

The road to slam – a history of bidding initiatives

David Green, Dunedin, New Zealand

Part 1: Blackman ?

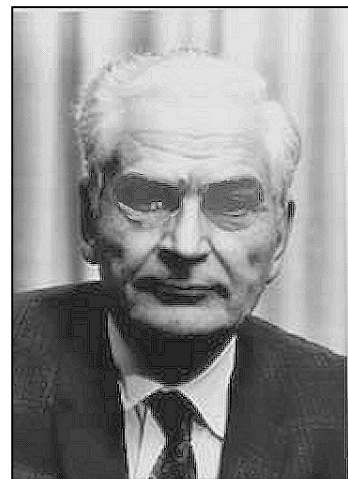


Ely Culbertson 1891-1955

Ever since the son of an American mining engineer and a Cossack chief's daughter devised a conventional asking bid of 4NT for getting to or keeping out of slam, bridge players have been seeking a golden road to the game's Eldorado contract. Only months after Ely **Culbertson** (1891-1955) publicized this convention in his *Contract Bridge Blue Book* (1933), Easley **Blackwood** (1903-92) produced his blockbuster which, in one form or another, has become *sine qua non* for most slam auctions. Culbertson's 4NT was a D.I. (Declarative-Interrogative) ask requiring three aces or two Aces & the King of a suit bid in the auction in order to launch the ask. Blackwood placed no such requirements on the asker other than sound high card values, and the responses were simple and easy to remember.

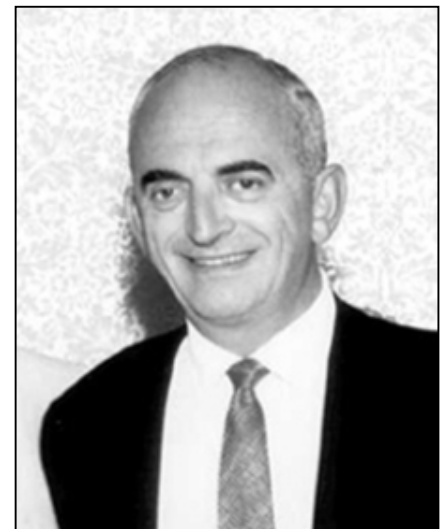


Easley Blackwood 1903-92

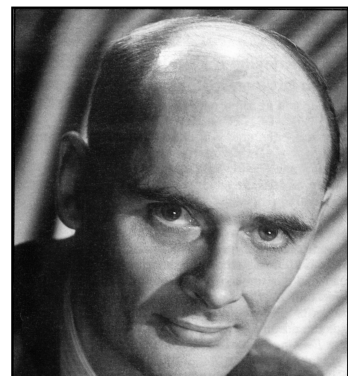


John Gerber 1906-81

Five years later in 1938 John **Gerber** (1906-81) lowered the asking bar to 4C. Since then, Blackwood & Gerber (*subsequently played in NT auctions*), along with the convention invented in 1939 by British player, J.C.H. Marx, but first written up after the war in 1945 in *The Bridge World* by Samuel **Stayman**, have become the 'conventions' lexicon for the majority of bridge players. Only a few years ago in a cut-in rubber session in Brighton, England, Claude Richter (*Luxemburg-NZ*) partnered a white-haired lady, who, no doubt detecting a foreign accent & wondering whether Claude was familiar with the British way of doing things, inquired: "Do you play *Staywood*, my dear?" Not sure whether the good lady's two conventional bids were embodied in the acronym or whether she was perhaps a Mrs Malaprop, & no doubt keen to impress her with his youthful charm, Claude trotted out *Checkback Staywood*: "Oh yes!", he replied, "And *Blackman*".



Sam Stayman 1911-93



Terence Reese 1913-96

While these slam conventions were intended as checksums for 1st and 2nd round controls, many players, with the sniff of a slam, launch the 4C or 4NT ask without adequate preparation. Great players of the 1945-1965 era like England's Terence Reese (1913-96) and Switzerland's Jean Besse (1914-94) stressed the importance of sound bidding judgment as the prelude to a slam auction, and they much preferred the use of **cue bidding** to manoeuvre all the way to slam. Reese's *Develop Your Bidding Judgment*, The Oak Tree Press, 1962 (reprint 1987) has remained one of the all-time classics of bidding.



Boris Shapiro 1909-2002

Reese and Shapiro, despite the ill-founded cheating accusations made against them in 1965, formed one of bridge's great partnerships of all time. When I first met Reese on the occasion of an 80th birthday party put on by the English Bridge Union at Brighton in 1993 he was very critical of modern bidding gadgets. His only concession to progress was the transfer principle.

Boris Shapiro (1909-2002), a Latvian-born emigrant to England in 1918 after the Russian Revolution, may have set a record that will never be broken: in 1929 he won his first World title, the World Auction Bridge Pairs, and 69 years later at the age of 89, paired with Scottish international, Irving Gordon, he won the World Senior Pairs.

Reese & Shapiro would have relished this hand from an 11/06 Pairs night at the Otago Club:

Dlr: E ♠ KT8762

Vul: NS ♥ AT8

♦ T

♣ AKT

♠ 43

♥ 6

♦ AQJ963

♣ J864

♠ 95

♥ 7542

♦ 872

♣ Q932

♠ AQJ

♥ KQJ93

♦ K54

♣ 75

W N E S

P

1♥

2♦/3♦

2♠/3♠

P

4♦¹

P

5♣²

P

5♥³

P

6♣⁴

P

6NT⁵

All Pass

¹ Cue agreeing [s & showing slam interest

² Cue accepting SI & showing extra values

³ Cue of own suit to show good holding

⁴ Cue interested in grand if partner has ♦A

⁵ Choosing the safest & best MP slam

No pair bid to 6NT when the hand was played at the Otago Bridge Club, as North had asked with 4NT, making 6NT unplayable from that seat. Do I hear you ask: what if they are missing ♥A &/or ♠Q? The cue bidders would argue that North would not be in a position to accept the slam invitation without first-round controls in ♦s or ♥s & with only one honour in the trump suit. Nor would he look for the grand with a 6♣ cue

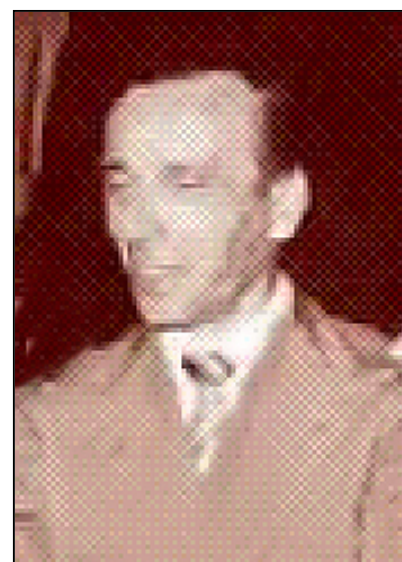
with only a 5-card suit. This judgment-style is not, of course, fail-safe, and although my former partner, Henry Levy of Tauranga, remains firm in his belief that most slam bidding is better done this way. I am of the opinion that a mixture of methods should be used depending on the hand.

Part 2: Strong Club



Howard Schenken 1905-79

In the early 1950s an Italian professor of philosophy from Naples, Eugenio Chiaradia (1917-1977) devised a *Fiore forte* (**Strong club** or 'SC' for short) system. It wasn't the first, which dates right back ironically to Harold Stirling **Vanderbilt** (1884-1970), descendant of the railroad tycoon and creator of the contract bridge scoring system in 1925. In Britain the **Nottingham SC** system was in vogue from the 1930s right through to the 1960s; even the Americans had their Big Club developed by Howard Schenken (1905-79) and published in 1968 but it was not until the Italians took their SC system to World Championships and won consistently that leading



Eugenio Chiaradia 1917-77

players began to take notice. Playing with Pietro Forquet (1925-), a young banker, Chiaradia named the system the **Neapolitan Club** after his home town, the birthplace of *Pizza Margherita & spumoni*. By 1957

they had made up a team with a pair from Rome, Giorgio Belladonna (1923-95) and Walter Avarelli (1912-87), and, together with Guglielmo Siniscalco (1921-) & Massimo d'Alelio (1916-98), they formed the original *Squadra azzurra* – the Blue Team, which won the World Championships in New York in 1957.

