you are likely to encounter.

2H Super-Negative with 5-Suit Transfers: An improved method of handling higher slamtry responses is possible using transfer bids: 2S is a transfer to 2NT, while 2NT is a transfer to 3C, 3C is a transfer to 3D, 3D is a transfer to 3H, and 3H is a transfer to 3S. These suit transfers guarantee a Q10xxx or better suit. Opener accepts a transfer to 2NT if he has the 22+HCP balanced hand (and the standard 2NT structure applies), or bids a suit if unbalanced. He accepts a transfer to a suit with 3+card support for that suit, and otherwise bids 3NT if balanced or a new suit if unbalanced. This method is not widely played yet, so is not part of the Foundation System, but it is highly recommended.

2D Waiting: The 2D response is used with any hand that is not worth a slam try. Many play that 2D is mandatory unless holding a 5+card suit headed by 2 of the top 3 honors. If Opener shows an unbalanced hand by a rebid in a suit, the cheapest suit rebid by the 2D bidder (usually 3C) is a second negative, confirming a hand equivalent to our 2H super-negative. If Opener rebids 2NT, the second negative is Pass; the standard 2NT structure applies.

Point Count Step Responses: This structure is fairly popular with novices, and is reasonably effective when Opener has a balanced hand, but is virtually never used by experts. A 2D response shows 0-3 HCP, 2H shows 4-6 HCP, 2S shows 7-9 HCP. Higher bids are usually natural, with 10+HCP, but some pairs like to continue the steps indefinitely to show 10-12, 13-15, etc. These rarely occur.

Control-Showing Responses: This structure shows aces and kings, counting a king as one control and an ace as two controls. A 2D response, shows 0-1 control, 2H shows 2 controls, 2S shows 3 controls, etc. Some practitioners vary this structure somewhat in order to distinguish between one ace and two kings. Although fairly popular in expert circles, I have never encountered it here in Hawaii.

2D Artificial Positive: This structure was devised by the legendary Al Roth, inventor of the Roth-Stone system, and is sound theoretically, but has never achieved wide-spread popularity. The idea is that 2D is an artificial slam try, while all other responses are natural but deny slam aspirations, making it easier to find the best game or part-score contract.

Further Development of the Bidding

As noted in previous paragraphs, after the 2C Opener confirms a strong balanced hand, and in certain situations where Responder has shown a balanced slam try, the bidding will develop using the standard 2NT response structure as described in the chapter on Notrump Bidding. When Opener confirms an unbalanced hand, all further bidding is natural. Raises of 5+card suits show 3+card support, while raises of 4-card suits usually show 4-card support, or at least good 3-card support with a ruffing value.

Slam Cue-Bidding

In the *Introduction* to this chapter, we noted that two things are essential for successful slam bidding. You must be able to win at least twelve tricks, and you must avoid losing more than one trick. The Losing Trick Count, when applied to the bidding structure described thus far in this and the previous chapters, provides guidance in achieving those two essential requirements. Previous bidding will usually give Responder a good estimate of Opener's LTC, and can often tell how many of those losers are likely to be eliminated by Responder's cover cards. This is an imprecise tool, however, for two reasons. Sometimes Responder will not have learned enough about Opener's distribution to be sure whether his soft values (kings and queens in side suits) are useful cover cards. In addition, the LTC assumes a maximum of only three losers in any suit, so a sufficient number of trumps must be available in dummy to take care of any 4th or 5th round losers in any or all of Opener's side suits. Hence there may on occasion be only one immediate loser, but only 10 or 11 winners available. It is for this reason that the Foundation System places great emphasis on distinguishing between 4-, 3-, and 2-card trump support. Slam cue-bidding is one of the tools aimed at refining the estimate of the number of immediate losers; it is a useful alternative and/or supplement to the ace-asking conventions to be described later in this chapter.

What is a Slam Cue-Bid?

