



25  
BRIDGE  
CONVENTIONS  
YOU SHOULD KNOW

2ND EDITION, REVISED AND UPDATED

BARBARA SEAGRAM & MARC SMITH  
WITH ADDITIONAL MATERIAL BY DAVID BIRD



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To my wonderful husband, Alex Kornel — my soulmate, my partner in business, and at the table — with all my love.

Barbara

To the most important people in my life: my wife Charlotte, my dog Georgio, and all the bridge partners who have patiently suffered my idiosyncracies over the years.

Marc

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P U B L I S H E R ' S   F O R E W O R D  
T O   T H E   S E C O N D   E D I T I O N

Twenty-three years ago, when we first published *25 Bridge Conventions You Should Know*, we did not realize that it would become one of the best-selling bridge books of all time. However, more than 300,000 copies later, in half a dozen different languages, it's hard to argue with that description.

So why revise a book that has been so popular and so successful? Simply put, times have changed, and bridge has changed with them. Bidding, in particular, has changed. And what teachers shared with their students at the end of the twentieth century is in some ways quite different from what happens in the classroom now, well into the twenty-first.

If you own a copy of the first edition, you will find much in these pages that is still familiar. The conventions that are in both editions have simply been updated to reflect modern bidding styles and treatments – the sections on notrump bidding, for example, now reflect the almost universal use of transfers over a 1NT opening. Some conventions have largely fallen into disuse, and have been replaced with others that have become popular, and are now commonly encountered. Remember that even if you don't want to play a particular convention yourself, you may need to be familiar with it if many of your opponents use it.

A final note: David Bird was the co-author of a follow-up book, *25 More Conventions You Should Know*, and we welcome him as a contributor of three chapters to this new edition of the original book.

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## F O R E W O R D

I have just read a good bridge book, a very good bridge book — the one you have in your hands. I don't know whether everyone who writes a foreword reads the book as thoroughly as I have this one, but I did, and you have a treat in store for yourself.

You are about to familiarize yourself with twenty-five of the most popular and useful bidding conventions described succinctly, simply, and clearly — very clearly. Barbara Seagram and Marc Smith, a Canadian and a Brit, an unlikely pairing, have come up with a winner.

My gut feeling is that a reader who knows nothing or next to nothing about the convention being explained will leave the chapter thinking he or she can play the convention. It doesn't get any better than that.

In addition to the clarity of the explanations, and to my mind the most important feature of the book, a review-type quiz follows each chapter which further hammers home the important concepts. The summary of the main points contained in the chapter, which is laid out neatly before each quiz, is the icing on the cake.

I'm a bridge teacher and I'm going to recommend this book to my students. What more can I say other than that by hook or by crook you should make sure your partner also has a copy of this book? It still takes two to tango.

*Eddie Kantar*



## A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

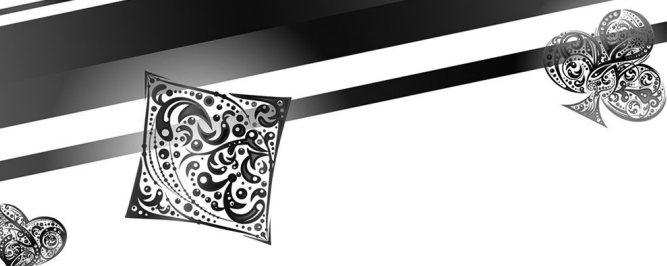
My sincere thanks to an incredible teacher, Michael Davey, who taught me to love this game; to my dear friend and mentor, Eddie Kantar, whose books, friendship and humor have inspired my teaching for thirty-five years; to Alan LeBendig, the kindest and best friend ever, who was always there to give advice, wisdom and support; and to a great lady, Kate Buckman, who started the Kate Buckman Bridge Studio in Toronto in 1958 and who invited me to work for her in 1975; Kate taught me the magic of running a bridge club. My sincere thanks to all the thousands of students and members of our Studio and our School of Bridge, who have taught me to learn and who have been so supportive over all the years. And last but not least, my thanks to our editor, Ray Lee, who made this book possible and is a joy to work with.