This marked the start of an era (1957-1975) of world bridge dominance which may never be bettered. The Italian team won the Bermuda Bowl (the acme of world bridge supremacy) no less than thirteen times and the Bridge Olympiad three times in that era. In 1960 Benito Garozzo (1927-), a flamboyant Fiat car salesman from Naples, had joined the team when Siniscalco was unable to travel to Buenos Aires, forming a partnership with Forquet & combining elements of the Neapolitan and Roman Club systems into the team's celebrated **Blue Club** system. One of the great advantages of a strong club system is the exchange of information that is possible after a 1♣ opener followed by a positive response or one showing 3+ controls has guaranteed the auction will reach game at only the one- or two-level. Let us give centre stage to the Neapolitan Club and the Professor on this hand from an European Championship from the late 1950s:

Dlr: N	♠ QJ8		Siniscalco	Chiaradia		
Vul: NS	♥ AK5		W	N	E	S
	♦ K65		P	1♣ ¹	1♠	1NT ²
	♣ AQ97		P	2♣ ³	P	3♦ ⁴
♠ T932		♠ AK7654	P	4♦	P	4♠ ⁵
♥ T973		♥ QJ8	P	5♥ ⁶	P	5♠ ⁷
♦ Q43		♦ -	P	5NT ⁸	P	6♣ ⁹
♣ 32		♣ JT84	P	7♦	All Pass	
	♠ -					
	♥ 642					
	♦ AJT9872					
	♣ K65					

- ¹ Neapolitan, 17+, any shape
- ² Showing 3 ctrls (A=2; K=1)
- ³ Asking after suits
- ⁴ Unbalanced ♦ hand
- ⁵⁻⁷ Cues confirming [void & ♥ Ctrl
- ⁸ Grand Slam try
- ⁹ Accepting with 2nd rd. ctrl. in ♣

In today's competitive bidding environment East is likely, at favourable vulnerability & even 2nd in hand, to bid 3♠ to disrupt any constructive SC sequence. The T♠ was led, covered by the ♠J, ♠K & ruffed. Chiaradia, playing the ♠ overcaller for possible shortage in ♦s laid down A♦, drew trumps with the marked finesse, cashed ♣A, played to the ♣K, back to the ♣Q & ruffed the fourth ♣ finishing in hand in this position:-

Dlr: N	♠ Q8	
Vul: NS	♥ AK5	
	♦ -	
	♣ -	
♠ 93		♠ A7
♥ T97		♥ QJ8
♦ -		♦ -
♣ -		♣ -
	♠ -	
	♥ 642	
	♦ T9	
	♣	

He now led the ♦T and both defenders were squeezed, unable to keep their vulnerable spade holding protected as well as holding on to three hearts. West discarded a ♠, dummy and East a ♥. Eugenio now entered dummy with ♥A, led the ♠Q setting up his ♠8 when the ♠9 fell under the Ace for the heart discard. *Bravissimo!*

The Italians' success spawned a host of SC and weak/strong club systems from Iceland to New Zealand. The one that finally caught the imagination of players other than internationals was the China



Charles Wei 1914-87

Bidding System (later dubbed **Precision**), devised by Charles Wei (1914-87), Chinese-born American shipping entrepreneur in 1965. The system used a 16+♣ opener & a medium 13-15 NT but, unlike predecessors, 5-card majors, but was little known until the Chinese National team finished runners-up in the Bermuda Bowl in 1969 & 1970. Garozzo & Belladonna modified it to Super-Precision which was played by the Italian team in the 1970s. One of the more successful **weak/strong club** systems (usually doubling up a weak 10-12 balanced hand with a 15+♣) was the Swedish Carrot Club, devised by Anders Morath (1944-) and Sven-Olov Flodqvist (1940-) in 1972. A pair playing the system won the European Championships for Sweden in 1977 and again in 1987.

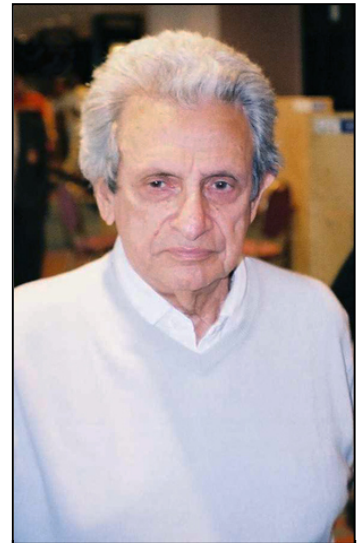
Part 3: Interrogation

1. Asking Bids



Giorgio Belladonna 1923-95

It was inevitable that sooner or later someone would capitalize on all that vacant real estate made possible by a deal which confirmed game/+ prospects after only two bids at the one-level. Again, it was an Italian, and one of the greatest players ever to grace the game, Giorgio Belladonna, & his partner, Walter Avarelli, who, in their 1959 publication, *The Roman Club System of Distributional Bidding*, exploited the economy of the **canapé** principle of describing hand shape & followed up a 1♣: +ve with a set of **asking bid** options. As the 1♣ opener was usually much stronger it was the ideal setting for an interrogation of some of the weaker hand's salient



Benito Garozzo 1927-

features. The full Roman System was complex but asking bids, like other Roman gadgets, were incorporated into other systems. Even the Americans, Edgar Kaplan (1925-97) & Alfred Sheinwold (1912-97) introduced them in 1969 into their 5-card major system. Belladonna and Garozzo deployed them in their Super Precision System in the 1970s, and many players still employ Roman control asks and suit quality asks in their Strong Club systems.

Briefly, here are the four most frequently-used Roman asking bids:

α (Alpha) = Support – the 1♣ opener's first-bid suit is an asking bid for a combination of controls (A=2; K=1) and support for his suit (honours & 3 or 4+ length).

β (Beta) = Controls - after a 1♥/♠ response to 1♣, a bid of 1NT by opener asks responder for the number of controls in his hand (A=2; K=1).

γ (Gamma) = Suit quality - a single raise of responder's first-bid suit asks for a combination of the number of honours in that suit & the suit length.

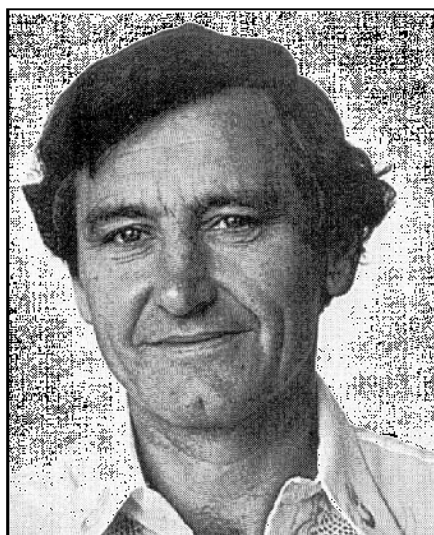
ε (Epsilon) = Suit controls - a new suit by the 1♣ opener, after he has used **α** to establish his own suit or **γ** to show an interest in responder's first-bid suit, asks for 1st, 2nd or 3rd round controls in the new suit (shortage or honour cards or both)

Responses to the asking bids were given in steps (e.g. raising a suit or NT = 5th step); a repeat **α**, **γ** or **ε** ask, though little used as they took up valuable bidding space, would detail the holding further. Below are two hands demonstrating asking bids in action. *Responses have been slightly modified as follows: - Support (α) responses recognize Qx or better as support; Suit quality (γ) responses include the Jack as a step with only a 5-c suit; Suit control (ε) responses extend the steps to include greater length with honour(s).*

<u>Hand 1: β, γ and ε</u>		<u>Hand 2: α and ε</u>	
♠ AJ4	♠ 73	♠ 4	♠ A10852
♥ Q76	♥ KJT82	♥ AKJ863	♥ Q5
♦ AK54	♦ 3	♦ KJ103	♦ AQ62
♣ AQ5	♣ KJ732	♣ A3	♣ 52
1♣ ^{SC} : 1♥	+ve, 8+hcp, 5+♥s	1♣ ^{SC} : 1♠	+ve, 8+hcp, 5+♠s
1NT ^β : 2♣	0-2 controls	2♥ ^α : 3♦	4+controls, ♥Hx(x)
2♥ ^γ : 3♣	♥HJxxx	4♦ ^ε : 5♠	♦HHxx
3♦ ^ε : 3NT	King or singleton	6♣ ^ε : 6♥	Q♣ or ♣xx
4♣ ^ε : 5♦	♣Hxxxx	7♦	Wow!
6♥		N.B. If the response to 6♣ ^ε had revealed a 2 nd rd ctl. in ♣s, West would have bid 7NT	

The advantage of the γ ask can be seen in the first hand with the response showing $\heartsuit HJxxx$ opposite $\heartsuit Qxx$; if responder had shown a 5-c suit to only one (or no) honour, opener would bid 3NT and the auction would finish in $4\heartsuit$. In the second hand the α ask finds the $\heartsuit Q$ and the first ϵ ask conveniently brings to light a four-card \diamondsuit suit to two honours. Like most conventions, however, Roman asking bids worked well on some hands, not on others, the problem being that one could not always use ϵ , in particular, & even γ (after, e.g. $1\clubsuit:2\diamondsuit:3\diamondsuit$) without the bidding getting too high. The result was that sometimes partner's full distribution was missed at the expense of specific salient features. Nonetheless, the fire had been ignited and the flames spread rapidly as players sought more comprehensive ways of asking for shape, controls and honour cards.