Consider this auction, with the opponents presumed to be silent and their passes not shown: **1S/3S/4C**. The 4C bid cannot be a game try, since Responder cannot pass below 4S even if he has an absolute minimum for his 3S bid, and Opener is not likely to be suggesting that 5C might be a better game than 4S. So the 4C bid logically can only be a slam try, showing a useful holding in clubs and inviting Responder to re-evaluate his hand in terms of its potential for a slam contract. If Responder has a minimum, or barren distribution, he will usually sign off at 4S, which Opener will usually pass, but with an exceptionally strong hand Opener may make another bid as a further slam try; and again, a weak Responder can sign off in 5S. If Responder thinks his hand might prove useful in a slam contract, he does not sign off at 4S or 5S, but makes some other bid to show encouragement. Similarly, **1H/3H/3S** is a slam cue-bid, and not an attempt to play in 4S rather than 4H. The same logic suggests that **1S/3S/3NT** is not an attempt to play in 3NT rather than 4S. The 3NT bid, while not formally a slam cue-bid, is a slam try showing a strong balanced hand (usually 5332, 6322, or perhaps 5422).

Now consider another auction: **1D/3D/3S/3NT/4C**: Here the 3S bid was initially assumed to show a spade stopper and deny a heart stopper, asking Responder to bid 3NT if he has a heart stopper. When Responder dutifully bids 3NT, Opener's 4C bid reveals that the 3S bid was not a 3NT try, but a slam cue-bid, showing useful holdings in spades and clubs, but probably no useful holding in hearts (else his first cue-bid would have been 3H rather than 3S). Had Opener's bid over 3NT been 4D, he would be denying a useful holding in both clubs and hearts, so that his strength must be concentrated in diamonds and spades. So our definition of a slam cue-bid becomes: *any new suit bid after trump agreement, which is not a game try in the agreed suit or a 3NT game try.*

Rules for Slam Cue-Bidding

The primary message of the initial slam cue-bid is that it appears likely that the partnership has enough winners for a slam, so that attention should now be focused on making sure that there are not two quick losers. Each partner will continue showing useful features until a slam is reached or it becomes clear that there are two probable losers. This usually involves each partner showing first and second round controls (aces, kings, singletons, or voids) in some sort of structured fashion. We present here a set of rules which define such a structure.

Rule 1. Lindsay's Law: *Thou shalt not initiate a slam cue-bidding sequence unless you have at least two aces.* This is vital to avoid reaching a slam with two aces missing, since if neither partner has two aces, the partnership can have at most only two aces. I had never seen this rule published anywhere, so when I wrote my first book, *3D and the MAFIA Club*, I included it, and with a typical bridge writer's modesty named it Lindsay's Law.

Rule 2: *Each partner should bid side suit aces up the line; skipping a suit denies the ace of that suit.* Consider this sequence carefully: **1S/3S/4C/4D/4S**. Opener has shown the club ace, responder has shown the diamond ace, and Opener has denied the heart ace, so Opener must have the spade ace (because of Lindsay's Law), but only mild slam interest, since he could have bid 4NT to encourage further cue-bidding by partner, or he could have continued showing kings at the 5-level via Rule 3 below.

Rule 3: *Bidding a suit in which either partner has shown the ace, or in which you have previously denied the ace, shows the king of that suit.* Thus in the Rule 2 sequence above, if Opener had continued with 5C he would be showing the club king; if instead he had continued 5D, he would be denying the club king but showing the diamond king. In principle, a singleton as second round control can be shown at this stage, but this is dangerous if done in a side suit which partner has previously bid.

Rule 4: *The first cue bid by either partner should be an ace, never a void.* This rule does not apply to the bid which initiates a cue-bidding sequence, since that bid is frequently a natural bid showing a useful second suit and inviting partner's cooperation if he holds a useful honor in that suit. Lindsay's Law still applies in this situation. The initiator should have two aces somewhere, even if the initiating bid is in a suit such as KJ10xx. A void does not count as an ace in satisfying Lindsay's Law. Actually, it is best not to cue-bid voids at all, except perhaps in a suit bid by the opponents, or in a suit in which you have previously shown shortness via a splinter bid. Other methods of showing voids are available, such as Exclusion RKC (to be described later in this chapter).

Rule 5: *If a minor suit has been agreed, any notrump bid is a sign-off, suggesting no further slam interest* (although partner can continue if he has further assets not yet disclosed).

