

A Better Blackwood

Roman Key Card (RKC)

Just because it is better doesn't mean it changes the purpose for using it. The reason for using any Ace-Asking Convention is to keep from bidding BAD Slams. RKC's advantage is two-fold: first, it provides information about five Control cards as oppose to traditional four by Blackwood and Gerber; secondly, under middling conditions it shows presence or absence of a sixth Key Card. It might help to think about the **5 key cards as five Aces**.

What are Key Cards?

The five Key Cards are the four Aces (like Gerber or Blackwood) and the Trump King. These are the five most important Trick-Taking cards in the deck. What happens if there isn't a Trump suit, i.e. it seems you are exploring for a NoTrump Slam? In that case the King being reported is the King of the **last suit** bid by your side.

The Convention is often referred to by the version that a player uses. There are two versions which shouldn't cause too much confusion. Neither versions garner a lot of support to endorse one of the other but I will suggest one. The two versions, which refer to the meanings of the two lowest possible responses, are 1430 and 3014. Perhaps its better to denote it as fourteen-thirty because the first level response refers to 14 and the second level response to 30; and thirty-fourteen because the first level response refers to 30 and the second level response to 14. Make sure your Partner and you are using the same version. Just like Blackwood the sequence it starts with 4NT, but that bid is now asking for Key Cards.

How does the Bidding Go?

14 – 30	Response	30 – 14
1 or 4 Key Cards	5♣	3 or 0 Key Cards
3 or 0 Key Cards	5♦	1 or 4 Key Cards

After 5♦ responses are identical no matter the version

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|-----------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 5♥ → 2 or 5 Key Cards | without the Trump Queen | |
| 5♠ → 2 or 5 Key Cards | with the Trump Queen | |
| 5N → 2 or 5 Key Cards | with a useful void | |
| 6↓ → 1 or 3 Key Cards | with a useful void | 6↓ → 6 of any suit below Trump suit. |
| 6T → 1 or 3 Key Cards | with a useful void | 6T → 6 of Trump suit. |

And King asking?

It proceeds just like regular Blackwood with one **exception**. Information regarding the Trump King is included in the response to 4NT, thus it should not be included in the count of Kings reported after the 5NT bid. If you held all four Kings you would respond telling your partner you have three kings. You can't count the Trump King.

Can the Queen be Asked About Separately?

Earlier we referred to middling response. We were referring to the point that the **14** and **30** responses show the extreme ends of potential holdings. If one gets such a response there is no information about the Queen as there is in the 2 Keycard response; So if you get a **14** or **30** response you might still want to know about the Queen. Queen ask is a step bidding process. Once Responder replies to the 4NT bid, whatever the response a Bid of the next higher suit is QUEEN ASK. How

about an example! 1♥ – P – 3♥ – P; 3♠ – P – 4♣ – P; 4NT – P – 5♣ Let's analyze the bidding up to this point, Partner has Opened the bidding and in spite of your limit raise Partner wants to do some more exploring. He signaled that by Control bidding 3♠, perhaps he has a Big hand! You cooperate by showing a Control in ♣'s. Partners 4NT seems to be saying he has a ♦ stopper, with all suits stopped he is asking for Aces. You don't have any, so you reply 5♣.

Partner now bids 5♦?? What is with that 5♦ bid. Partner probably has all the Aces, Maybe a K and/or a Q here or there, you said you had 10-11 HCP only K, Q and J's can make be in that total. It must be that Partner doesn't have the ♥Q so before making the decision it might be important to know if you have it. The 5♦ bid is asking that question. **Do you have the Trump Q?** A negative response is given by bidding the Trump suit, here 5♥ would indicate NO! A positive response might requires going to the 6-level and is given by bidding the suit of your lowest K below the Trump suit. If your lowest K is above the Trump Suit just bid 6 of the Trump suit.

DOPI, ROPI, DEPO

This is probably a good time to discuss those little boxes on the Convention Card in the area of the Ace-Asking Conventions. There are three each marked with either DOPI, ROPI and DEPO.

Some Opponents wont go away quietly – they insist on interfering with your bidding process. So here we are in the beginning of our slam investigation with Partner bidding 4N and your RHO throws in a bid. You could Double for penalty and get a good score but you also may want to ignore the interference and continue on to your nice slam. Regardless which convention you are using Gerber, Blackwood or RKC any interfering bid can confuse the responses to the Ace-Ask. The interfering bids are usually in the lower suits, so our counters are designed for that:

DOPI stands for **D**ouble = **ZerO** (0 or 3); **P**ass = 1 or 4. The same combinations in **30-14**

ROPI stands for **R**eDouble = **ZerO** (0 or 3); **P**ass = 1 or 4. The same combinations in **30-14**

DEPO stands for **D**ouble = **E**ven (2 or 4); **P**ass = **O**dd.

Make sure you discuss with Partner how you intend to use these bells and whistles.