*Barbara Seagram*

I would like to thank my good friend and fellow author David Bird, with whom I have spent many pleasant hours discussing bridge hands over excellent lunches. Without him, my sentences would probably still be long and tortuous. I would also like to thank all the bridge partners who have patiently suffered my idiosyncracies over the years. A special mention goes to one of the nicest human beings I have ever known, my former partner, the late Peter Czerniewski, without whom my bidding sequences would probably still be long and tortuous. Thanks also to my students, without whom life would probably seem long and tortuous. Better end now before this dedication becomes, ah, would you believe, long and tortuous.

*Marc Smith*

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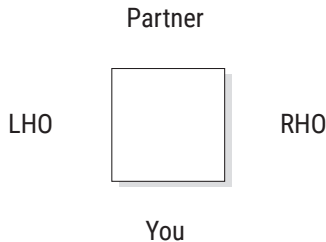


# A U T H O R S ' N O T E

The examples in this book are based on Standard bidding. All of the conventions here can be played as part of a 2/1 system, but the meanings of some auctions will be slightly different. Make sure you discuss them with your partner.

In the course of this book, we frequently refer to 'points'. If you are bidding notrump, then this means high-card points (HCP) since you cannot count distribution for notrump purposes. However, when bidding suits, 'points' means total points (HCP + distributional points) unless we specifically say 'HCP'. You can add 1 length point for each card over four, i.e. a five-card suit gives you 1 extra point. If you are going to be dummy, then with three-card support, add 3, 2 or 1 **dummy points** — 3 for a void, 2 for a singleton, 1 for a doubleton. With four-card support, add 5, 3 or 1 dummy points.

The opposition are referred to as LHO (left-hand opponent) and RHO (right-hand opponent). When partner opens the bidding, RHO bids next, then you, followed by LHO, and then partner again. If in doubt, refer to this diagram:



Throughout this book, you will see the terms 'natural' and 'artificial'. Describing a bid as natural means that, for instance, if you bid spades, it shows spades. An artificial (or conventional) bid, on the other hand, is quite different. For example, you might make a conventional club bid, and doing so may say nothing about your club holding. Your bid could show both majors, or ask your partner a question about his hand, or mean something else entirely, but it does not necessarily show the suit you have actually bid — hence the term 'artificial'.