2. Relay Bidding



Roy Kerr 1934-

It was here in New Zealand that the interrogation process took a quantum leap. In the early 1970s a new face appeared on the New Zealand bridge scene. Recently returned from USA to take up a Professorship in Mathematics at Canterbury University, Roy Kerr (1934-) soon established himself as a player of great skill and imagination & was a member of the New Zealand team making its first appearance at the World Teams Championships (Bermuda Bowl) in Venice in 1974. Well acquainted with quantum leaps through his academic research which led in 1963 to a mathematical solution to the existence of 'black holes', Kerr, aided by American, Walter (Walt) Jones (1932-), Professor of Physics at Canterbury University, published in 1980 *Symmetric Relay*, a bidding system which took the asking bid principle virtually to its limit. Using the Fibonacci number sequence (1,1,2,5,8,13 etc) as a guide to the availability & pattern of bidding space between the first ask (dubbed a **relay**, e.g. $1\spadesuit^R$ over a $1\heartsuit$ +ve to the $1\clubsuit$ opener) and the maximum allowable response of 3NT (in order

not to go beyond the lowest-denomination game contract), but realizing, too, the importance for ease of memory of a **symmetric arrangement** of responses within that bidding space, they built a system disclosing the full distribution of responder's hand. He first bid suit (s), then indicated shortage and finally hand shape: single suiter, uneven 2-suiter - commonly 5/4 or 6/4, extreme 2-suiter - commonly 5/5 or 6/5, 3-suiter or balanced, all within the confines of the $1\heartsuit$ -3NT bidding space.

To conserve bidding space further, the **run-on** (or **zoom**) principle was employed, allowing responder to continue bidding the next set of responses if he had shown the top step of the series being asked for. *Roman Key Card Blackwood uses this principle in a simple way – the first two step responses to 4NT show combinations of four of the six key card holdings (0/3 or 1/4) but, with 2 or 5 key cards, responder does not just bid the third step but runs on to the 4th step (5♠) to indicate he holds the Queen of trumps, otherwise he stops at the 3rd step without the good lady.* Once the full distribution was disclosed, the relayer then asked for **controls** (a positive response to the $1\clubsuit$ opener or a constructive opening bid having already guaranteed two controls). The dénouement to the interrogation came with a series of relay 'scans' for honour holdings in responder's suits (sorted by length then rank). Again, responder was allowed to run-on to the next scan to a step where he denied an honour in a particular suit. Thus the term **denial cue bid** became part of the vocabulary. For a full description of the system, refer to Andrei Sharko's excellent revised presentation: *Symmetric – The Symmetric Relay Contract Bidding System Made Easy* (2004), downloadable from www.abf.com.au/members/systems/SRME.pdf

Systems using Symmetric Relay (e.g. *Moscito*, the brainchild of New Zealanders, Paul Marston & Stephen Burgess) have not been widely played beyond expert level because of their complexity and the pressure of learning & remembering numerous artificial responses. Also, several national bridge bodies restrict relay systems from being used in the majority of their tournaments, partly because they can slow up proceedings but mainly because they are seen to disadvantage non-expert opponents. There has grown, too, over the last twenty years, with a greater cross-section of the population playing bridge & on a more casual and social

basis, a feeling that attempts to make the bidding a lengthy, one-sided enquiry is contrary to the spirit of interaction, judgment & anticipation, cherished values which players have come to associate with the auction over much of its first fifty years of development. (Perhaps a parallel can be drawn with the alarm shown in the 1990s that arose from men's tennis matches being effectively resolved by little else than high-powered serving). Fortunately, in recent years, the more competitive nature of the game has given birth to a host of *in-your-face* interference (q.v. 'Rumble', www.bridgematters.com/rumble06.htm) over a strong 1♣ opener and its later-evolved equivalent - the **forcing pass**, nullifying the effectiveness of relaying in particular.



Stephen Burgess 1956 - & Paul Marston 1948-

For what it's worth & as a demonstration of relay in action, I include this memorable hand, played with a partner in England in a big match some years ago. We were playing a **transfer-oriented relay system**, i.e. arranging the initial suit responses to get (hopefully) the stronger undisclosed relay hand playing the contract (known as right-siding). As you can imagine reaching a cold 7NT on these cards after 25 bids was a relayer's dream, though in reality it turned out to be overkill, as opponents were -100 in the no-no contract of 5♠. Our East at the other table was rewarded with a drink & a cuddle as she sensibly declined to double lest they ran to one of their **six** makeable contracts at slam level: 6♦, 6♥, 7♥, 6NT, & 7NT or even 6♣ in their 4-1 fit but not 7♦ in a 4-2 fit! Incidentally, playing 4-1 fits at the 6-level was not unheard of with the more memory-deficient aficionados of Symmetric Relay.

Dlr: N ♠ AT76
 Vul: NS ♥ AKJ
 ♦ A2
 ♣ AQJ3

♠ 4	♠ KQJ9
♥ T542	♥ 98
♦ 765	♦ T983
♣ 97654	♣ T82

♠ 8532
 ♥ Q763
 ♦ KQJ4
 ♣ K

N	S
----------	----------

Distribution – Suit (s), shortage & shape

1 ♣	1 ♥ ¹	¹ +ve response with 4+♠
1 ♠ ^R	1 NT ²	² Both majors
2 ♣ ^R	2 ♦ ³	³ Minor shortage
2 ♥ ^R	2 ♠ ⁴	⁴ ♣ shortage
2 NT ^R	3 ♣ ⁵	⁵ 4441 distribution

Controls (A=2; K=1)

3 ♦ ^R	3 ♥ ⁶	⁶ 0-2 controls
------------------	------------------	---------------------------

Honours in suits – shown by Denial Cue Bids

3 ♠ ^R	3 NT ⁷	⁷ No A♠ or K♠
4 ♣ ^R	4 ♦ ⁸	⁸ No A♥ or K♥
4 ♥ ^R	5 ♣ ⁹	⁹ A♦ or K♦+A♣ or K♣, No Q♣ (Run-on)
5 ♦ ^R	5 NT ¹⁰	¹⁰ Q♥ + Q♦, no J♠ (Run-on)
6 ♣ ^R	6 ♦ ¹¹	¹¹ No J♥
6 ♥ ^R	6 N ¹²	¹² J♦

7NT

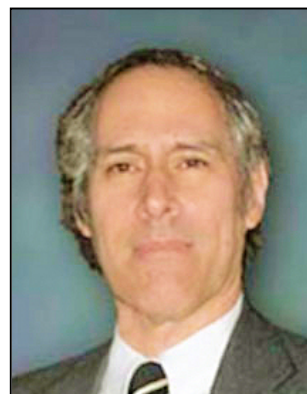
N.B. A two-step bid above 5♣ & bids of 3NT, 6NT or at the 7-level by the relayer are always to play.

Relayer can count 12 tricks in NT, 13 if responder has J♦ & is safe to ask, as he can sign off over 6♠ with 6NT

Part 4: Slam overtures

1. Useful Space Principle (USP)

The introduction of relay bidding may have been the catalyst for theorists & players alike to consider more closely the **useful space principle (USP)**, i.e. assigning meanings to actions so that the remaining bidding space matches the needs of the auction. Jeff Rubens (1941-), a retired mathematics professor, currently editor of *The Bridge World* and an outstanding writer and columnist, publicized this principle in a series of articles in *The Bridge World*, Nov 1980 - Apr 1981



Jeff Rubens 1941-

An excellent example of its use can be seen in this modification of the 5-card Puppet Stayman (5cPS)



Steve Robinson 1941 -

convention over a 2NT opener. The original convention was devised by American internationals, Chris (Kit) Woolsey (1943-) & Steve Robinson (1941-), with assistance from Neil Silverman & was first published in 1977-8, the modification is below:

2NT : 3♣ Asks if partner has a 5-c M or four ♥s

3♦ denies either a 5-c M or four ♥s

3♥ asks for four [s] (3♠=yes; 3NT=no)

3♥ shows a 4c- or 5c- ♥ suit.

