

ALLAN DeSERPA

# SIXPACK

ADVENTURES WITH KEYCARDS AND QUEECARDS



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# Foreword

Most readers skip the foreword and go right to the first chapter. If you happen to have glanced at this first paragraph, I invite you to accept the Sixpack Challenge. Go right to the end of the book and look through 40 deals in “Challenge the Champs” format. The Sixpack Challenge is to get more than 36 (90%) of them right.

The Sixpack concept arose from a simple idea. When a partnership identifies a double fit, the most important piece of information is about keycards and queecards. There are six keycards for the two suits, including the four aces and the two kings. Queecards are the two fit-suit queens. Those eight cards are crucial to any slam investigation. If you are missing two or more of those eight cards, it is best to stop in game.

Accordingly, Sixpack provides a way to uncover this information without going beyond game. This book is organized into an “easy” half and a “complex” half. Part I proceeds from some basic principles and a set of uniform rules that never change. Even Part I offers some revolutionary ideas. You will become familiar with new concepts like “launch,” “launch space” and “intervention transfers,” but you will not have to change any of your cherished systems or conventions. The same steps that show keycards and queecards are the same for clubs and diamonds as for hearts and spades, spades and clubs or diamonds and a major. The same rules will apply to Stayman auctions as to Jacoby Transfer auctions.

Subject to a small amount of initial memory work and familiarity with the intervention transfers, a relatively experienced player could adopt Sixpack after a few hours of study. Of course, your partner would also have to read Part I, but you do not need a practiced partnership. Just learn the rules, sit down and start to bid magic slams.

To make the best use of Sixpack, Part II deals with advanced topics. I said that Sixpack applies equally to Stayman and Jacoby auctions. It actually applies to about half of the Stayman two-suited auctions. The other half requires some changes and additions to the notrump structure. In other situations, the keycard steps have to move up a notch (Kickback Sixpack). A glance at the chapter outlines will reveal the advanced topics of “Reverse” Sixpack, “Flannery” Sixpack and “Exclusion” Sixpack.

Having worked through hundreds of simulated deals, I am convinced that Sixpack is amazingly accurate. Although Sixpack is untested in real competition, it has evolved from a purely theoretical idea based on loser-trick count and cover cards. The simulations have reinforced my expectations and uncovered “glitches” that led to refinements that have now offset some unanticipated problems.

Every step of the way, with every new topic, tinkering with Sixpack has generated unexpected benefits. Even if you never ask for keycards, the employment of transfer bids will expand your bidding space and improve the accuracy of your auctions. For example, I have never been satisfied with continuations after opener reverses the bidding. Transfer continuations solve a lot of difficult problems in this regard.

Have you bid any of those 40 deals yet?

My claim in Chapter 1 is that Sixpack can almost “play itself.” All it needs is “a little help” from you. For the basic applications, particularly within the comfort zone of Jacoby transfers, that claim is only a slight exaggeration. Good judgment helps at the margin, but a pair of computers could score around 90%.

In most of the 40 deals, Sixpack gets you to the right contract with amazing ease. In the difficult deals, it is hard to judge the right spot looking at both hands. But with Sixpack, that is pretty much what you are doing – looking at your hand and partner’s hand, working out the odds of making six or seven.

In addition to those 40 bidding problems, I have assembled another 60 example deals. Some of them were generated by simulation and others come from actual play. They have been edited to illustrate key concepts, but I have refrained from using examples specifically designed to make Sixpack look good. No approach to bidding bridge hands is perfect, but Sixpack will generally enable you to locate all of the important honor cards. At worst, your guesses will be highly informed.

This book is pretty cheap. There is a lot of time in the mornings and between sessions. Give Sixpack a try. Regardless of your level of play or experience, you will not regret it.

Allan DeSerpa  
September 15, 2014



# **Sixpack**

## **Part I**

### **Foundations**



# Chapter 1

## Introduction

For the first half of this book, I shall assume that one partner holds a balanced hand with 15-17 HCP and opens the bidding with one notrump. Responder will have two biddable suits with game-forcing values. Typical hand patterns are 5-5-2-1, 5-4-3-1, or 5-4-2-2, but shapelier hand types are also in the mix. The primary focus will be on those that border on slam tries. A prototype for this hand would be:

Example 1: ♠ AQxxx ♥ KJxxx ♦ Kx ♣ x

Notice that it contains only 13 HCP, but the promising hand pattern and good controls still place it in what you should consider the “slam range.”

The reason why it is in the slam range is that you can picture a lot of balanced 15-counts that would fit this hand perfectly. Indeed, six spades is cold opposite the right 14-count: ♠ KJxx ♥ AQx ♦ Axx ♣ xxx. Similarly, slam is on a finesse opposite this magical 13-count: ♠Kxx ♥ ATxx ♦ Qxx ♣ Axx. If the diamond queen were an ace, a grand slam would depend on the same finesse. Before we get carried away, take a moment to imagine the opposite extreme. A poorly fitting hand would be short in the majors with wasted values in the minors: ♠ xx ♥ Qxx ♦ AQJx ♣ KQJx is about as bad as it gets. You might want to play this hand in three notrump, despite having a decent heart fit.