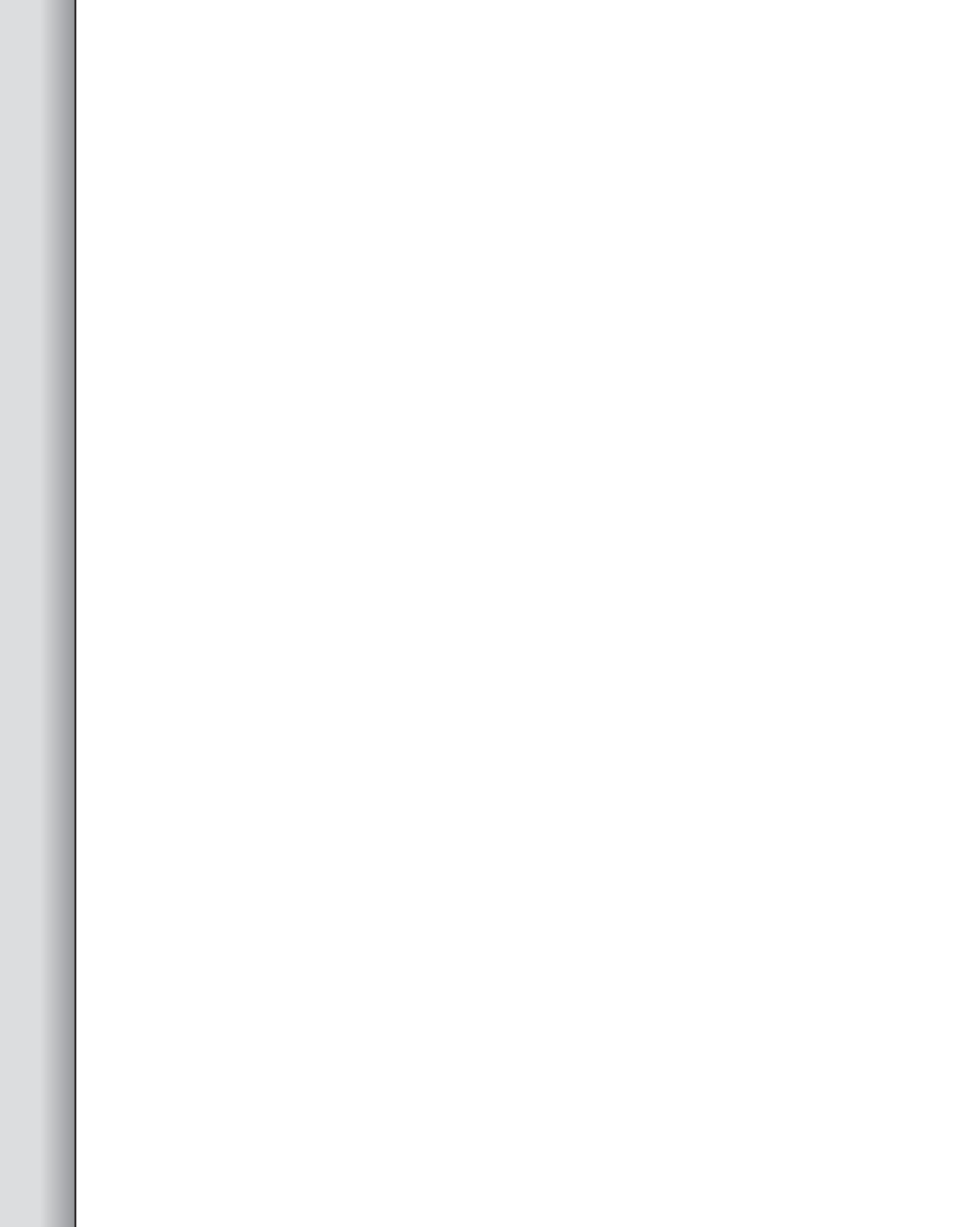
Lastly, as in the first edition, we have used the male pronoun throughout the book, for convenience. At all times you can assume that 'he' means 'he or she'.





# LEARN THESE FIRST





## C H A P T E R

## 1

# BLACKWOOD and GERBER

## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

♥ *Easley Blackwood* (1903-1992) of Indianapolis invented his convention in 1933. He was a successful bridge teacher and writer, as well as a chess player and singer. The Blackwood convention is played in some form by just about every regular partnership in organized bridge. *John Gerber* (1906-1981) of Houston devised his convention in 1938.

The **Blackwood** convention uses a bid of 4NT to ask partner how many aces he has. Let's say you have the following hand:

♠ AK864   ♥ KQ962   ♦ 7   ♣ KQ	
<b>You</b>	<b>Partner</b>
1♠	2♥
4NT ( <i>Blackwood</i> )	

Do you really need to know anything other than how many aces partner holds? If he has two aces, you expect him to make 6♥, and if he has all three missing aces then he will surely be able to make all thirteen tricks. In the event that he has only one, then you will play in 5♥.

The beauty of Blackwood is its simplicity. To answer partner's question you show how many aces you have by bidding as follows:

5♣	=	0 aces or 4 aces
5♦	=	1 ace
5♥	=	2 aces
5♠	=	3 aces

We shall return later to the question of how you tell whether partner has zero or four aces when he responds 5♣.