3♠ asks which (3NT=4; 4♥=5)

3♠ shows 5♠s

3NT shows 4-4 in Ms. Resp. transfer

Responder can transfer to a fit



Chris (Kit) Robinson



The responses, 3♦ through 4♠ to a 2NT opener complement 5cPS & have many chunky follow-ups leading to slam invitations. These have been well exploited by expert partnerships like the 'Meckwell' combination of Eric Rodwell (1957-) and Jeff Meckstroth (1956-), members of the USA1 Bermuda Bowl team in recent years, winning the championships as recently as 2001 & 2003. The advantage of 5cPS's 'puppet' strategy of right-siding the contract can be seen on this hand from an important teams match:

Eric Rodwell 1957 -

Jeff Meckstroth 1956 -



Dlr: E ♠ Q864
 Vul: EW ♥ AQ53
 ♦ K4
 ♣ 983
 ♠ JT73 ♠ 92
 ♥ 8 ♥ T976
 ♦ 752 ♦ T986
 ♣ AQT64 ♣ J52
 ♠ AK5
 ♥ KJ42
 ♦ AQJ3
 ♣ K7

	N	E	S	W
		P	2NT	P
	3♣ ¹	P	3♥ ²	P
	4♦ ³	P	4NT ⁴	P
	5♣ ⁵	P	5♦ ⁶	P
	5♠ ⁷	P	6♥	P
	All pass			

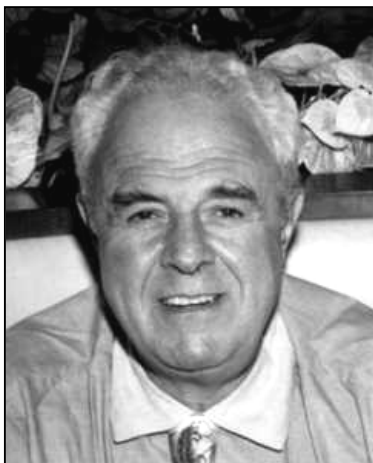
- ¹ 5-card Puppet Stayman
- ² 4 ♥s or 5 ♥s
- ³ Cue, slam interest in hearts
- ⁴ Roman Key Card Blackwood 1430 (discussed next issue)
- ⁵ 1 or 4 key cards
- ⁶ Do you hold Q♥?
- ⁷ Yes & a ♠ honour

The ♠J was led after some thought. Declarer won in hand & drew two rounds of trumps with dummy's A♥ & Q♥. This was a far-sighted play, declarer realising he may have to ruff a ♣ in dummy after making two ♣ pitches on the 3rd and 4th rounds of ♦s and still need a safe trump entry to hand if trumps broke 4-1. When East discarded a fatuous ♣T as a signal on the second round it was decision time. Who had the ♣A? Were the ♠s breaking? Who had the length in ♦s? Declarer decided that West looked like a railway employee so he played four rounds of ♦s discarding two clubs in dummy & was relieved to see East following to all four rounds. He now exited with ♣K. The signalman won his ♣A and returned a spade but declarer was home. He won the spade in hand, ruffed his club loser and his far-sightedness had paid off as he could now re-enter hand in the trump suit, draw the remaining trump and claim his slam.

2. Transfers

In the early 1950s a convention was publicized simultaneously in USA (David Carter) and Sweden (Olle Willner): quite simply, over a 1NT or 2NT opener the responder showed a game-going hand in a major by bidding 4♦ (♥s) or 4♥ (♠s). This became known as **Texas transfers**. I suppose if you play this game long enough anything can happen. I remember a bizarre hand in Christchurch many years ago when my partner forgot that in our hurried one-minute system discussion we had agreed to play Texas transfers. He opened an Acol 1NT at nil vul., 2nd hand passed and I duly bid 4♦ holding ♠xx ♥Jxxxxxxx ♦x ♣Ax. Pass, pass, pass! Not even a gulp from partner, questions from the opponents or a blink from me. LHO led her singleton ♥A. Dummy went down with ♠AQxx ♥KQxx Jx Jxx. The good lady switched to a ♣ at trick 2 when her partner perforce showed a void, what's more playing a black card to alert her partner to the fact. There followed, I remember, just a hint of body language, what is now interpreted as 'dissent' in other sports from RHO - you know the sort of thing: the stifled gasp, polar bear swivelling of the upper torso and a bottom wriggle. However, when the spade finesse lost & the dust cleared & I was eight down for a score of -400, the defender in question looked much happier until being plunged again into discontent after seeing that her score on the board was no better than most of the rest of the field, who, on the premise that the 5-level belongs to the government, had been allowed to play in 5♦ scoring +400.

The transfer principle was developed further in 1956 by Oswald Jacoby (1902-84), one of the all-time greats



Oswald Jacoby 1902-84

of the game both as a player and for his contribution as theorist & administrator. He missed six years away from the table serving in WWII as a Navy lieutenant commander and again in the Korean War as commander of intelligence, in which time he had relinquished his 1st place on the all-time ACBL master-point list to Charles Goren (1901-91). Many others had also overtaken him, & he had lost his place on the American Bermuda Bowl team. However, by 1962 he was back at the top of the list and in 1965 Jacoby was admitted to the ACBL Hall of Fame. He employed 2/3♦ (♥s) or 2/3♥ (♠s) to show 5+c majors over INT / 2NT openers (**Jacoby transfers**), thereby making possible the use of one bid to initiate either a weak, invitational or strong response. Fifty years later the transfer principle has become one of the most important weapons in the bidding arsenal: we now have transfer pre-empts, transfer Lebensohl (Rubinsohl), transfer advances, suit-to-be-led transfers & exit transfers (defensive bidding strategies).



Alfredo Versace 1969 -

The star partnership of Lorenzo Lauria (1946-) & Alfredo Versace (1969-), members of the Bermuda Bowl Italian champion team (Estoril, 2005), make use of transfers in many ways. In slam-seeking auctions they play transfer splinters: (3NT, 4♣, 4♦), for instance, over 1♥/ 1♠. Over a 21-22 2NT opener, they use transfer responses - 4♣ (♥s), 4♦(♠s) 4♥ (♣s), 4♠ (♦s) - to show a good 6+suit and slam interest (see hand below). Both sequences offer opener & responder the opportunity of exploring further or signing off in the trump suit, as well as the advantage of right-siding the contract and making it impossible for opponents to double the splinter suit over 1♥/ 1♠. Below two hands to illustrate these transfers:-



Lorenzo Lauria 1946 -

Hand 1: Transfer over 2NT to show slam interest

♠ AK52 ♠ 73
♥ Q2 ♥ AKJ964
♦ AJ54 ♦ 3
♣ AK5 ♣ JT32

2NT: 4♣¹
4♦²: 5♦³
5♠⁴: 5NT⁵
6♥

¹ 6+♥ Slam interest

² ♥H & slam interest

³ 1st or 2nd rdctl. in♦s & denying ♣ or ♠ ctls.

⁴ Anything else?

⁵ Nothing

Hand 2: Transfer splinter over 1♠

♠ AQJ43 ♠ K7652
♥ 9 ♥ A54
♦ AT84 ♦ 7
♣ KT8 ♣ QJ52

1♠ : 4♣¹
4♦² : 4♥²
4NT³ : 5♥⁴
6♣

¹ Splinter in ♦s
² Cue bids
³ RKCB
⁴ 2KCs minus Q♣

3. Double fits

Another significant step towards reaching slam is discovering whether there is a **double fit**, i.e. finding the partnership with 8+ combined cards in each of two suits with both hands having at least a five card suit.



