

## Roman Key Card Blackwood – Part 1

(Friday mini-lesson – 2 August 2019)

What is Roman Key Card Blackwood (RKCB)? Why should one use it instead of normal Blackwood? And how is it used? It's not actually as straightforward as simply knowing the four RKCB responses to 4NT.

### Why?

- Many slams depend upon one member of the partnership holding the **trump king**. With Ordinary Blackwood, this usually cannot be determined below the 6-level
- The presence or absence of the **trump queen** can *never* be determined with Ordinary Blackwood.

Roman Key Card Blackwood, which evolved from the ace asking mechanisms of the great Italian teams of the 1960's, is a refinement of ordinary Blackwood, and is based on *aces*, and the *king of trumps*. **The four aces along with the king of trumps are called the five key cards.** In addition, it enables the presence of the trump queen to be investigated.

### Trump Agreement

It is of the *utmost importance* for the partnership to have agreed upon the trump suit before initiating Roman Key Card Blackwood, for the obvious reason that the trump king needs to be identified and agreed on. To overcome any ambiguity, my recommendation is to apply the following **rules in sequence**.

1. Any **explicit** suit agreed, e.g.,  
1♠ - 3♠ - 4NT is RKCB with **spades** as trumps  
1♣ - 1♦ - 3♦ - 4NT is RKCB with **diamonds** as trumps
2. Any **implicit** suit agreed, e.g.,  
1NT - 2♣ (Stayman) - 2♥ - 4NT is RKCB with **hearts** as trumps  
1NT - 2♥ (Transfer) - 2♠ - 4NT is RKCB with **spades** as trumps  
1♠ - 4♦ (Splinter) – 4NT is RKCB with **spades** as trumps  
1♥ - 2NT (Jacoby) - 3♣ - 4NT is RKCB with **hearts** as trumps  
2NT - 3♦ (Transfer) - 3♥ - 4NT is RKCB with **hearts** as trumps
3. The last **naturally** bid/IMPLIED suit by the **responder** to 4NT, e.g.,  
1♦ - 1♥ - 1♠ - 3♥ – 4NT is RKCB with **hearts** as trumps (the last naturally bid suit by responder).  
1♠ - 2♥ - 3♠ - 4♥ - 4NT is RKCB with **hearts** as trumps

The above three rules should determine the trump suit in the majority of cases. However, if none of those apply, one further rule can be added.

4. The last naturally bid suit by the 4NT bidder, e.g.,  
2♣ - 2♦ - 2♥ - 3NT – 4NT is RKCB with **hearts** as trumps

(responder hasn't bid any suit naturally, so it now reverts to the 4NT bidder who has bid hearts).

**Note** – the agreed trump suit doesn't *necessarily* mean that this is the suit of the final contract. It can be used as a means of finding out about the king of that suit.

### **Responses**

The responses **include the king of trumps as a fifth ace**, the preferred option being '1430' (but some players do play '3014') i.e.

5♣ - 1 or 4, 5♦ - 0 or 3, 5♥ - 2 (or 5) **without** the queen of trumps, 5♠ - 2 (or 5) **with** the queen of trumps (**or its equivalent** – e.g. a 5-card suit implying a probable 10-card fit)

In these responses there can be ambiguities (e.g. 1 or 4), but either the previous bidding, or the 4NT bidders holding itself, usually makes it clear which is the most probable alternative.

To progress to a slam, players should ensure that they have **at least 4 out of the 5 key cards** (unless there are useful voids). Even then, a slam should be avoided if it can be determined that the partnership is missing one key card and the trump Queen.

### **Queen Ask** (this can be adopted at a later stage)

Following 5♣ or 5♦ response, the location of the trump queen may still be unknown. If the RKCB bidder wishes to locate it, a bid of the next suit up [not the trump suit] is the queen-ask. E.g., 1♥ - 3♥ - 4NT - 5♣ [1 or 4] - 5♦ [Do you have the Q♥?]. **Note** – this illustrates why 1430 responses are preferred, since it allows more room after a more positive response when ♥s are the agreed suit.

The responses to the queen ask are:

**Without** trump queen, bid the agreed trump **suit at the lowest level**.

**With** trump queen, bid **5NT with no outside king**.

**With** trump queen and another **king**, bid the suit containing the king.

With more than one outside king, bid them up-the-line.

**Note**: by the trump queen we mean the queen **or its equivalent** (e.g. a 5-card suit – i.e. a 10+ card fit)

### **King Ask**

If holding **all five key cards and the queen of trumps** between the partnership, the 4NT bidder can then ask for kings by bidding 5NT.

Remember that in response to this bid, **ignore the king of trumps** – it has already been accounted for in response to the 4NT bid. Simplest method is to give number of kings as follows: 6♣=0, 6♦=1, 6♥=2, 6♠=3.

**More next week** with specific examples in detail.