

## Ace Asking - Easley Blackwood Style

I, myself, think we are getting ahead of ourselves by discussing Ace Asking before we understand Control Bidding. In some respects, however, Control Bids are much more easily understood if one knows where it's heading. Here's something to consider when going for the big contracts. A Grand Slam can not afford to lose a single Trick and the Small Slam can only lose one. It only takes an **A** to ruin Huge aspirations. Ace asking is often misunderstood as an avenue to a Slam. In reality, Ace asking is a means of avoiding a bad Slam try. If the result indicates that there is an **A** missing one must lower her Grand aspirations to Small. So how does Ace asking work? We noted earlier that a jump to 4NT in many cases is Quantitative. But consider the following auction: 1♣ – P – 1♠ – P  
3♠ – P – 4NT

There is an obvious agreement on a Trump suit the Responder hadn't had a chance to do anything but suggest ♠'s. Partner's jump shows a Big hand and Responder might be holding ♠AKQ97♥K5♦QJT♣K2. It appears to the Responder that they have somewhere between 32 and 36 HCP; Slam territory... so Responder who is the only one who knows what his hand looks like initiates Ace Asking. That is what the 4NT Bid is doing. It is a Convention called Blackwood named after its designer, One of the foremost pioneers of the game. The Response provides the answer in a straight-forward up-the-line manner: Once the answer is given, the Blackwood initiator can ask for K's by Bidding 5NT the responses are identical

5♠ = 3 A's	6♠ = 3 K's
5♥ = 2 A's	6♥ = 2 A's
5♦ = 1 A's	6♦ = 1 A's
5♣ = 0 or 4 A's	6♣ = 0 or 4 A's

The first thing to notice is that the lowest response has two meanings. That may seem ambiguous and dangerous but it is not. Ace's should not be asked for if one doesn't have an idea of what response to expect. For example: If one has all four **A**'s and needs to know how many **K**'s partner has; the only way to get to King-asking is to ask for **A**'s first, expecting a 0 answer.

### What if You Want to Stop at 5NT

You Bid 4NT, Partner responds 5♣ and you decide the best contract is 5NT but you can't Bid it without Partner thinking you are asking for **K**'s. What do you do? You get him to Bid 5NT by Bidding some unbid suit. Let's continue our Opening example to see how that works

1♣ – P – 1♠ – P;  
3♠ – P – 4NT – P; 4NT == Blackwood!!  
5♣ – P – 5♥ – P; 5♣ == 0 A's, the 5♥ bid says Just bid 5N (note: 5♦ would be Queen-ask)  
5NT – P – P – P.

### Warning Label

Most new players are over zealous in the use of Ace Asking Conventions. These conventions are useful under the right conditions but gets one in trouble when improperly used. It is probably easier to say When is the wrong time to use the tool.

Whenever you hold a suit that has two or more losers it is probably wrong to ask for Aces! Example: you and Partner have the following hands

♠KQJT9	♠A642	Opener has 12 HCP/13PP; Responder has 17HCP/18PP and his thoughts
♥9	♥AKQ2	of SLAM start when his Partner Opens 1♠. Using Strong Jacoby Trump
♦KQ4	♦A92	Raise he tells Partner about his good hand and support bidding 2NT.
♣Q432	♣87	Opener's response bid is an encouraging 3♥ showing the singleton ♥.

Responder knows he has control of ♦'s and in hope that he will find Partner in Control of ♣'s launches into Blackwood. The 5♣ (=0) response should slow Responder down and it does he bids 5♠. Responder avoided

serious trouble but with two quick losers in ♠'s **should have never** ventured toward Slam-land. The lesson here is:

If your hand has 2 quick losers in any one suit, that your partner hasn't already shown a stopper (A or K), then don't ask for Aces. In this case Responder had 2 quick losers in ♠'s, a suit his partner never cue bid. Partner might have a stopper there but "might" is too iffy a word on which to try and force our contract to the 6 level. Luckily, the bidders did safely stop at the makeable 5 level, but those two quick losers should have urged stopping at 4, making 5; rather than bidding 5 and chance the possibility of going down 1.