Paul Soloway 1941-2007

Paul Soloway (1941-), the American international, included in his system the use of a **jump shift** bid to show one of three possible hands with 17+ hcp (either semi-balanced, single-suited or a fit with partner's opening bid). The problem is that 17+ hcp opposite an opening hand is relatively rare. I like to play a jump shift to show a jump fit or a strong single suited hand (*but not a semi-balanced hand*), modifying the hcp strength to require only game values and restricting further the jump shift bid (2♠ through 3♥ to jumps over 5 card majors, though it can be played over 1 of a minor with special responses from opener to show hand shape). The jump shift shows **either** a 5+c suit to two of the top three honours with Qx or better in partner's major **or** if no better fit than Jx & no worse than xx with partner's major, then a 5+ card single-suited hand to the top three honours or with greater length to AKJ. Opener's first priority is to support the jump shift suit with as little as Hx. If the opener holds all three

honours in his major he will assume partner has the second option & can support the jump shift suit with Jx. Further slam initiatives can take place through cue bidding Aces and /or using Roman Key Card Blackwood & follow-ups. So this 28hcp NT grand slam, for instance, could be reached in just four or five bids: ♠J5 ♥AKQ72 ♦A94 ♣752 opposite ♠AKQ643 ♥JT ♦73 ♣A86. If West opens, the auction proceeds 1♥: 2♠: 4♦ (supporting ♠s via a cue bid with Jx as partner must have AKQ♠s): 7NT; if East opens 1♠ then 3♥: 4♥: 5♦: 7NT. To get an idea of this convention in action, check out this hand from an Otago Club Teams event. North preferred a jump fit of 3♦, even with only 8hcp but a very good ♦ suit and ♥Qxxx, rather than a 3♣ splinter which might have brought EW into the auction for a relatively cheap sacrifice.

Dlr: S ♠ 3
Vul: NS ♥ QT86
♦ KQJT3
♣ 952

♠ QJ62 ♠ KT94
♥ 9753 ♥ -
♦ - ♦ 98542
♣ KJT64 ♣ AQ83

♠ A875
♥ AKJ42
♦ A76
♣ 7

N	E	S	W
		1♥	P
3♦	P	4♦	P
4♥	P	4♠	P
5♦	P	6♥	All pass

South realized there was a double fit (partner must hold Q♥ & KQ♦ to five or more cards) as he held the ♦A so he supported to show at least ♦Hx. When North indicated no further interest in slam (4♥) it was clear he held good trump support to go with a strong ♦ suit but probably little else, though he should not be 5422 shape for the jump shift. South made another effort with his 4♣ cue which North liked, holding a singleton ♠, so he replied 5♦ (USP: i.e. cheaper to show length or greater strength in ♦s than showing the ♠ singleton which can be pre-supposed by South). This was enough for South to bid the 24 hcp slam. Declarer won the ♠Q with his Ace, ruffed a ♠ & returned to hand via the ♥J. He was about to ruff a 2nd spade, cash dummy's ♥Q & return to hand with ♦A to draw the remaining two trumps and claim 13 tricks when he remembered the axiom of teams bridge: **Bid boldly, play safely**. So, having reached an excellent slam, he simply drew trumps and claimed 12 tricks. If he had been greedy, West would have ruffed declarer's ♦A, put his partner in with ♣A to get another ♦ ruff for a two-trick set. The contract could have been defeated, of course, on an initial ♣ lead followed by a ♦ switch.

Part 5: Blackwood Revisited

Easley Blackwood Snr. could have had little idea in 1933 when he published his 4NT convention that his patronymic (abbr. 'BI' below) & even just its end-syllable, **-wood**, would spawn so many slam-seeking offspring. His son, incidentally, Easley Blackwood Jnr. (1933-) is a professor of music, concert pianist, composer and author of books on music theory. Apart from Easley Jnr., we now have Blackwood derivatives named Baby, Byzantine, Cheap, Exclusion (Voidwood), Rolling, Roman, Key-Card & Roman Key-Card (RKCB) as well as Minorwood, & Redwood (Super-Gerber). Some of these have come & gone but most have addressed a limitation of Easley's original convention that caused many players to move to Gerber, i.e. the asking level of 4NT was too high, particularly if a minor suit was involved. Mind you, Blackwood pointed out when asked about his convention, that in the cue-bidding climate of the 1930s he intended it primarily as a means of keeping out of slam without the correct number of Aces. Nowadays, in the popular RKCB format with its follow-ups it is back in vogue as much for locating **key cards** like the Queen of trumps & Kings or Queens in key suits as for simply checking on Aces.

Baby BI takes the ace-asking bid to its lowest level of 3NT after suit agreement & even lower in its modified version over a 1♥ or 1♠ opener where an immediate response of 2NT asks for Aces, then 3NT for Kings, 4NT for Queens and 5NT for Jacks! **Cheap BI** makes use of the next 'meaningless' bid after suit agreement to ask for Aces, (e.g. 1♥: 3♥: 3♠). Jeff Rubens' convention of using the suit above the trump suit (**Kickback**) has a variant in **Redwood**, using only the red suits, 4♦ and 4♥ to ask, after ♣s or ♦s have been agreed. **Minorwood** uses the minor suits themselves at the 4-level to do the same thing & is in popular use especially after 1♣/♦ is followed by a 2♣ or 2♦ inverted minor raise. Of course, the main drawback of these methods is that other bidding treatments like cue bidding or, if playing modified Baby BI, a Jacoby 2NT over 1♥/1♠ to show a good raise with slam interest have to go. There can also be confusion as to whether partner intended the Minorwood bid as asking, especially in competitive auctions. **Rolling (Sliding) BI** uses the next bid up from the Ace response to ask for Kings. **Exclusion BI (Voidwood)**, in fact, raises the ace-asking bid much of the time as it uses a void suit of 4♠ or above to make the asking bid. In my opinion this is a valuable convention especially where a grand slam is a possibility.

Three of the Blackwood variants have retained the 4NT asking bid but altered the responses. **Byzantine BI** was devised by Jack (J.C.H.) Marx, 1901-91, one of the five musketeers who formulated the Acol system in the early 1950s. It uses a complex set of responses involving all three top honours depending on whether there is one or two suits supported or suits bid but not supported. **Roman BI** responses were devised by the Italian Blue Team and originally showed Aces only: 5♣ (0 or 3); 5♦ (1 or 4); 5♥ (2 of the same colour or rank); 5♠ (2 not of the same colour or rank, i.e. ♦ & ♠ - pointed suits, or ♣ & ♥ - rounded suits). A later modification separated the often-ambiguous 5♥ response: in Italy this modification took the form of the mythical bird, **ROC** as a mnemonic: 5♥=2 same **rank**; 5♠= 2 pointed/rounded (**odd**); 5NT= 2 same **colour** - but an English version preferred a bird phoneme more familiar to English ears: **CRO** (steps showing colour, rank & odd). Although the 4NT asker could usually tell whether partner's response of 5♣ or 5♦ showed the lower or higher number of Aces, if, in doubt, he simply signed off in the trump suit, leaving the responder to continue the dialogue with 3 or 4 Aces. Playing Roman Blackwood with a teenage rookie by the name of Stephen Burgess in 1976 I was bundled into a slam missing 3 Aces and 2 kings!

Dlr: E ♠ QT98
 Vul: EW ♥ AJ9432
 ♦ QT5
 ♣ -
 ♠ J72 ♠ AK643
 ♥ 6 ♥ T
 ♦ K9743 ♦ AJ8
 ♣ A863 ♣ J742
 ♠ 5
 ♥ KQ875
 ♦ 62
 ♣ KQT95

	N	E	S	W
Burgess			Green	
		<1♠>	3♥ ¹	P
4NT ²	P		5♣ ³	P
6♥	P		P	DBL
All Pass				

¹ Roman Jump Overcall (6-15hcp & 5+♥s & 5+♠s)

² Roman Blackwood

³ 0 or 3 Aces

Stephen was under the impression I must hold three Aces for what he took to be a strong overcall & jumped straight to slam – after all he'd not long before left his partner in a Stayman enquiry and had only recently discovered that the red stripes on the board indicated a pair was 'venerable'; one suspected that he wasn't entirely sure what that meant except that they were likely to lose more than their reputation if they went down! West, Hurricane Bill (Whitney), known as the fastest dummy player in the South, doubled and put his ♣A on the table hoping to find his partner with a singleton. Well, that was a big help, any other lead ruining this story. I ruffed, came to hand the only way possible, in trumps, glad to find them breaking 1-1 (Can you see why?), & pitched two of dummy's ♦s on the K♣ & Q♣. Then came the crunch decision. I led the ♣T but no cover. Who had ♣J? I had to get this right as I needed a further club trick in order to discard dummy's last ♦, & then come to hand in trumps again to ruff a ♦ before surrendering the lead in ♠s. Eventually I decided Bill would not lead the Ace from AJxxx, so I ruffed, relieved at the fall of ♣J. Now, the rest was easy: re-enter hand in trumps, discard the 3rd diamond on the good ♣, ruff a ♦, give up a trick in ♠s and cross-ruff the last two tricks for a total of 12 tricks (5 trump tricks in hand, 4 ruffs on the table and 3 ♣ tricks).

