

9)

Controls asking relay after partner 1NT opening

When responder has a slam going hand , it is very common to ask for Aces with a 4NT bid and step responses. The Roman Key Card Blackwood (RKCB) is also widely used . Responses to RKCB take into account 5 Aces , that is the usual 4 Aces and the trump King , counted as the fifth Ace. Over a 4NT asking bid responses are as follows :

5♣ = 3 or 0 Aces

5♦ = 4 or 1 Aces

5♥ = 5 or 2 Aces

5♠ = 2 Aces and the trump Queen .

Some players invert the meaning of the first two responses because the 4 or 1 combination has a higher frequency of the 3 or 0 combination.

Both treatments shown above , have some drawbacks. Bidding space consumption is enormous and forces all contracts at the 5 level even in case of a negative response. Such anomalous contracts at 5 level represent only a higher risk without offering any advantage.

Situation is even worst when ♣ is trump because a semi-negative response forces the contract to the 6 level . For this reason , when ♣ is trump , many players use the Turbo convention that has got its own problems.

Finally , all information supplied in such an expensive way, is limited to Aces possession but nothing is said about Kings except for the trump King.

For all of these reasons , controls asking relay is getting more and more popular.

In this respect we count 1 Ace = 2 controls and 1K = 1 control.

The control asking technique carries many advantages. First of all the asking relay is made at a level lower than 4NT thus allowing a comfortable stoppage at 4 level. Moreover it gives information about the possession of Aces and Kings.

In case of a 1NT opening , that is a balanced hand with 15-17 HCP, control asking is even more advantageous .

We ought to know that a hand opening 1NT , has more than 98% probability of having a minimum of 4 controls, (Source : Rosenkranz table) so the step responses to a control asking relay can start with 4 controls.

Over partner 1NT opening, we shall use 4♣ as a controls asking relay any time that this bid can not be confused with a natural bid.

Normally in order to be able to successfully bid a small slam we need to have 10 controls out of 12. For this reason responder in order to enquire about controls he would need to have himself at least 4 in his hand so that , in case of negative response , he will not be forced to 5 or higher level.

Let us see the step responses in detail :

N	S
1NT	4♣ = controls asking relay

4♦ = 4 controls

4♥ = 5 controls

4♠ = 6 controls

4NT = 7 controls and so on .

South, having bid the controls asking relay, has a minimum of 4 controls. If North responds 4♦ or 4♥ showing 4 or 5 controls, the total of controls on NS side would amount to 8 or 9, insufficient for slam bidding and South will be able to conclude the bidding at 4♥, 4♠, 5♣, 5♦, or 5NT (that would be conclusive) without being forced to a higher level.

In order to appreciate the difference between the traditional RKCB and the control asking relay let us see a couple of examples with both methods:

Example A

S

♠ Q J 10 9 6 Over North 1NT, South with his nice 2 suiter and singleton
 ♥ A K 10 8 in ♣, has a legitimate hope for slam.
 ♦ K 8 6 Let us see how things would go with the two methods.
 ♣ 3

Controls asking relay

W	N	E	S
-	1NT	p	2♣
p	2♥	p	4♣ = contr. ask.
p	4♥ = 5 contr.	?	

RKCB

W	N	E	S
-	1NT	p	2♣
p	2♥	p	4NT
p	5♥ = 2A		?

We are missing 1A and 1K because North has 2A and 1K. If North has the ♣K and ♦A plus ♠A, We can play 6♥ with 50% chances finessing the ♠K. If instead North has ♣A plus ♠A and ♠K, all depends from the ♦A and ♦Q position.

1A is missing and 2K are not accounted for. Best thing to do is to pass but we are forced to play at 5 level.

Any way, all in all, we have only 9 controls on our side and South will pass 4♥.

Example B

S

♠ Q 10 9 8 7 Over North 1NT, South certainly got a slamish hand.
 ♥ A K Q 8 Let us see how things would go with the two methods.
 ♦ A Q 6
 ♣ 3

Controls asking relay

W	N	E	S
-	1NT	p	2♣
p	2♥	p	4♣ = contr. Ask.
p	4NT = 7 contr.	?	

RKCB

W	N	E	S
-	1NT	p	2♣
p	2♥	p	4NT
p	5♥ = 2A		?

North has 2A and 3K, so we have 12 Controls on our side. We can count on 5 tricks in ♠, 4 tricks in ♥, 3 tricks in ♦ and 2 tricks in ♣ for a total of 14 tricks (?!). South can easily bid 7 NT

North shows 2A but we have no news about 3K. Having North opened 1NT, he must have at least 15 HCP out of which he has shown 2A plus could have 1K, 2Q and 1J. Best we can do is to bid 6♥.