

Slam Bidding – From A to Z

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This is the last in the Slam bidding series. NK

The Key Card Principle of Slam Bidding

Over the years, I have observed a lot of cold slams being missed. As well an equal number of bad slams bid. The main problem, I have come to determine, is that players are looking at the wrong indicators in making their decisions.

The Key Card Evaluation Tool (KCET)

We know that we need all but one of the key cards, and usually the queen of trump to bid slam. The primary tool to find out this information is the key card ask. But sometimes our game forcing auctions are more suited to cue bidding. At some point, quite often at the game level, we have to decide whether to continue to pursue slam, or take our sure plus. At the top of our checklist should be these questions to ask ourselves:

- How many key cards does partner likely have for their bidding?
- Subtract yours. If you are likely off two or more, sign off in game.

We need some examples to better understand how you can use this tool?

Example 1: You are South, playing IMPs, and hold ♠Q1087 ♥K96 ♦K3 ♣AKQ106. The bidding starts:

Your bidding:

North	South
	1♣
1♠	3♠

4♦ ?

What is your call?

Bid 4♠. Yes you have a nice hand, but are missing 4 key cards! If partner has three of them they will take another call. North's hand was ♠AKJ652 ♥QJ542 ♦8 ♣4. The actual South asked for key cards, and played in 5♠, down one on a heart ruff.

Example 2: You hold as South ♠Q ♥A54 ♦KQ9874 ♣K43. IMPs, both vul. The bidding starts:

West North East South

1♦

Pass 1♠ Pass 2♦

Pass 2♥ Pass 2NT

Pass 3♦ Pass 3NT

Pass 4♦ Pass ?

What do you think of South's bidding? The first three bids were classic. 1♦ was normal, and 2♦ is a just about a maximum, but not good enough for 3♦. Partner had to create a game force, ergo 2♥. 2NT served a dual purpose:

1. Get to 2NT from their side, potentially protecting the ♣K.
2. Conserving bidding space, allowing partner to describe their hand and continue investigating the best spot.

3♦ said, I have diamond support in my game force. As such 3NT seems very conservative and misguided. A single stopper in both side suits, and a maximum. I would have bid 3♥.

Having bid 3NT, partner surprises you with the 4♦ bid. In the actual bidding of a world class pair, they did not get to slam. I don't get it.

You have two cards and queen of trumps. You have denied a good slam, but partner tries again. Do you think partner has a very good hand? Uh, yes!!! Not only do you have two key cards, you have prime cards, extra values, including the

singleton queen in partner's suit. I would be less surprised that 7♦ is making, than 6♦ is going down. Partner held ♠AJ754 ♥K7 ♦AJ10 ♣A106.

Here is a different example of using the Key Card Evaluation Tool.

Example 3: You hold as North ♠Q7 ♥K104 ♦KQ109874 ♣5. The bidding starts:

Pass 2♣¹

2♦² 2♠³

3♦³ 3NT³

4♦⁴ 5♣⁵

?

1. Strong, 22+ HCPs
2. 2+ controls.
3. Natural.
4. Good suit, slam try.
5. Cue bid, cooperating.

What do you bid and why?

Partner did not cue bid 4♥ or 4♠, so that means they are denying these cards? Maybe. If true, they have all of the remaining high card points. So in that case, their hand is ♠KJ10xx ♥QJ ♦AJ AKQJ. Would partner cooperate with that hand opposite a passed hand? Surely not. Knowing that you need both KQ diamonds and ace of hearts. At the table the player signed off in 5♦. Partner bid 5♣, as they did not have a heart control. Their hand was ♠AK109x ♥QJ ♦AJ ♣AQJx.

Example 4: 2023 Bermuda Bowl N-S vul. As North, you hold ♠107 ♥KQ92 ♦AK7 ♣Q752. The bidding starts:

West North East South

Pass 1♥

3♠ 4♣¹ 4♠ 5♣

Pass 5♦ Pass 5♥

Pass ?

1. Strong raise to 4♥.

What do you bid, and why? Partner has ostensibly made a slam try, although they may not have extra values, but good distribution. What can they have? Short spades? Absolutely! They don't have many values in diamonds. They 'must' hold the ♥A and the ♣AK. You know from your hand slam should be cold. You not only have two key cards and the queen of trump, 4 trumps, no wasted spade values, and the key queen in partner's 2nd suit. Bid 6♥! AT the table the North player meekly passed 5♥.

The full deal:

North

♠107

♥KQ92

♦AK7

♣Q752

West

♠KQJ943

♥J98

♦J109

♣4

East

♠A862

♥5

♦Q6542

♣J109

South

♠5

♥AJ864

♦83

♣AK863