Rule 6: *If a major suit has been agreed, any notrump bid is forward-going, but denies the ability to cue-bid the cheapest side suit and encourages partner to bid that suit if possible.*

An alternative to Rule 6 is to use NT cue-bids to show controls in the agreed suit. With this agreement, in the sequence discussed under Rule 2, the 4S bid would show the ace, while the 4NT bid would show the AK, since if his second ace had been in hearts he would have bid 4H instead of either 4S or 4NT. This is a useful treatment, but is not part of the Foundation System because it is not in widespread use and thus requires explicit partnership agreement.

A Sample Auction

To see how all this works in practice, suppose this is the last round of a Sectional Swiss Teams. You are tied for the lead, and will win the event if you win this match. With both sides vulnerable, you are the dealer and pick up AQJ98 A96 KJ1096 ♠ -. You open 1S and, with the opponents remaining silent throughout, partner responds 2C. This does not thrill you, but you rebid 2D and hear partner bid 3S. Since 2S would have been forcing, this obviously shows good trump support, so with the adrenaline flowing you start a cue-bidding sequence with a 4H bid, and partner responds 5D. You're obviously going to 6S now, but decide to bid 5NT to see if partner has anything else worth showing such as the heart king, and partner surprises you with a 6D bid. Now you have to start thinking. He's not showing the king, since you have it. A singleton ace is a possibility, but a singleton in your side suit is hardly worth bragging about, so he would surely have just signed off in 6S with that holding. Finally, it dawns on you. Lindsay's Law tells him that you have the spade ace, since you'd have bid 6C rather than 5NT if you had the club ace, yet 5NT is a grand slam try, so he knows you may very well have a club void, or be hoping that he has the club ace. He knows that you would not be bidding this strongly with a jack-high suit, so he knows you have the diamond king and he is showing the diamond queen. Triumphantly, you bid 7S, partner passes, and you await LHO's opening lead of the heart king. Partner slowly puts down K1064 73 AQ ♣ KJ974 and you have a few anxious moments. You see that 7S is cold if trumps are 22, but if they're 31, you need to pitch a heart on the third round of diamonds and ruff two hearts before drawing the last trump. You win the heart ace, cash the spade AQ, and LHO shows out. You play the diamond ace, overtake the diamond queen with the king, and lead the diamond jack. No, diamonds do not split 33, but you're in luck anyway, since it is LHO who has only two, and he does not have the outstanding trump. So you can pitch a heart from dummy, ruff a heart, ruff a club, ruff the last heart, ruff a club, draw the last trump, claim your grand slam, which had about a 75 percent chance of making, and win the event. It doesn't get any better than this. Hands like this are what has kept me playing this game for fifty years.

Ace-Asking Conventions

Gerber

This uses a 4C bid as an ace-asking convention, and occurs only in certain notrump sequences: after a 1NT or 2NT opening, or after a 2C opening is followed by a 2NT or 3NT bid. See the chapter on Notrump Bidding for details.

Blackwood

The world's most popular ace-asking convention since its invention by Easley Blackwood in 1933, Blackwood has remained popular because of its simplicity. A bid of 4NT, except when an invitational raise of a preceding NT bid, asks for a count of the number of aces held by partner. A response of 5C shows 0 or 4 aces, 5D shows 1 ace, 5H shows 2 aces, and 5S shows 3 aces. A 5NT response shows 2 aces and a useful void. A jump to the 6-level below the agreed suit shows 1 ace and a useful void in the suit bid, unless the jump is to 6 of the trump suit, which shows 1 ace and a void in a higher-ranking suit. Because of its simplicity, Blackwood was habitually over-used by most players when contemplating a slam, especially in situations where cue-bidding would have been a more suitable approach. Early in my bridge career, to avoid this problem, I once went for a full year without using Blackwood in order to sharpen my skills at using the cue-bidding methods described in the previous section. These days, Blackwood is slowly being superseded by Roman Keycard Blackwood (see below) and is therefore not a part of the Foundation System.

