

# Ask Jerry



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Dear Jerry,

I would like to know the detailed reasons for not using Blackwood when your hand has a void. Some examples might help me to understand thoroughly the disadvantages. Some articles I read on the Internet were not convincing because the reasons were not given in a clear-cut manner and in depth, as they should have been in a matter as important and difficult as slam bidding.

Robert

Hi Robert,

My 28-year-old son, Jake, is a five-year veteran of the arena football league. He is very large, with lots of muscle, so I try not to trifle with him. On more than one occasion, he has accused me of asking questions where I could not possibly care about the answer. This is often analogous to using any form of Blackwood when holding a void! Let's use the following hands as examples:

Opener	Responder
♠ A K J 8 4 2	♠ Q 10 7 3
♥ A K Q J	♥ 8 2
♦ 7 3 2	♦ Q 6 5 4
♣ —	♣ A Q 4

Opener	Responder
1♠	3♠
?	

Using 3♠ as a standard limit raise, showing four trumps along with game-invitational values, how should opener proceed? If Blackwood is employed, responder would show one ace (or key card), and the guesswork would continue. On this layout, even the five level could be in jeopardy.

Flip-flop responder's minor-suit holdings:

Opener	Responder
♠ A K J 8 4 2	♠ Q 10 7 3
♥ A K Q J	♥ 8 2
♦ 7 3 2	♦ A Q 4
♣ —	♣ Q 6 5 4

Once again, Blackwood would reveal one ace or key card, but on this layout, 12 tricks are near certain, and 13 are available if trumps break 2-1. The solution is to cuebid (*i.e.*, show a first-round control in a suit) to find out if partner has other suits under control, but use Blackwood when the number of suits controlled is the only issue.

On the first set, therefore, the auction should be:

Opener	Responder
1♠	3♠
4♣	4♠
Pass	

On the second set:

Opener	Responder
1♠	3♠
4♣	4♦
6♠	Pass

In each case, 4♣ was a control-showing cuebid, showing interest in a spade slam. On the first, responder's failure to cuebid a diamond control should warn opener of the dangers of continuing. On the second, responder's diamond control lets opener know that a small slam should certainly have play.

Blackwood was always intended as a failsafe to be used when the power and fit for possible slam was established during the bidding and where the only issue was how many suits were controlled. As dealer, you hold:

♠ A K 7 6 5 4 2 ♥ 9 ♦ 4 ♣ A K Q 5.

Opener	Responder
1♠	3♠
?	

Over the 3♠ limit raise, this is a perfect hand for Blackwood. If responder holds two aces, bid them all! If responder acknowledges one ace, bid a small slam because you don't care which ace it is. If your inquiry finds zero aces, sign off at the seemingly safe five level.

Because your question only involved using Blackwood with a void, I will not delve into the evils of bidding Blackwood with fast losers in a side suit ... at least in this column.

Bottom line: It is rare that Blackwood is the correct continuation when holding a void in a side suit. □