## ***So when's a good time for Blackwood?***

The simple answer to this question is 'When the only thing you need to know is how many aces partner holds'. That may seem obvious, but it is worth thinking about a little more. If you're going to make a small slam, you need a number of conditions to be true:

1. *You must be able to make twelve tricks.*
2. *You must have a sufficiently strong trump suit, or*
3. *If you are going to play in notrump, all suits must be adequately stopped.*
4. *The opponents must not be able to take two quick tricks.*

Let's look at each of these requirements in turn.

### ***1. You must be able to make twelve tricks.***

<b>Partner</b>	<b>You</b>
♠ A K 7	♠ Q J 3
♥ K 6 4 3	♥ A 8 5 2
♦ A 7 4 3	♦ K 8 6 2
♣ K J	♣ A Q

This is a rather extreme example, but it emphasizes the point. You have a combined 34 HCP including all of the aces and kings. Even so, there is no guarantee you can make any more than nine tricks, let alone twelve! However, using Blackwood will not tell you that you cannot make a slam on this hand.

### ***2. You must have a sufficiently strong trump suit.***

<b>Partner</b>	<b>You</b>
♠ A K 3	♠ Q J
♥ K 5 4 3	♥ A 7 6 2
♦ A 6 4	♦ K Q 5 3
♣ K Q 7	♣ J 8 3

Do you really want to play in 6♥ on this hand? Of course not — the defenders have the ♣A and a sure heart trick. Indeed, if trumps break particularly poorly, you might not even be able to make game in hearts! Using Blackwood would not tell you this, though.

**3. If you are going to play in notrump, all suits must be adequately stopped.**

Partner	You
♠ A 8 6	♠ 9 5
♥ K Q 7	♥ J 10 6 4
♦ A Q 6	♦ K J 5 2
♣ K J 7 3	♣ A Q 8

This time you can eventually make twelve tricks — one spade, three hearts, four diamonds and four clubs. However, assuming they lead a spade, the defenders will have established several spade tricks before you will be able to cash your twelve. Since you have three of the four aces, Blackwood will not tell you that the six-level is too high on these cards either.

**4. The opponents must not be able to take two quick tricks.**

Partner	You
♠ K Q 7 3 2	♠ A J 8 5
♥ A K	♥ 5 3 2
♦ 5	♦ K Q 6 4
♣ K Q J 4 2	♣ 9 3

Now you have plenty of tricks and an adequately solid trump suit, but of course the defenders can take two aces before you can make your twelve tricks. Blackwood can tell you not to bid this slam. This would be a sensible auction:

Partner	You
1♠	3♠
4NT	5♦
5♠	pass

If partner has two aces, then you plan to bid 6♠. When he has only one, you know the defenders have two aces to cash and so you stop at the relative safety of the five-level.

The important point is this: *out of all the necessary conditions for slam, there is only one that Blackwood can help to confirm.*

#### BY THE WAY

*Blackwood is probably the single most abused convention. Do not use Blackwood as a constructive tool for bidding slams; use Blackwood to avoid bidding bad slams. Blackwood simply allows you to avoid reaching the six-level when the opposition has two aces to cash.*



## Is 4NT always Blackwood?

Yes, unless partner has opened the bidding in notrump or his first rebid was notrump. In both of these auctions, for example, 4NT is a quantitative raise:

<b>Partner</b>	<b>You</b>
1NT	4NT

<b>Partner</b>	<b>You</b>
1♠	2♦
2NT	4NT

However, if the opening bid or first rebid was in notrump, you can use the **Gerber** convention (a jump to 4♣) instead of Blackwood to ask for aces:

<b>Partner</b>	<b>You</b>	
1NT	4♣	(Gerber)

<b>Partner</b>	<b>You</b>	
1♣	1♥	
2NT	4♣	(Gerber)

Gerber and Blackwood responses follow similar principles. After 1NT – 4♣:

4♦	=	0 or 4 aces
4♥	=	1 ace
4♠	=	2 aces
4NT	=	3 aces

## Is there life after Blackwood?

Once you hear how many aces partner holds you will usually just pick the final contract. However, if you are interested in a grand slam you can continue with a bid of 5NT to ask partner how many kings he holds. Bidding 5NT to ask for kings guarantees that your side holds all of the aces and that you expect to make thirteen tricks if partner has an appropriate number of kings. The responses are identical to the first round but one level higher:

### BY THE WAY

Similarly, after a Gerber 4♣ bid and response, you can bid 5♣ to ask for kings. Again, the responses are identical to the first round, but one level higher.