Kickback

Using 4NT as an ace-asking convention works well for bidding (or staying out of) major suit slams and notrump slams, but is of limited utility for minor suit slams, because the response can sometimes force the bidding to the 6-level when 2 aces are missing. To avoid this problem, some theorists devised a scheme in which a bid of the suit just above the agreed trump suit is used as the ace-asking bid. This handles the minor-suit problem but introduces two new problems: (a) the Kickback bid is no longer available as a cue-bid; and (b) some firm rules need to be established concerning when such a bid is Kickback and when it is natural. Kickback is therefore not a part of the Foundation System. In my own partnerships, I have occasionally used a 4S Kickback when hearts are agreed, but prefer a different approach (to be described later) when a minor suit is agreed.

Roman Keycard Blackwood (RKC)

This ace-asking convention was popularized by the famous Italian Blue Team which dominated World Bridge Federation competition in the 60s. It defines five keycards, which include the four aces and the king of the agreed suit. After the 4NT keycard-asking bid, 5C shows 0 or 3 keycards, 5D shows 1 or 4 keycards, 5H shows 2 keycards but denies the queen of the agreed suit, and 5S shows 2 keycards with the queen of the agreed suit. After a 5C or 5D response, if asker wants to know about the queen of the agreed suit, he can bid the cheapest suit which is not the agreed suit. Partner is expected to sign off in the agreed suit if he does not have the queen, or to make some other bid (usually an undisclosed king, or slam in the agreed suit) if he does have the queen. When asker is not concerned about the trump queen, a 5NT bid can be used to ask about side-suit kings. Over 5NT, partner is expected to bid his cheapest side-suit king, and the auction will continue in the usual cue-bidding style.

An alternative in responding to this 5NT bid is to use Blackwood-style responses: 6C = 0, 6D = 1, 6H = 2. Feel free to use either method, but be sure to discuss this area with each of your partners before playing RKC.

What does a 4NT RKC bid mean when there is not yet an agreed suit? The most popular approach when no suit has been explicitly agreed is to use the last suit which has been bid naturally as the agreed suit, in order to gain the advantages of learning about the king and queen of some specific suit, even if that suit does not ultimately become the trump suit. This is the official Foundation System method.

Again, there are two schools of thought. The conservative approach is to use RKC only when there has been specific trump suit agreement, and to use 4NT as old-fashioned Blackwood if no suit has been agreed. This is a playable alternative, but again be sure to discuss this area with each partner before playing RKC.

The increasing popularity of RKC has led to its over-use, in the same way that Blackwood used to be over-used in preference to the cue-bidding approach. I hope that the earlier cue-bidding section has convinced you to consider that approach when appropriate rather than relying exclusively on RKC.

Eddie Kantar, a former World Champion and a popular California teacher and writer, strongly recommends a slight modification to the RKC response structure. He suggests that the first two responses should be reversed, so that 5C shows 1 or 4 keycards, while 5D shows 0 or 3. He calls the original scheme "0314", and his scheme "1430" (rather than "1403", because 1430 is such a familiar number to bridge players as the score for a vulnerable major suit small slam). His book promoting 1430 is now in its 3rd edition, and claims a slight theoretical advantage for 1430 over 0314. I remain skeptical of that advantage, and discuss this issue later in this chapter, so 0314 is the official Foundation System method, but either scheme is quite playable. This is another area which must be discussed with your partner before playing RKC.

RKC When the Agreed Suit is a Minor

4NT as the RKC ask is virtually useless when the agreed suit is a minor. With clubs agreed, a 1 response will force the bidding to the 6-level (and even a 0 response will do so if playing Kantar's beloved 1430). With diamonds agreed, a 2 response, with or without the queen, will do so.

Kantar recognized this problem, of course, and proposed a Kickback-like scheme to handle it. You will recall from the prior discussion of Kickback that rules must be established to determine when a potential Kickback bid is really Kickback, and when it is natural. This is not a trivial issue. Kantar has dozens of rules for various bidding sequences. One of the simplest reads something like this: *When clubs are agreed, 4D is RKC unless diamonds is a first-bid suit, in which case 4H is RKC unless hearts is also a first bid suit, in which case 4S is RKC.* Similarly: *When diamonds are agreed, 4H is RKC unless hearts is a first-bid suit, in which case 4S is RKC unless spades is also a first-bid suit, in which case 4NT is RKC.* He discusses dozens of potential slam auctions, and has different rules for each. This is murky water, indeed, unless you always play with the same partner, and both of you have phenomenal memories. This is definitely not part of the Foundation System.