1. Roman Key Card Blackwood (RKCB) & follow-ups

Firstly, it is important to appreciate, as Blackwood himself pointed out at the outset back in 1938, that before RKCB is launched the prospect of a makeable slam based on what the combined hands have shown is good **and**, of course, that there is an agreed suit (AS) likely to be the trump suit **or** one artificially agreed (after a NT opening, e.g. 2NT: 4). By far the most popular Blackwood development in the last fifteen years has been key-card identification through 5-Ace Roman Key-Card Blackwood (RKCB) & its follow-ups. (*Some players use 6-Ace RKCB when there are two suits supported, mirroring the 5-Ace version but counting Kings and Queens in the two supported suits in the initial responses.*)

However, let us focus on the 5-Ace version for this explanation. A bid that asks partner to show Key cards, i.e. a first key-card ask (KCA) – sometimes called a 1st 'scan' - is 4NT (with a M suit agreed) or 4♦ (dubbed Minorwood, with a minor suit agreed – see under separate heading below for explanation and examples). The King of the agreed suit (AS) is counted as an equivalent Ace, giving 5 KCs. **After a 4NT KCA responder bids 5♣ (0 or 3 KCs) or 5♦ (1 or 4 KCs)** as in Roman BI, though a popular recent version, dubbed **RKCB 1430**, reverses these responses, so 5♣ shows 1 or 4 & 5♦ shows 3 or 0, possibly saving bidding space as partner more often has 1 KC than none. A response of 5♥ would promise 2 KCs without the Queen of the AS whereas 5♠ promises 2 KCs with the Queen of the AS. If the response to the initial key-card ask is 5♣ or 5♦, the asker can use the next bidding step (not the AS which is a sign-off) to ask for the Queen of the AS. In the original version of RKCB responder then runs on if he has the Queen of the AS and an outside King (s) to show the number of non-AS Kings (No Q of AS= sign-off in AS, Queen of AS & 1 King= 1st step, Q of AS & 2 Kings= 2nd step avoiding the AS). Finally, if the response to the initial KCA is 5♥ or 5♠, the asker employs 5NT (or 5♠ over a 5♥ AS) to ask for Kings (Responses in steps as before). So here is a simple example:

♠ AKJT54	♠ Q7	1[: 2}
♥ K65	♥ A43	2[: 3♦
♦ 3	♦ A852	3[: 4♥ Cue agreeing [s
♣ JT4	♣ AQ93	4NT: 5♦ (0-3 KCs – must be 3 for his strong bidding)
		5♥: 6[(5♥ asks for ♠ O. Response =ves. but no other Kings to show)

Bidding treatments have now become such a significant part of partnership preparation and development (Listen to the *Jeff Meckstroth* interview on the time he & Rodwell spend on bidding http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gjZM7j7EJMw&feature=youtube_gdata_player) that players discover their own methods of dealing with problems. This is no truer than with RKCB follow-ups so I am casting my threepennyworth of bidding developments on this subject into the ring.

KCA follow-ups are more than a mere checkback on Aces and King; they have become a significant method of asking for key-cards in specific suits, particularly the **agreed** (may become trumps) suit and the **key** suits (*see* definitions below). This aspect of the system takes account of an auction involving **jump shift**

bids indicating a double fit (e.g. 1♥: 2[: 3[: 4NT – here ♥ is the agreed suit and [is treated as a key suit because the KCA needs to ask about ♥ honours but already knows the partnership has all three [honours by virtue of the jump shift suit having been supported). Similarly when one hand has shown two suits, its non-agreed suit for asking purposes becomes a key suit.

Agreed suit (AS): The first suit supported during the auction, usually intended as trumps, e.g. 1♥: 4♥: 4NT (AS = ♥); 1[: 2[:4} (AS=)

Key Suit (KS): A second suit supported during the auction, e.g. 1♥: 2♠: 3♠: 4NT (AS = ♥, KS = ♠), **or**, if there isn't one, an unsupported suit bid by the **key card asker** e.g. 1♥: 1♠: 4NT (AS = ♠, KS = ♥)

Half-suit (HS): J.C.H. Marx's term for an unsupported suit but for KCA purposes I define a half-suit as an unsupported suit bid by the **key card responder**, which is less significant to the asker, e.g. 1♥: 1[: 2[:4NT ([:=AS; ♥= HS)

Non-suit (NS): A suit that has not been bid as a genuine suit, e.g. 4th suit forcing (includes any use of fourth suit), cue bids, response to key card asking & even opponents' suit in competitive auctions

Void suit (VS): Suit where no cards are held



David Green 1938 -



Andrew Robson c.1975 -

On the grounds that partner should not be asking without one of the honours (K or Q) in the KS, often his long suit, to my mind it is sensible to promote the Queen of the KS as an equivalent King (*see* hand from Alexandra Pairs 2004 below). Also bidding specific King suits rather than just showing the number of Kings is preferable, because responder often has none or just one non-AS King. Using a KC response publicized by the English star player, teacher and superb columnist, Andrew Robson in his column in *The Times*, responder can show two Kings (also upgrading the Queen of the KS to a King using my methods) by bidding the suit of the KC he doesn't hold, on the expectation that partner will have that KC or be able to tell from the earlier bidding that his partner can't hold both. Well, this might sound just as complex as Jack Marx's Byzantine Bl. but, in fact, the responses are consistent and not difficult to rationalize at the table.

Below is a memorable hand from the Alexandra Pairs in 2004 which I played with Nina Hewitt showing RKCB 1430 & follow-up in action:

♠ AKJT54	♠ Q7	1♠	3♦	The 3♦ bid showed either a 5+♦ suit to 2 of the top 3 honours & at least ♠Qx (Double fit) or a strong ♦ suit. When Nina repeated her ♦s it suggested she might not have a fit with ♠s or there was more to come, so that my 4♠ rebid confirmed a good self-sufficient 6-c suit. Nina's KCA 1430 agreed ♠s as the AS, & she found me with 3 key cards.
♥ 965	♥ A4	3♠	4♦	
♦ Q	♦ AKJ9743	4♠	4NT	
♣ A84	♣ 75	5♦	5NT	
		6♦	7NT	

When there is no supported suit, the last genuine suit bid by the responder to 4NT is treated as the AS even if the KCAer intends playing in his own suit. Nina's 2nd scan of 5NT which stepped over the 5♥ ask (for the Queen of AS) & 5♠ (sign-off) asked for Kings in non-AS suits upgrading the Queen of her KS (♦s) & was effectively fishing for ♦Q. Using the Robson method, my 6♦ response showed either K or Q of ♦s **or** K♣ & K♥. **How could she be sure it was the Q♦ & not the Kings when she had no outside Kings herself?**

We were playing a Strong Club system and I would have opened 1♣ with 17+hcp (2 more Kings & no Q♦) but even playing a standard system I would not have made a weak rebid of 4♠ with extra values. Very few pairs even reached a small slam in 6♠ as many partnerships have trouble identifying 6-2 fits let alone 7-1 fits with the top four honours.

Summary of RKCB 1430 & Minorwood 1430 modern follow-ups

- RKCB 0314 reverses the holdings of the 5♣ & 5♦ responses
- The Ace KCA (1st scan) counts the King of AS as an Ace, giving 5 Key cards (expect 0-4 from responder).
- The King KCA (2nd or 3rd scan depending on whether KCAer is looking for Queen of AS) excludes King of AS but counts the Queen of a KS as a King, giving 4 KCs (expect 0-2 with responder)
- The Queen KCA (3rd or 4th scan where possible & looking for a Grand Slam) excludes Queen of AS & Queen of KS, giving a maximum of 3 KCs if there is no KS (expect 0-2 with responder)
- If there are two KS, then the KS becomes the suit that has been supported, the other is treated as a HS
- If KCAer jumps a step (not to the AS) he is skipping a scan. This happens mostly when he holds the Queen of the AS over a 5♣ or 5♦ response to the 1st scan.