6♣	=	0 or 4 kings
6♦	=	1 king
6♥	=	2 kings
6♠	=	3 kings

You must also be able to handle any response partner makes to Blackwood when you decide to use it. When you intend to play in a minor suit, you must be especially careful. For example, if clubs is your suit and you hold

only one ace yourself, then you cannot use Blackwood since a  $5\spadesuit$  response (showing one ace) would carry you too high. The exception to this rule is when you think you can play the hand in notrump as well as in a suit. Let's say your agreed suit is clubs. You bid 4NT holding one ace and partner bids  $5\spadesuit$  (showing one ace). There are two aces missing: what now? You cannot bid 5NT as that would ask for kings. However, a bid of  $5\heartsuit$  or  $5\spadesuit$  (because it is an unbid suit at the five-level and thus cannot be natural) now asks partner to bid 5NT, which you intend to pass. Even with this neat little safety net available, before using Blackwood you must be sure that you have eleven tricks in notrump even though the opponents have two aces.

## *Let's not go that way...*

Here's a potential problem to stay away from:

♠ AK864 ♥ KQ962 ♦ - ♣ KQJ

<i>You</i>	<i>Partner</i>
1♠	2♥
?	

This time you have a void, and that creates real problems if you use Blackwood. Suppose partner shows you one ace: if it's the  $\diamond A$ , the most you will make is  $5\heartsuit$ . If it's the  $\heartsuit A$  or the  $\clubsuit A$ , you want to be in  $6\heartsuit$ . Similarly, if he has two aces, you still don't know whether to play in  $6\heartsuit$  or  $7\heartsuit$ .

This kind of hand is also a problem:

♠ AK864 ♥ KQ962 ♦ 74 ♣ K

<i>You</i>	<i>Partner</i>
1♠	2♥
?	

Even if partner has two aces, you may be off two quick diamond tricks, so you can't be sure you want to be in slam. The answer is not to use Blackwood on hands which contain a void or two quick losers in an unbid suit. There are other, better ways to handle these situations which we'll deal with later in this book.

## *No aces, partner? None at all?*

Earlier, we said we would return to the question of how you know whether partner has zero or four aces when he responds  $5\clubsuit$ . This may seem like a potential problem, although in reality it never is. Say you bid 4NT holding two aces. Partner responds  $5\clubsuit$ . How many does he have — 0 or 4? Of course, he has zero.

If you have no aces and partner bids  $5\clubsuit$ , then he must have all four or you are both bidding like maniacs. If you are bidding Blackwood, it is a reasonable assumption that you already know that between you and partner you have enough high card points to be interested in a slam. That hardly seems possible if neither of you has any aces.

# Summary

- Unless the opening bid or opener's first rebid was in notrump, 4NT is almost always Blackwood.
- To respond to partner's 4NT, show your aces by bidding 5♣ with 0/4 aces, 5♦ with 1 ace, 5♥ with 2 aces, or 5♠ with 3 aces.
- Once you have used Blackwood, you may next bid 5NT to ask for kings. This guarantees that your side has all four aces, and that you expect to make thirteen tricks if partner has the appropriate number of kings. The responses to 5NT are similar to the responses to 4NT, but at the six-level.
- When the opening bid is in notrump, you can jump to 4♣ (Gerber) to ask for aces. Partner responds by bidding 4♦ with 0/4 aces, 4♥ with 1 ace, 4♠ with 2 aces, or 4NT with 3 aces. Once you have used Gerber, you may next bid 5♣ to ask for kings; the responses are similar, but one level higher.
- Before using Blackwood or Gerber, be sure that the only thing you need to know is how many aces partner holds.
- Do not use Blackwood or Gerber if you have a void, or if you have two or more quick losers in a suit, since the response will not tell you what you need to know.