The Foundation System uses a much simpler solution to this problem. In game-forcing auctions, if a minor suit has been explicitly agreed, a bid of that minor at the 4-level is RKC. Similarly, if a minor has not yet been agreed, a raise of partner's minor to the 4-level is RKC, and that minor becomes the agreed suit. If the auction is not game-forcing, such minor-suit bids at the 4-level are often invitational rather than RKC, but if partner chooses not to pass, but to accept the invitation, he does so by making the normal RKC responses. Naturally, these responses are step responses. The cheapest response shows 0 or 3, the next cheapest shows 1 or 4, etc. This solution leaves all new suit bids at the 4-level available for use in slam cue-bidding.

If a 4-of-the-minor bid would be merely invitational, and you do not want to risk being passed, you can always use the cue-bidding approach instead. Of course, a 4NT bid immediately following a minor suit bid is also RKC with that minor as the agreed suit, but that approach will normally be taken only when the slam will ultimately be bid in NT, or perhaps on rare occasions in a major suit.

When the RKC response is disappointing, Asker will usually sign-off by bidding the agreed suit at the 5-level. When a minor is the agreed suit, the cheapest notrump bid is also a sign-off since (especially at matchpoints) the higher scoring of a notrump game means that it is usually undesirable to play a minor suit game if a notrump game is also available. When a major suit is agreed, of course, the only sign-off is the cheapest bid in the agreed major.

Feedback RKC (FBRKC)

This version of RKC is not part of the Foundation System because it is not widely known, but is included here as a highly recommended option for regular partnerships who play together frequently. It originated in *3-D and the MAFIA Club* with the idea that after the ace-asking convention there should be a mechanism for Asker to **feed back** to Responder the information about the total number of keycards the partnership holds, so that Responder can participate in the slam decision. With one small, but significant, change, in the Asker's second option below, FBRKC is identical to the RKC version recommended above.

If a major suit has been agreed, 4NT is FBRKC, while 4 of a minor suit is FBRKC if the minor has been previously agreed, or if that minor has been previously bid by partner. With hearts agreed a "2 with" response to 4NT FBRKC might occasionally (perhaps once a year if you play a lot) force a slam with 2 keycards missing. If this worries you, try 4S as Kickback FBRKC for hearts, with 4NT as a spade cue-bid, unless spades has been bid naturally by either partner. I've never felt a need to bother with this refinement.

The responses to the FBRKC bid are identical to the standard 0314 RKC responses previously described. After the FBRKC response, Asker has these options: Sign-off in the agreed suit (or in NT if the agreed suit is a minor), if the response was disappointing, presumably because two keycards are missing.

Make the cheapest bid which is not a sign-off. In standard RKC, this bid is the queen ask (unless the response was 2 with). In FBRKC, this bid is more flexible. It tells partner that only one keycard is missing, but that Asker is still not sure whether to bid a slam, and wants Responder to make that decision. Frequently a missing queen in the agreed suit is the reason for Asker's uncertainty, but FBRKC allows for other possible reasons such as a missing queen in a long side suit, or the lack of a second stopper in a side suit which is likely to be led before a missing trump keycard can be driven out.

Bid a slam in the agreed suit or in NT (or **jump** to slam in another suit) when he has no interest in a grand slam.

Confirm that all keycards and the trump queen are accounted for by making any bid, not included in the other three options above, as a grand slam try, giving preference to cue-bidding the cheapest side suit king, and asking Responder to cue-bid side suit kings up the line. Any NT bid by Asker which is not a sign-off confirms all keycards but denies any kings that are lower-ranking than the agreed suit.

0314 vs 1430

There are two possible areas where the choice of 0314 vs 1430 could matter:

- Which method is best at avoiding an embarrassing response; i.e., one which forces the bidding to a slam when two keycards are missing? With the methods recommended here, the only possible embarrassment arises when 4NT is used as RKC for hearts and receives the "2 with" response, and 0314 vs 1430 is immaterial in that case. More serious embarrassments can arise using Kantar's

Kickback methods after minor suit agreement, particularly 4S RKC for clubs and 4NT RKC for diamonds, but those are avoided using the “4 of the agreed minor” methods recommended here.

