

Even when sufficient values are present, it is prudent to ensure that two top tricks are not missing before bidding slam. Ordinary Blackwood checks on aces but disregards the king of trumps, which is also a likely loser when in enemy hands.

The solution is to play Roman Keycard Blackwood (RKCB). This method treats the king of trumps as a “fifth ace” or keycard. To put it another way, the keycards are the four aces and the king of trumps (five in total). Using RKCB, 4NT is still asking. The standard replies are:

- 5C = 0 or 3 keycards
- 5D = 1 or 4 keycards
- 5H = 2 keycards without the queen of trumps
- 5S = 2 keycards plus the queen of trumps

When bidding 4NT RKCB, you should normally have at least one keycard yourself. If ever you bid RKCB when holding no keycard, you and partner need to work out what is going on; the 5H and 5S responses could then conceivably show all five keycards.

With the following hand, partner opened 1D, you responded 1H, and partner raised to 2H. What action should you take?

PARTNER	YOU	YOUR HAND
1D	1H	S KQJ2
2H	?	H AQ432
		D AKQ
		C 2

You have slam values but while ordinary Blackwood would allow you to stay out of slam if missing two aces, it would not tell you if you were missing an ace and the king of trumps, which would also make for two likely losers. Having agreed to play RKCB instead, that problem is solved! Bid 4NT. If partner bids 5H to show two keycards, bid 6H. The defence has a black ace or the HK but not both so slam should make.

		S KJ964	
		H K8	
		D KQ9	
		C AQJ	
S 753			S 8
H A6532			H JT974
D T			D J764
C T983			C K52
		S AQT2	
		H Q	
		D A8532	
		C 764	
WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
Pass	1S	Pass	1D
Pass	4NT	Pass	2S
Pass	6S	All Pass	5S

Despite the negative feature of the singleton queen, South is good enough to open. From there it is just a matter of time till slam is reached, with North locating the fit and checking that only one keycard is missing.

West wins the heart lead and sees there is no future there. Leading the singleton diamond would be wrong too – only an extreme optimist would expect partner to get in to lead it back. It’s better to switch to clubs, a normal “towards weakness” lead. This forces declarer to commit to trying the 50% finesse, or deciding there is something better. If diamonds are 3-2, as they will be 68% of the time, the club losers can be discarded there. Take the CA, draw trumps, then lead the K-Q of diamonds. The suit breaks 4-1 but West was dealt a singleton honour so run the D9 (unless covered), a marked finesse. With diamonds good, 12 tricks are made.