The objective of this book is therefore to explore opportunities to find the great-fitting hands that waltz you into slams while still being able to stop in game when the fits are not so great.

## **A. Culbertson's Rule**

Contract bridge pioneer Ely Culbertson devised a simple rule about trying for games and slams after suit fits have been identified: If you can “picture” a cold game or slam opposite partner’s “magic” *minimum*, then you should *try* for the game or slam.

There are several key words embodied in this rule. The first is “picture.” This is not about counting points in your hand; it is about visualizing points in partner’s hand. You are not just allowed to fantasize. Rather, you are expected, even *encouraged*, to fantasize. That means making a list of cards you would like partner to have. With regard to Example Hand 1 in the introductory remarks, you are allowed to pick the king of spades, the ace and queen of hearts and both minor-suit aces: That’s a total of five magic cards and the points add up to 17.

If partner held all five of those cards, you would want to bid a grand slam, but hold it! That perfect array of cards is a magic *maximum*. Culbertson’s Rule does not invite you to indulge yourself that far. You should not focus on trying to bid the magic grand, but you can produce a small slam with only four of the five. Remove either minor-suit ace, for example, and you would be tickled pink to bid six spades, or even six hearts. The four magic cards add up to only 13 HCP. So this hand would meet Culbertson’s criterion with two points to spare. The conclusion is that you definitely want to try for slam with Example 1.



The last key word is “try”. Making a slam try does not mean jumping to four clubs (Gerber) to ask for aces. It means laying a careful foundation to elicit cooperation from partner. You want to have an orderly protocol that enables you to show your suits, identify eight-card fits for either or both majors, and then find out whether partner holds the cards that you want. In this case, Jacoby Transfers are ideal: You transfer to spades and rebid three hearts. This informs partner that you are 5-5 in the majors with game-forcing values.

Then what? As far as partner is concerned, even your game-force could be stretching with something as weak as:

Example Hand 2: ♠ KJxxx ♥ KQxxx ♦ xx ♣ x

More important, time (actually bidding space) is running out. How can partner find out if you have slam interest and show you the cards that he thinks you want without going past the last makeable contract? How can partner slam on the brakes with three notrump or choice of games? Signing off in four spades, for example, provides a preference for your suits but leaves you to guess whether to go on. Before going on, you should ask yourself about the different options that your present treatments allow. Although Culbertson’s Law advises you to try for slam, it does not advise you take reckless risks to do it.

## B. Statement of Purpose

My simple objective in writing this book is to propose and develop a systematic approach to bidding hands like these. The primary focus is on those aces, kings, and queens that fill in the holes of that promising hand. A broader, overriding theme is to enhance partnership cooperation through the expansion of bidding space and by managing it more effectively.

Let us look again at Example 1 and add a little flesh to the skeleton: ♠ AQ983 ♥ KJ762 ♦ K4 ♣ 7. The fillers that you would like partner to deliver are three aces, the king of spades and the queen of hearts. If spades are trumps, you could ask about three aces and the spade king; if hearts are trumps, you could ask about three aces directly and then relay to ask about the queen of hearts.

That is the way that you could do it if you play Roman Keycard Blackwood (as most serious bridge players do) and if you were willing to risk going to the five-level to scan for the potential fillers. So I will use RKC as a backdrop to explain some of the basics of Sixpack.

## C. Sixpack Versus Roman Keycard Blackwood

In RKC, there are five keycards. The king of the trump suit counts as a “fifth” ace. In Sixpack, as the name suggests, there are six. Regardless of which suit is the trump suit, the king of the second suit counts as the sixth ace.

In RKC, the queen of trumps is included in the questions and answers. As the rules require, the first two steps are ambiguous about the queen, so the procedure is to make a one-step relay to ask about it.

The next two steps show two keycards, first without and then with the queen of trumps. Sixpack uses a similar procedure to cover *both* queens, which I call “queecards.” In all, Sixpack covers eight key cards instead of the usual six.

The inclusion of eight key cards, along with the protocol for locating them, is only the tip of the Sixpack iceberg. You can memorize the steps and the relays in a matter of minutes. Beyond the elementary mechanics, however, there are *substantive differences* in the general approach. I do not claim that these differences are revolutionary, but they do represent a radical departure from any traditional procedure for ace-asking or keycard-asking.

### *1. Announcement and Launch*

In RKC, one partner asks and the other tells. “Asker” bids four notrump and “Teller” shows keycards. In Sixpack, one *announces* and the other *launches*. This is not just a matter of semantics. When responder bids a second suit in a Jacoby auction, for example, he is not *asking* about keycards. Responder is announcing a two-suited hand. Nonetheless, if opener has a suitable hand (to be defined below), he is required *launch* into keycard responses. The lowest keycard step is not, and cannot be, the cheapest reply; thus, “launch” is the most appropriate description of this action.