- Which method makes it easier to reach a grand slam when the RKC response indicates that the partnership holds all five keycards? Here the choice becomes which method uses the cheapest response to show that all keycards are held, thus leaving one additional bid available for showing side suit kings. This depends on the number of keycards held by Asker. If Asker has 1 or 4 keycards, 1430 has the advantage; if he has 2 or 5 keycards, 0314 is best; and if he has 3 keycards, there is no difference.

Shakespeare gets the last word on this subject: *Much Ado About Nothing*. Asker will probably have 1 or 4 keycards more often than 2 or 5, so there is a miniscule advantage for 1430, but it is hardly worth the lengthy debates 1430 has engendered. If your partner prefers 1430, humor him and use it. Otherwise, keep it simple and use the more natural sounding 0314. Once every three or four years you might regret it.

Exclusion Keycard (EKC)

When you hold a void in a side suit, it would be nice to be able to ask partner not to count the ace of that suit in making his keycard response. There is a way to do this. An unusual jump in a side suit is EKC, and asks partner to exclude the ace of that suit when making the usual 0314 or 1430 RKC response, so that there are only 4 keycards instead of the usual 5. An unusual jump before trump agreement agrees the last bid suit and is EKC. What is an unusual jump? In a game-forcing auction or after trump agreement, any jump in a new suit to the 4-level or higher is EKC. In all other situations (i.e., in a non-forcing auction, or before trump agreement) a single jump could be natural or a splinter, so it takes a double jump in a new suit to qualify as unusual. Thus, with opponents silent, 1S/2S/4C is EKC, but 1C/1S/3D is a splinter, while 1C/1S/4D is EKC.

Cue-Bidding vs RKC

The auction is reaching the crucial stage. You have determined that you probably have enough winners for a slam, and want to make sure you do not have two losers. The Foundation System offers two different approaches, cue-bidding and RKC. How do you decide which approach to use? Actually, there is a third approach which I have not described in this chapter: the bash, a sudden leap to slam. The bash is sometimes appropriate, when you think a slam is likely but further bidding is more likely to help the opponents find the right lead or a good sacrifice than to improve your chances of avoiding a bad slam. We'll ignore the bash here, and focus on choosing between cue-bidding and RKC. We will examine the pros and cons of both approaches in terms of the number of keycards held by the partner who is considering initiating our slam-bidding mechanisms.

0 Keycards: Lindsay's Law makes RKC the only option here, assuming you can find some legitimate reason for even considering a slam. This might happen once in a lifetime. RKC has no way to show 5 keycards, but if partner has them, he'll find his way to a grand slam.

1 Keycard: Again, Lindsay's Law makes RKC the only choice. Any 2 KC response rules out a slam unless you have a void in a suit in which partner does not hold the ace.

2 Keycards: This is cue-bidding country, but if neither KC is in a side suit, there's no convenient initiating cue-bid, although sometimes an initiating cue-bid in a long side suit headed by the king will work well, since if partner has the ace of that suit, he'll be able to read the situation. Otherwise it will usually be better to use RKC, or make a further descriptive bid and hope that partner will decide to use RKC. You'll need at least a "2 without" response for slam.

3 Keycards: Unless all 3 KCs are in the partnership's long suits, there will be an easy initiating cue-bid available, but if partner has a keycard in trumps, he may not be able to show it. Again, sometimes an initiating cue-bid in a long side suit headed by the king will work well. RKC is probably best unless you have a small doubleton and need a side-suit ace from partner for slam. You'll need at least a 1KC response for slam.

4 Keycards: Cue-bidding is preferred if you have a small doubleton and need a side suit ace from partner for slam. Otherwise RKC will usually work out better, since it will be easier to inform partner that we have enough KCs for slam.

5 Keycards: Unless you can bid the grand slam yourself immediately, use RKC in order to let partner know the good news in case he can count enough winners to bid the grand slam.