

BIDDING SLAMS AT NO TRUMP

by Maritha Pottenger

No trump slams are usually bid on power (high card points). The partnership needs about **33 HCP for a small slam in no trump** when both hands are balanced. (The most common balanced distributions are 4-3-3-3, 4-4-3-2, and 5-3-3-2.) However, NT slams often require a little extra if both hands are 4-3-3-3. When there is a good 5-card suit in the picture, small slams in NT can often be made with 31 or 32 HCP.

Quantitative bids are often used with NT slams. If you know that you and your partner have 33 combined HCP, you can just bid 6NT. (If your partner opens 1NT and you have 18 or 19 HCP, just bid 6NT.) If your partnership could have 33 HCP—if partner is maximum—bid 4NT. That invites partner to bid 6NT with a maximum and to pass with a minimum. (If your partner opens 1NT and you have 16 HCP and no 4-card major and no 5-card suit, bid 4NT.) Most people play that all jumps to 4NT are quantitative when partner's last bid was 1NT, 2NT, 3NT or Stayman was used.

If the partnership can find a 4-4 trump fit, the hands will often produce one trick more in that suit than the hands would produce in NT. A number of 30-32 point hands can make 6 in a suit, but only 5 in NT. If, however, the hands have 34-35 HCP between them, prefer to place the contract in 6NT. Not only is it more matchpoints, but 6NT is almost always cold and 6 of a suit could go down on a bad trump break. (Or, you might receive a ruff by the opponents on the opening lead in a suit.) Do NOT look for a 4-4 fit if you have a 4-3-3-3 hand. It will usually NOT pay off and you may reveal important information to opponents about partner's hand.

If either partner opens 1NT or 2NT, use Stayman to explore for a 4-4 major fit. If you cannot find a major fit, you probably want to play at the appropriate level in NT. If partner denies a major suit (e.g., 1NT-P-2C-P-2D-P), then 4NT remains the same quantitative bid it would have been over 1NT: asking partner to bid 6 with a maximum hand and to pass 4 with a minimum.

If partner makes a quantitative call over your 1NT opening, pass with any 15 HCP (minimum) hand. Accept the slam invitation with any 17 HCP (maximum) hand. With 16 HCP, decline with 4-3-3-3 distribution. You probably want to bid on with any other distribution (definitely if you have—comparatively—lots of Aces and King). Kantar suggests that, **if you are going to bid on, you should show a 4-card minor at the 5 level.** This allows you and your partner to (perhaps) find a 4-4 minor fit (after the possibility of a major fit has been eliminated). If partner has a fit for your minor, 6 of the minor is a better bet than 6NT. If partner does not have a fit for your minor, partner can bid 5NT (sign-off) or 6NT (setting the contract)—depending on his/her hand—knowing that you have exactly 16 HCP.

When quantitative bids were first invented, a jump to 5NT asked partner to bid 6NT with a minimum and 7NT with a maximum. (If, for example, partner opened 2NT and you had 16 HCP, you would bid 5NT.) However, those combinations don't come up as often as the chance for finding a minor fit comes up. Kantar recommends that the 5NT jump be reserved as a Minor Suit Stayman inquiry. It asks partner to bid a 4-card minor if s/he has one. If a 4-4 minor fit is found, that will often be a safer place to play (may make 6 of minor and only 5NT or 7 of minor and only 6NT). If partner does NOT have a 4-card minor, partner just bids 6NT. Over a sequence of 1 of a minor, 1 of a major, 2NT by opener (showing 18-19 HCP), if responder has 15 HCP, responder know that 6NT is odds-on, but uses the 5NT (Minor Suit Stayman) to check first. If a fit is found in the second minor suit, play 6 of that minor.