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BIDDING FOR A SLAM CONTRACT – USING BLACKWOOD

A slam contract is one in which you have bid to Level 6 (a small slam needing 12 tricks), or Level 7 (a grand slam needing all 13 tricks). There is no room to make a mistake at this level, but the hundreds of bonus points you can earn for bidding and making the contract can make the risk worthwhile. To make a slam in a suit contract, you need the following components in your combined hands:

1. Combined strength of at least 33 points for a small slam, and 37 points for a grand slam. Remember, you can use distribution points here. How do you know if you have that together? Use what you know about your partner's bid, and combine that strength with what's in your hand. For example, if your partner has opened 2 NT (20-21 points), and you have 13 points of your own, you know you belong in slam!
2. A fit in trump. No playing around here. You need at least 8 trump together to comfortably make a slam contract.
3. At least 3 of the 4 aces to make a small slam. You generally need all 4 aces to make a grand slam, unless, of course, you are void in the suit in which the opposition has an ace.

JUMP SHIFT- One way you can show your partner strength is by making a jump shift. If your partner has opened, and you have around 18 points, and a good 5 card suit, you can bid your suit after skipping one level. For example, if your partner opens one diamond, and you have 5 hearts and 18 points, you would bid 2 hearts, instead of 1 heart. Even though your 1 heart response would be forcing, by jump shifting you are immediately letting your partner know there is a good possibility of slam. Even if partner has only 13 HCP, you may have 33 together with distribution.

BLACKWOOD- The Blackwood Convention is used when you have determined that you have a good shot at slam, and you want to see how many aces you have together. One of the players will bid, "4 NT". The response to that reveals how many aces she has. If partner responds "5 clubs", it means no aces, "5 diamonds" means 1 ace, "5 hearts" means 2 aces, and "5 spades" means 3 aces. Obviously, if you don't have at least 3 aces together, the next bid should NOT be for slam. If the response to 4 NT shows only 2 aces together, the next bid would be at the 5 level in the suit that has been agreed on for trump.

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NOTE: Do not be in a hurry to bid 4 NT. You can end up knowing that you have all 4 aces, and still be in trouble if you haven't first established what the correct trump suit should be!

What if your partner's response to your bid of 4 NT shows that you have all 4 aces? You can then decide if you want to try for a grand slam. However, you would probably need all 4 kings to make it. Therefore, if you have all 4 aces, your next bid would be "5 NT". Just like 4 NT meant, "How many aces?", a bid of 5 NT asks, "How many kings?". A response of 6 clubs means no kings, 6 diamonds 1 king, 6 hearts 2 kings, and 6 spades 3 kings. If you don't have all 4 kings, don't bid a grand slam. For example, let's say you have decided on hearts as your suit. You think you have about 37 points, but not sure about the kings. Your partner responds to your bid of 5 NT by saying, "6 diamonds", showing 1 king. With your 2 kings, that means you are missing one king. Your next bid would be "6 hearts", saying, "Partner, stop bidding."

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SAMPLE HAND # 1- North is the Dealer

NORTH
Spades- Q J 10 5 3
Hearts- A
Diamonds- A J 10 9 4
Clubs- Q 8

WEST
Spades- A K 9 7
Hearts- 2
Diamonds- 8 6
Clubs- J 9 7 5 4 3

EAST
Spades- 8 4 2
Hearts- J 10
Diamonds- Q 7 2
Clubs- A K 10 6 2

SOUTH
Spades- 6
Hearts- K Q 9 8 7 6 5 4 3
Diamonds- K 5 3
Clubs- None

SAMPLE HAND # 2- West is the Dealer

NORTH
Spades- 7 6 2
Hearts- Q J 8 2
Diamonds- None
Clubs- A K Q 9 7 3

WEST
Spades- A 9 5 4 3
Hearts- 6 5
Diamonds- J 8 5
Clubs- 10 5 4

EAST
Spades- Q J
Hearts- 9
Diamonds- 10 9 7 6 4 3 2
Clubs- J 8 2

SOUTH
Spades- K 10 8
Hearts- A K 10 7 4 3
Diamonds- A K Q
Clubs- 6