



By: Don Rogers

IV. When Slam is Possible (15+)

Occasionally (not often), you are going to pick up a really good hand and hear partner open 1NT. As always in this type of auction, the responder is the captain and must be in charge of getting to slam when that is right. Opener's job is to answer questions.

If partner opens 2NT and you have 12+ (or compensating distribution) the same considerations apply and there may be a slam.

The key to remember is that with two balanced hands, 33+ combined points probably belongs in a small slam, and 37+ in a grand slam. (The logic is that with 33+ points, opponents cannot possess two aces, and with 37+, the opponents cannot have an ace.) Does this mean that 33+ will always make 6NT? No - there can always be an unfortunate lie of the card that will cause it to be defeated. However, remember that you have to play the percentages, and more times than not there will be a way to make a small slam with 33+. If you are making every slam you bid, then you are probably not bidding enough slams!

A. Balanced Hands

1. S-AQx H- Axx D- Qx C-KJ10xx

If partner has a nice 17 count, slam is likely. If partner has a doggy 15, slam is probably doomed. Bid 4NT (quantitative). THIS IS NEVER BLACKWOOD. It simply asks partner to bid 6NT if on a maximum, and to pass with less.

2. S-AQxx H- Axx D-Qx C-KJ10x

Almost the same hand as 1., But now you have a four card major. As usual, if partner has four spades a spade contract will probably produce an extra trick. Bid 2C (Stayman) to find out. If partner bids 2D, bid 4NT (once again quantitative*), to invite 6NT. It's more complicated if partner bids 2H, because:

- Partner could also have four spades
- A bid of 4NT by you is Blackwood, because partner has named a real suit.

I am not sure this is a standard treatment, but I think a rebid of 5NT by you in this case should get the message across that you have four spades, not four hearts, and an invitational hand. Opener can pass 5NT with a minimum, bid either 6S (with a max and four spades), or 6NT (with a max and less than four spades.) Do discuss with partner prior to first use!

3. S-AQx H-Axx D-Qx C-KQJ10x

With a prime 18 and a fine 5 card suit, just raise to 6NT. No reason to ask partner. You know, so you go.

4. S-AQx H- Axx D-Qx C-AKQJ10

With a fine 22 count, just bid 7NT and take the average.

B. Unbalanced Hands.

With unbalanced hands you have to exercise more judgement, because long suits and a fit with partner can mean much less in the way of points are required for slam. There are lots of ways to use 3 level responses to 1NT to show various distributions, strong hands, etc. If you have these in your toolbox, great, but if not, the standard meaning of bidding a suit at the three level after partner opens 1NT is that you have a good hand and a good six card suit, and some interest in slam.

1. S-xx H-xx D-Kx C-AKQxxxx

This hand “only” has 12 points, but look at the playing strength! Partner is sure to have at least two clubs (partner cannot have a singleton A, K, or Q, as you are looking at them), so this hand will produce at least seven tricks 90% of the time. What you really need to know is not how many points partner has, but how many aces. This is the time to use Gerber (a direct bid of 4C over 1NT, asking for aces). Unless partner has only one ace, bid 6NT.

2. S-xx H-Kxx D-Kx C-AKJxxx

Here you have one fewer club, not a solid suit, but an extra King. The club suit here could produce only two tricks if partner has no fit, but six if partner has a club fit. Bid 3C (forcing). If partner just bids 3NT, pass is probably best. If partner raises to 4C, check for aces with 4NT and go if there are not two aces missing.

3. S-Ax H- Kxx D-Kx C-AKJxxx

You know you want to be in slam, but which slam? Bid 3C. If partner bids 3NT, you can force the issue by bidding 4C. Partner must not pass this. Your 3C bid was forcing to game – why would you now take partner out of 3NT, unless you were still interested in slam? The 4C bid puts the focus on partner's club holding, and asks partner to further describe their hand. (It is a general principle that going past 3NT in a minor shows slam interest.)