

Control Bidding

Bidding Controls is a most important first step in slam bidding. When makes a control bid they are sending a signal to their Partner that they might be interested in pursuing a Slam contract. There are two methods of bidding Controls. The idea behind Controls is having the ability to stop the opponents from running a suit. Of course, there are on average no more than 4 Tricks per suit in each hand, and if the contract is going to be a Trump contract there may be even less. When we consider these issues and add experience we find that only first and second round controls should be of concern. Methods differ in how these two Controls are exposed. In the common method if both 1st and 2nd round controls are held they are reported separately and in sequence; first-round First, then afterwards a second-round. In the Italian cue method, which is our preference, a control 1st or 2nd is indiscriminately reported. The logic behind this approach is that there is usually not sufficient bidding space to control bid 1st and 2nd round controls consecutively. Additionally in Ace-asking we already have a way to show, not specific, but total 1st round controls. In fact combining Control Bidding with Ace-asking provides the safest method of finding and avoiding Slam. How does it work?

Control Bids - Italian Cue Bids

Italian Cue Bids are really Control Bids here's contrasting examples: You first hear this Bidding sequence:

1NT – P – 2♥ – P; 3♠ – P – 4♣ – P; 4♦ – P – 4♠ – P; P – P.

What was the 4♣ Bid? Why? Partners 3♠ Bid showed 4-Card support. Looking at Responder's hand it shows 14 HCP, possible 29 HCP why not just jump to 4NT to ask for Aces. Answer: It is better to use the 4-level Bidding space to find out more about the hands before asking for Aces! The 4♣ Bid was a Control bid showing a stopper¹ in Clubs. This would have happened with either normal Control bidding as would the 4♦ Bid. The Responder was not able to show a ♥ stopper so he stops the bidding at Game in the known suit. The Opener also does not have a ♥ stopper and so also agrees to stopping at Game by Passing. Look at the both hands.

♠AQxx	♠KJTxxx
♥Jxx	♥T9x
♦Akxx	♦QJ
♣Qx	♣AK

It is clear that the opponents can get 3 quick Tricks in ♥'s. Without Control Bidding, the Responder might have been tempted to jump to Blackwood Ace asking which would have revealed a missing **A**. First, Blackwood automatically means a minimum 5-level Contract. But a missing **A** still means you could be at the 6-level (small slam) so some braves souls might even go on to 6♠ when only 4♠ is available. With the preceding hand the bidding would have gone exactly the same whether you are using normal or Italian Control bidding. An important element to make note of **as soon as one partner makes a bid in the agreed upon suit – Control bidding is terminated**; but importantly it is not a closeout bid. Now let's see the difference that the Italian system can make. Examine the bidding sequence

1♣ – P – 1♠ – P; 3♠ – P – 4♣ – P; 4♥ – P – 4NT – P; 5♦ – P – 6♠ – P; P – P;

and the corresponding hands as we discuss the sequence.

♠ KQxx	♠AJxxx
♥KQ	♥xx
♦xx	♦Axx
♣ AQxxx	♣KJx

We'll start with the jump to 3♠ which shows a strong hand and support for Partners suit. Partners suit is strong as well so he starts Slam investigation with a Control bid of 4♣ which indicates 1st **or** 2nd round Control in that suit. The Opener cooperates by skipping ♦'s indicating no Control in that suit and

1 A stopper here is either a A (1st round control) or K (2nd round control).

bidding 4♥'s showing 1st or 2nd round Control in that suit. The Responder isn't worried about Opener's lack of Control in ♦, because he has it. Now, with at least 2nd Controls in all suits Responder can confidently (there is no suit with more than 1 loser, find out how many 1st round Controls there are. With at least 2nd round Control in all suits and holding 1st round in two suits, the 5-level is a relatively safe landing place; so Ace asking is less risky. The 5♦ response shows 1 Ace. With one Ace missing Responder takes Contract to a safe 6♠. Make note of the fact that **Control bids are always made up-the-line; skipping a suit implies no stopper in that suit, and never cue bid above game level.**

Lets look at another. You are holding ♠ Kxx ♥AJxx ♦Qxx ♣Jxx and Partner Opens with 1♥, RHO Passes and you respond with a limit raise to 3♥. Partner Bids 4♦ showing a stopper in ♦'s and interest in slam. What is your bid? This was the sequence: 1♥ – P – 3♥ – P; 4♦ – P – ?

Your Bid is 4♥! Why??

The 4♦ Bid is obviously a Control bid; Partners skipping ♣'s indicates he does not has a ♣ stopper and neither do you and you have 3 quick losers in that suit. Partners Control bid showed a desire to explore for Slam, but the missing ♣ stopper throws cooling water on his desire. You deliver the bad news by simply bidding Game.

Italian Cue bids work much better with RKC Blackwood.

Important Note: Cue bidding never goes beyond the target Game-level except to bid 4NT asking for Aces. It is to be treated as supplementary information not Slam forcing, just Slam interest!