

CUE-BIDDING (SHOWING CONTROLS) LOOKING FOR SLAM by Maritha Pottenger

Blackwood was originally designed to keep people OUT of slam when they were missing two Aces. However, people have a tendency to overuse Blackwood. The more modern Roman Key Card (RKC) Blackwood allows you to also find out about the King of trumps (and even the Queen of trumps), but RKC can also be overused. For many hands, particularly when you have a small doubleton in a suit (and thus the possibility of two quick losers there), it is better to cue-bid than to just ask for Aces. When you have a void, if you have been unable to show it in other ways (e.g., over a Jacoby 2NT or with a splinter bid), you want to cue-bid rather than just ask for Aces. In order to cue-bid, you must have **suit agreement** (or implied suit agreement). An example would be: **1♠-P-3♠**—where spades is the agreed suit. New suits show controls—first-round control (Ace or void) initially and second-round control (King or singleton) after you have denied first-round control. Traditionally, you makes the cheapest cue-bid you can first. When you bypass suit(s), to cue-bid in a higher suit, you DENY first-round control in the suit(s) you bypass. Therefore, after **1♠-P-3♠**, **4♣** shows ace—or void—in clubs; **4♦** shows Ace or void in diamonds and DENIES first-round control of clubs; **4♥** shows ace—or void—in hearts and DENIES first-round control of clubs OR diamonds.

Although some partnerships now cue-bid **first or second-round control** at the same time, classic cue-bidding is to bid first-round controls (Ace or void) first. After first-round control has been denied, you can show second-round control (King or singleton).

1♠-P-4♣ (a splinter bid agrees to opener's major); **4♦** shows first-round control of diamonds, etc.

1♠-P-2NT-??—(Jacoby 2NT agrees to opener's major.) Regardless of Opener's next bid—which could show shortness; bid game; bid 3 of major, show side 5-card suit), if Responder bids a new suit, it is a cue-bid, showing first-round control.

2♣-P-2♦-P; 2♠-P-3♠-P (spades are agreed suit; any new suit now bid is a cue-bid).

Once in a great while, cue-bids look like game tries in the beginning. For example, **1♦-P-1♠-P; 2♠-P-3♣**: Opener should assume that Responder is making a game try, asking for help in the club suit. If Opener likes his/her hand and/or has help in clubs, bid **4♣**. Otherwise, bid **3♠**. If you try to sign off at **3♠** and partner makes ANOTHER cue bid (e.g., **4♦** or **4♥**), now you know that the first bid was a cue-bid and not a game try.

Generally, however, game tries are made after one of a major followed by two of a major. Cue-bids, looking for slam, are usually made at the three-level or above (e.g., **1♠-P-3♠-P-new suit** here is a cue-bid.)

Sample auctions:

1♠-P-3♠-P; 4♣-P-4♥-P; 5♣-P: Opener has shown first-round control of clubs. Responder has shown first round control of hearts (and denied first round control of diamonds). Opener now shows second-round control of clubs. Clearly Opener is salivating with hope that Responder can show second-round control of diamonds. Incidentally, if Responder signs off at **5♠**, either defender, no matter what their diamond holding, should lead a diamond!! Opener may have something like ♠AKxxxx ♥x ♦xx ♣AKQ.

Auction at right: Opener has shown first-round control of clubs. Responder has shown first round control of diamonds. Opener has shown first round control of hearts. Responder temporizes by bidding trump suit. Opener shows second-round control of clubs and Responder then shows second-round control of diamonds. Opener bids the grand slam. Opener probably has something like ♠AKQJ10x ♥A ♦QJ10x ♣AK.

2♣	P	2♥	P
2♠	P	3♠	P
4♣	P	4♦	P
4♥	P	4♠	P
5♣	P	5♦	P
7♠	P	P	P

1♠-P-4♣-P; 4♥-P-4♠-P; 5♣-P: Responder splinters and Opener shows first-round control of hearts. Responder signs off at game and Opener shows first-round control of clubs. Clearly, Opener is desperately hoping that Responder has first or second-round control of diamonds. If Responder has the Ace of diamonds (or void), s/he should bid **5♦**. With King of diamonds or singleton, bid **6♠**. Otherwise, bid **5♠** and partner will give up. (A diamond lead is obligatory for defenders!) Opener may have something like ♠AKQxx ♥A ♦Qx ♣AKQxx. Incidentally, a **5♥** call by Responder would show the ♥K and deny the ♦K.