1st scan (4NT or 4|/4♦) asks for 5 KCs (4 Aces + King of AS): Step response: 1st=1/4; 2nd=0/3; 3rd=2 - Q of AS; 4th=2+Q of AS; 5th=2+void - Q of AS; 6th=a jump in void =2+void +Q of AS

2nd scan (next 'free bid') asks for Q of AS; Response: AS =no Q of AS ; if Q of AS held run on to 3rd scan (see below) to show KCs (Kings + KS Queen)

3rd scan (next 'free bid') asks for 2/3 KCs (Kings of non-AS + Queen of KS): Response.: NT (if available below AS) or AS = none; any other suit =1 KC in that suit **or** 2 KCs in the other 2 suits

4th scan (if room) when KCAer is looking for a Grand Slam asks for any other useful feature (e.g. extra suit length, a Q in HS or NS or J in AS or KS not shown). Response: 6AS =none; 6 of suit = 1 Queen in that suit or 2 of 3 in the other suits; 6NT feature in KS; 7AS= extra value (J or longer suit) (*See 4th scan e.g. below*)

2. Minorwood 1430

Experienced partnerships now use RKCB 1430 for a major suit KCA and **Minorwood** 1430 for the minor suits. Minorwood, of course, specifies the AS via the asking bid. This hand is a simple example of where this convention is effective. Using RKCB (0314 variety) the auction would have been overboard if East had showed only one KC. Also, there is room to manoeuvre further using follow-ups if East shows 3 KCs.

♠ A5	♠ KJ4	
♥ KQ3	♥ J7	<u>W</u> <u>E</u>
♦ K7	♦ A5	1♣ (or 2♣ ^{SC})
♣ KJ9763	♣ AT9842	4♣ 4♠ (2KC - Queen of AS)
		6♣

This hand from the 2006 Australian Seniors illustrates a more complex auction involving Minorwood 1430 & follow-ups (1st, 3rd & 4th scans) to show how another excellent grand slam, missed by almost all the contestants, could have been bid. The bidding also shows the importance of identifying AS, KS and HS:-

<u>4th Scan example hand</u>		<u>W</u>	<u>E</u>	
♠ AKJ54	♠ 7	1♠	2♦	¹ Probably 5/5 distribution or extra values
♥ A65	♥ J4	3NT	4♣ ¹	² 4♦ Minorwood 1430 style
♦ QJ6	♦ AK985	4♦ ²	4♠ ³	³ 0 or 3 KCs. (KCAer then jumps 2 nd scan as he has Q of AS)
♣ K6	♣ AQJ75	5♣ ⁴	5♦ ⁵	⁴ 3 rd scan -asking for Kings & KS Queen (Q♠) - not Q♣ which is HS
		5♥ ⁶	6♣ ⁷	⁵ None
		7♦		⁶ 4 th scan -asking for non-AS/KS Queens (so,not of course AS Q♦ or KS Q♠) or extra AS/KS length
				⁷ =Q♣. With Q♣ & Q♥ E bids KS (5♠); with 0 he signs off in AS (6♦). With 6-c ♦ suit he bids 7♦ or with 6-c ♣ suit (KS) he bids 6NT

This hand illustrates the use of RKCB after a sequence involving inverted minor raises:

		<u>W</u>	<u>E</u>	
♠ AK5	♠ 73	1♣ ¹	2♣ ²	¹ Playing 5-c M system so can be a doubleton }
♥ AKJ3	♥ Q9	2♥ ³	3♣ ⁴	² Inverted minor raise with at least the values for a raise to 3 }
♦ 6	♦ AT85	3 ⁵	4♦ ⁶	³ Confirms a } suit and a reasonable hand otherwise 2NT
♣ A7542	♣ KT863	4NT ⁷	5 ⁸	⁴ Just a } raise, not strong enough to show ♦s
		5NT ⁹	6♥ ¹⁰	⁵ GF, probably 3415
		7♣		⁶ Cue ⁷ RKCB ⁸ 2KC-Q} ⁹ Any King or KS Queen?
				¹⁰ Yes - K♥ or O♥

Part 6: Black holes

1. Grand Slam Force



Josephine Culbertson 1895-1956

Even back in the 1930s theorists were aware of the significance of locating trump honours. In 1936 Ely Culbertson devised, & his wife, Josephine (1898-1956), published in *The Bridge World* a convention called the **Grand Slam Force** (GSF), also dubbed **Josephine**. A bid of 5NT after suit agreement but without the use of a 4NT ask instructed partner to bid the grand slam if he held two of the top three honours in the TS. This convention was later adapted by Walter Malowan, a member of the 1934 winning Vanderbilt Cup team, to be used after Blackwood. Where it was possible below the safe sign-off level the GSF used a bid of what Malowan called an “unplayable” (new) suit at the 6-level to invite the grand. Again, with two of the three honours, partner bid the grand otherwise he signed off in the small slam.

2. RKCB showing a void

Eddie Kantar (1932-), star American player (two World Championships), teacher & writer of many books on

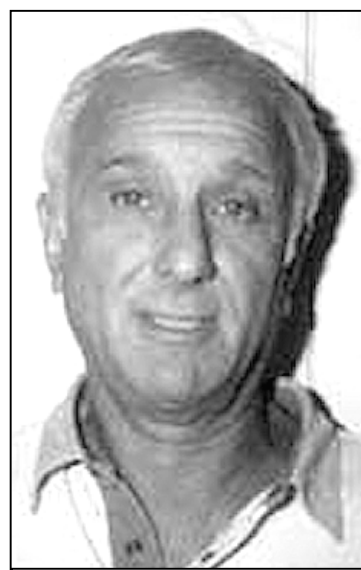


Eddie Kantar 1932 -

bridge – one of the best-known being *Bridge for Dummies*, is also the only player, other than Andrew Robson, to have taken part in World Championships in bridge and table tennis (*both require ‘table manners’, I suppose, so next time you contemplate a new partner, check out their service*).

He devised a method of showing a void through responses to a 4NT KCA: 6 of the VS = 1 Ace & a void in the suit bid; 5NT= 2 Aces & a void. These responses have been modified in various ways. Chip Martel (1953-) & Lew Stansby (1940-), American 3x Bermuda Bowl champions, use similar responses to Kantar but allow 1 or 3 Aces with a bid of the VS at the 6-level. If the void is at a higher level than the TS they respond 6 of the TS to the 4NT

ask. This would work well on the hand below, for instance, after West opens 1♥, rebids 2♦ over 2♣, & East launches RKCB. West can show his void in ♠s by bidding 6 of the TS (♦s), encouraging East who will assume his partner holds ♥ AK, ♦ K & ♣ Q for his opening bid as well as some length in the ♣ suit &/or a 5♣ suit to bid the grand.



Bobby Goldman 1938-99

♠ -	♠ KT7
♥ AK9643	♥ 5
♦ KJ84	♦ AQ76
♣ Q72	♣ AKJ95

3. Exclusion Blackwood (EKCB)

This convention was the brainchild of Dallas Aces’ star & 3x Bermuda Bowl champion, Bobby Goldman, (1938-1999)

http://bridgehands.com/Tournaments/ACBL_NABC/Orlando1198_2.pdf.

Goldman was the co-author of *Aces Scientific*, 1975, a remarkable compilation of bidding notes made with Mike Lawrence (1940- himself the author of bestsellers: *How to read your opponents’ cards* & *The Complete Book of Overcalls*) as Dallas Aces’ team members <http://web2.acbl.org/nabcbulletins/2006spring/db8.pdf>. Goldman also wrote *Winners & Losers at Bridge*, 1979, based on an original book by Sidney Harris (1970). He drew parallels at the bridge table with Harris’ maxims about life, showing readers how they could do something about what the Dallas Aces called *The Seven Deadly Sins* (No-win declarer or defensive

plays – judged not by results but the line taken, bidding without values, system violations, unilateral or impulsive actions & mechanical mistakes). He was also a great teacher introducing mini-bridge methods in the 1970s long before they became standard technique for teaching beginners. In my opinion EKCB is a valuable but under-used convention which could easily be added to a player's slam armoury. Quite simply, a bid of a void after suit agreement but otherwise 'out of the blue' at the 4♠/5♣/5♦/5♥ level is the equivalent of RKCB (0314 or 1430 style) with responses excluding the VS. The follow-ups, asking for Kings and then Queens, involve just two suits. No team bid this excellent grand slam with East the dealer & EW vul. from the 2007 S. Island Teams in Dunedin. After a double fit has been disclosed an EKCB sequence could get there in just five bids.

