

Heartfelt by Derrick Browne

Your partner opens the bidding 1C, and you have the hand below. What is your plan?

S 8
H KQJ876543
D AK
C A

If you play in a heart contract, the two major suit aces are your only likely losers. You need only ask for aces, and then bid grand slam if partner shows two, small slam if partner shows one, and stay out of slam if partner has none. And yet, in the recent Spring National Teams, 24 out of the 36 pairs finished in 6H even though two aces were missing; one down. What went wrong?

Most top players, such as those competing in the Spring Nationals, use Roman Keycard Blackwood (RKB) instead of ordinary Blackwood. Playing RKB, 4NT asks not for aces but for the five keycards, keycards being the king of trumps as well as the aces. Where no trump suit has been agreed, the last bid suit is normally treated as trumps.

Can you see the problem? If West bids 4NT in reply to East's club opening, or spade rebid, East will reply to show one keycard and West will not know whether that is an ace (useful) or the king (useless). Here is one possible, more successful, auction:

WEST	EAST
S 8	S KQ42
H KQJ876543	H 9
D AK	D QJ8
C A	C KJ742

WEST	EAST
	1C
1H	1S
2D	2NT
4C	4D
4H	Pass

After three suits have been called, a bid of the fourth suit is commonly played as artificial and game forcing, hence West's 2D bid. East now bids 2NT. Over a 1NT or 2NT bid, a jump to 4C is recommended as Gerber, asking for aces. When East denies an ace, it is easy for West to sign off in 4H.

The Spring Nationals were won by Bruce Neill, Avi Kanetkar, Sartaj Hans and Andrew Peake, while the Dick Cummings Open Pairs saw Peter Gill and Paul Gosney coast to an easy victory. Kanetkar made a winning decision on the following deal. After North opens a weak 2H and East vercalls 2S, what action should South take?

SNT Finals, Board 41, Dealer N, EW vul.

	NORTH		
	S T96		
	H AQ7642		
	D JT		
	C 94		
WEST		EAST	
S 542		S KQJ83	
H J5		H K93	
D AQ9862		D K53	
C 62		C 53	
	SOUTH		
	S A7		
	H T8		
	D 74		
	C AKQJT87		
WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
	Neill		Kanetkar
	2H	2S	?

Kanetkar had eight tricks in hand and hoped partner could provide one more, so he ventured 3NT. A diamond lead would have taken this one down but West led a normal spade, partner's suit, and that led to an 11 IMP pickup when 4H was reached on the North-South cards at the other table, and went two down.