## BLACKWOOD AND GERBER



# NOW TRY THESE...

What is your next bid on each of these hands?

1 ♠ AK108653  
♥ 4  
♦ KQJ7  
♣ 5

**You Partner**

1♠ 3♠  
?

2 ♠ AK754  
♥ 6  
♦ KQ852  
♣ KQ

**You Partner**

1♠ 2♦  
?

3 ♠ K6  
♥ A  
♦ KQ10853  
♣ KQ63

**You Partner**

1♠  
2♦ 3♦  
?

4 ♠ KQ10964  
♥ AKQ  
♦ KQJ  
♣ A

**You Partner**

2♣ 2♦  
2♠ 3♠  
?

5 ♠ KQJ9763  
♥ 6  
♦ AKJ  
♣ K4

**You Partner**

1NT  
?

6 ♠ AKQ  
♥ A9752  
♦ KQ84  
♣ 6

**You Partner**

1♥ 2♥  
?

7 ♠ AKQ75  
♥ AJ64  
♦ KQ6  
♣ A

**You Partner**

2♣ 2♥  
?

8 ♠ KQJ964  
♥ AK84  
♦ —  
♣ K63

**You Partner**

1♠ 3♠  
?

9 ♠ AK10753  
♥ 84  
♦ KQJ5  
♣ A

**You Partner**

1♠ 3♠  
?

10 ♠ KJ4  
♥ A74  
♦ KQ105  
♣ K83

**You Partner**

1NT  
?

# ANSWERS

- 1      4NT    If partner has two aces you will bid 6♠. If he has only one ace you will sign off in 5♠. It is possible that partner has no aces, so using Blackwood even on this huge hand is not without risk.
- 2      4NT    All you really need to know is how many aces partner has. If he has two aces, bid 6♦. If he has all three missing aces, bid the grand slam.
- 3      4NT    As with Problem 2, knowing how many aces partner has will tell you how high to bid. No other information is relevant.
- 4      4NT    Blackwood will tell you everything you need to know. If partner has an ace, bid 6♠, and if he has two, bid the grand slam.
- 5      4♣    This is the Gerber convention, used opposite a strong notrump opening. If partner shows zero or one ace, sign off in 4♠. If he has two, bid 6♠, and if he has all three missing aces, bid 7♠.
- 6      4♥    Partner might easily have an ace, but if he does then he is very unlikely to have both the king and queen of hearts. Your trump suit is not good enough to look for slam.
- 7      3♥    You will recall that partner's 2♥ response to 2♣ guarantees at least two of the top three honors. As you have the ace, he must have at least ♥KQxxx, and thus all you need to know is whether he also has the missing ♦A. However, if you bid 4NT now, it would show a 28+ HCP balanced hand (see p. 49). So raise hearts now, then use Blackwood at your next turn.
- 8      ??    You cannot use Blackwood here, since the response will not help you. If partner shows an ace, it may be the ♦A or it may be one of the two useful aces: you can never find out. Exactly what you should bid now, we shall discuss in Chapter 20 on control-showing cuebids.
- 9      ??    This is the other type of hand on which players frequently misuse Blackwood. As with Question 8, knowing how many aces partner has doesn't solve your problem, and therefore Blackwood is the wrong tool. Say partner shows one ace: you still do not know whether the opponents have the ♥AK to cash. This problem is another that can be solved using control bids (see Chapter 20).
- 10     4NT    No, this is not Blackwood. Partner has opened 1NT and therefore 4♣ would ask for aces. This is a quantitative notrump raise, inviting partner to bid 6NT with a maximum or pass if he is minimum.