		W	E	
♠ AQ	♠ KT76542		1♠	¹ Showing a double fit or strong single-suited
♥ AK964	♥ Q532	3♥ ¹	5♣ ²	² EKCB 1430 with ♥ suit as AS
♦ KQ	♦ AT	5♥ ³	5NT ⁴	³ 0/3 KCs (exclusive of the } suit)
♣ K962	♣ -	6♣ ⁵	7♥	⁴ Asks for K♦ & KS honours: [K or [Q
				⁵ Using the void to show 2KCs (K♦ & Q[])

If East decides to open, the bidding proceeds with a 'double fit' jump shift 3♥ from West. Even with only 9 hcp, East is in a position to take EKCB asking action (he has a 7-c ♠ suit that has been indirectly supported and 4-c ♥ support to an honour as well as both 1st round controls in the outside suits). This is much more fruitful action than pointlessly cue-bidding the ♦A which may result in his partner taking control & making it difficult to disclose the 7-card suit or the void. **Timing** is all-important for any form of KCA. The asker should take control only when (**but definitely when**) he doesn't need either to disclose or to find out any more about the combined hand strength or distribution. He knows enough to realize that a slam has excellent prospects if partner has the right key cards. If East does not open the bidding, the grand can just as easily be reached in a Strong Club auction: 1♣: 1♠: 2♥: 3♥: 3♠: 5♣ as before.

EKCB can be most valuable when there is a void in partner's opening suit as it can be notoriously difficult using conventional methods to ascertain whether partner does or doesn't have wasted values in that suit. This hand from one of the world's most prestigious annual events held in USA, the Cavendish Invitational Pairs, saw only 14 of 44 of the world's top pairs reach the Grand Slam in ♠s in the 2006 event. Using jump shift responses to show strong suited hands to the top 3 honours (as here) followed by EKCB the hand could have been bid as follows:

♠ J7	♠ AKQT865	W	E	
♥ KT952	♥ -	1♥	2♠ ¹	¹ Either double fit or 5+c suit to strong single-suited
♦ AK52	♦ 63	3♦	3♠ ²	² Confirming a 5+c suit to top 3 hon
♣ Q5	♣ AKT6	4♠	5♥ ³	³ EKCB 1430 ⁴ 1 or 4 key cards (excluding ♥s)
		5♠ ⁴	6♣ ⁵	⁵ Asking for minor suit Kings
		6♦ ⁶	6♥ ⁷	⁶ K♦ (6♥ would have shown both K♣ & K♦)
		7♣ ⁸	7♠	⁷ Asking for Minor suit Queens (either will do to make the grand a good prospect) ⁸ Q♣

4. Balanced Hands

The basic hcp requirement for balanced NT slams has not, of course, changed from Culbertson's days: 33hcp for 6NT and 37hcp for 7NT, but the tendency just to bid 6NT when no major fit is found has been bypassed by experienced players who now seek minor suit fits and ask for shortage. On the hand below from an important teams match, a Strong Club auction combined with Minorwood illustrate how the non-making 33hcp 6NT contract (which effectively needs Q♥ onside & clubs breaking) can be avoided in favour of a fairly easy slam in ♦s:-

[AK73	[J2	W	E	
♥ K7	♥ AJ3	1♣ ^{SC}	1NT ¹	¹ 8-13 balanced
♦ AKJ3	♦ QT87	2♣ ^R	2NT ²	² 8-10, both minors
♣ A75	♣ K963	3♦ ³	3♥ ⁴	³ Sets suit & asks for shortage ⁴ High shortage ([])
		3♠ ⁵	4♣ ⁶	⁵ Asking for controls (A=2; K=1) ⁶ 3 controls
		4♦ ⁷	4♥ ⁸	⁷ Minorwood 1430 ⁸ 1 or 4 KCs
		4♠ ⁹	5♣ ¹⁰	⁹ Asking for Queen of TS (♦)
		6♦		¹⁰ Yes & run on to show K♣ or K♠ & K♥ (Must be K♣ as East would have 4 controls)

If West opens 2NT many players play 3♠ to show both minors and slam interest. The bidding can then continue with the big hand using 4♦ Minorwood 1430.

5. Slams in Competition

When opponents either: (1) bid over the KCA suit or even double it to show a willingness to sacrifice or perhaps confirm partner's suit as a good lead or (2) overcall or double the KC response, responders have two further responses available – Pass and Double – both offering the slam-seekers an opportunity to take the penalty when the slam seems unlikely. When your AS is higher than opponents', **DOPI** / **ROPI** are preferred, the double (D) or redouble (R) showing 0 or 3 (Aces **or** KCs if playing RKCB) and Pass (P) 1 or 4. If playing RKCB 1430, players reverse the responses to get **DIPO** / **RIPO**. If, on the other hand, opponents' AS is higher than yours, **DEPO** / **REPO** (**DOPE** / **ROPE** with RKCB 1430) is more effective where E=Even, O=Odd. For a simple and feisty explanation check out:

http://web2.acbl.org/documentLibrary/play/Commonly_Used_Conventions/dopiropidepo.pdf

Often bidding a slam in competition becomes a matter of judgment, and there can be no way of being confident that you are doing the right thing. Many players use the DOPI principle in a mnemonic like **PIDS** (P=1, a forcing pass; D=some) to show a singleton or not in the opponents' suit at the 5- or even 6-level when they were on the road to slam. Experienced players work on the principle, especially in teams, that when in doubt be bold & bid on to slam if the return from the opponents' sacrifice is likely to be meagre. What's more, you have team-mates in the other room who, hopefully, will also be pre-empting the auction. Having cast a pebble at Stevie Wonder (a.k.a. Stephen Burgess) as a youthful rookie, perhaps I can now pay him tribute by dedicating this last hand to his depth of thinking. Stephen, I remember, once claimed an overtrick in a small slam before the dummy went down, irritated that he hadn't bid the grand, which, as he suspected, was cold on the maxim that if you've got a sure 12 tricks there's a good chance of a thirteenth on a squeeze. On the hand below from the 1997 Tollemache (English County Championships) I can see Stephen, holding threat cards in three suits over the opening bidder, brushing aside the 5♠ sacrifice by jumping to 7♣, & then running around the table wanting to play the hand:-

Dir: S	♠ T652		
Vul: Nil	♥ K8765		
	♦ 6432		
♠ AJ	♣ -	♠ -	
♥ AQ43		♥ 9	
♦ AJT9		♦ 875	
♣ A74		♣ KJT986532	
	♠ KQ98743		
♥ JT2			
♦ KQ			
♣ Q			

When the hand was played, South found the tricky lead of ♥J - tricky because he quite likely held the ♥K for his opening bid & was trying to force declarer's hand at trick 1. Declarer could see 12 tricks and a thirteenth with a successful ♥ finesse. However, after a little thought he realised that if South did hold ♥K and the two honours in either ♠s or ♦s he would be squeezed in the end game; what's more he would still be under pressure if he held only ♠KQ & ♦KQ and the ♥K was in his partner's hand. So he rose with dummy's ♥A, cashed the ♠A in order to rectify the count, discarding one of his ♦ losers, and proceeded to run his clubs. On the last ♣, South was mangled, not able to retain his ♦ guard & the ♠ winner.

Well, here we are at the end of the road. Ironically, we may not have come much further down it than did Harold Vanderbilt, who took up bridge 100 years ago and in 1925 devised a bidding system with a strong ♣, 16-18 NT & weak two bids for his new version of the game - contract bridge. Perhaps we are trying to re-invent the wheel. Nonetheless, we owe a lot to those theorists and writers who have publicized their system ideas over the last 80 years as they have given the auction a new and more vibrant lease of life. Bidding is an absorbing application of logic where Science and Intuition (e.g. 1NT: 6NT) both have a place. Good judgment is always important in a competitive auction, good dialogue in a constructive one. The skill lies in mixing the methods. For slam bidding there can be little doubt that a natural 1♦ & 5-c major openings as well as double fit & shortage disclosure make the dialogue much more robust in the face of enemy interference, while transfers provide valuable flexibility at the exploratory stage & asking bids, refined to the useful space principle, precision to the later stages when the air is often free from enemy action.



Harold Vanderbilt 1884-1970