Please allow this to point sink in, with a Jacoby auction as a frame of reference. The auction starts at one notrump. Responder bids two hearts, transferring to spades and showing the first suit. Opener accepts the transfer, allowing responder to rebid a second suit. Bidding the second suit is the *announcement*.

Responder has now become *announcer* and opener has become *announee*. There is no “asker” or “teller,” at least not yet, but the announcement is a watershed moment in the auction. With a suitable hand, opener (now announee) *launches* into Sixpack without being explicitly asked to do so! If announee pursues this path, he becomes the teller. Responder may then become asker to obtain further information about queecards (and/or side-suit kings).

Assuming that part has sunk in, allow me to illustrate the power of Sixpack with reference to a full auction, using the example hands from above:

Opener holds: ♠ KJ52 ♥ AQ3 ♦ A96 ♣ J72

Responder holds: ♠ AQ983 ♥ KJ762 ♦ K4 ♣ 7

The auction: 1NT – 2♥ → 2♠ – 3♥ – 4♣ – 5NT – 6♠

Three hearts is the announcement, four clubs is the launch, five notrump says “pick a slam.” *Four clubs* shows three keycards and at least one queecard. Responder was “announcer”, but never asked a single question, except to allow opener to set the trump suit.

## 2. *The level of inquiry*

The fact that no one has to ask about keycards keeps the auction low. Responder obtains a full accounting of all of the keycards and queecards *below the game level*. If opener held ♠ KJ52 ♥ AQ3 ♦ Q96 ♣ KJ7, he would have bid *three notrump*, showing only *two* keycards. In this case, responder sees that the partnership is off two keycards. Accordingly, he signs off in *four hearts*, which opener corrects to four spades.

These auctions, indeed the complete set of possible auctions, are carefully orchestrated to ensure that you are never propelled beyond your preferred game contract. So if you have an attractive hand with only 13 high-card points, you do not have to “make a slam try”; Sixpack does it for you. You never have to risk a minus score at the five-level; Sixpack protects you.

It helps to have experience and judgment. Indeed, if you have great experience and judgment, maybe you can bid all of the good slams and avoid all of the bad ones without Sixpack. Whether or not you have an abundance of judgment, Sixpack virtually plays itself.

### 3. *Intervention*

Right now, you are probably thinking “did he *really* say that *three notrump* would show two keycards?” What if opener doesn’t have any keycards? What happens if opener turns up with that roach of a misfit ♠ xx ♥ Qxx ♦ AQJx ♣ KQJx? Instead of bidding three notrump to play, does Sixpack make him bid three notrump to show two keycards?

No: Sixpack has an “escape route” all mapped out. The escape plan is called an *intervention* and the route is called an *intervention transfer*. After responder rebids three hearts, three spades becomes a transfer to three notrump. This allows opener to pass if he wants to play three notrump, or correct to his choice of major-suit game.

Performing an intervention is not necessarily a means of escape. It can also start a constructive slam try that emphasizes only one of responder’s suits. Suppose you have a nice hand with an exceptional fit for hearts. You can show this hand and nudge responder

toward slam. Start with the intervention transfer to three notrump and then continue with four clubs, an artificial “super-acceptance” of hearts. Similarly, a continuation of four diamonds would be an artificial super-acceptance of spades.

#### *4. Overview*

The announcement” is a watershed moment, not only after a Jacoby transfer but also in a variety of bidding situations. There exists a multitude of messages, encouraging or discouraging, that opener (annoucee) might wish to deliver. In context of the Jacoby auction, the “wish list” would include:

- (1) Deny a fit for both suits
- (2) Support hearts while denying spades
- (3) Support spades while denying hearts
- (4) Show a fit for both suits
- (5) Cuebid minor-suit aces
- (6) Show slam interest
- (7) Deny slam interest
- (8) Show keycards and queecards

The one thing that Sixpack does not cover is item (5). Launch or intervention replaces natural cuebidding. This is not much of a loss because a cuebid of four clubs or four diamonds does not accomplish much. A cuebid shows a specific ace (or at least tends to show a specific ace) but does not set a trump suit. So RKC would not apply. Even if it did apply, RKC generates much less information and propels the partnership to the five-level.

The primary focus is on item (8). Whenever there are two key suits, there are six keycards (four aces and the king of each suit), along with the two queecards that

are almost as important as the aces and kings. Knowledge about keycards and queecards is, perhaps by far, the most important consideration for effective hand evaluation.

That said, it would be misleading to characterize this book as being about keycards and queecards. The use of intervention transfers increases bidding efficiency dramatically. Accordingly, Sixpack addresses all of the other questions (about suit fits and slam interest) and “packs” all of the answers into those crucial steps below game.

#### **D. Summary**

Laying out the whole set of treatments requires more foundation than I have laid thus far. There are many specific details to be worked out. The object of this chapter has been to map out a general plan. That plan is not just about “asking for” keycards or queecards. It is a comprehensive plan that accommodates a wish list for continuations after a “watershed event.”

The orderly procession from announcement to launch, with relays for queecards, is only one path. But that path provides announcer with bits of information, a few at a time. The bits of information are delivered in timely fashion to allow for a quick stop at the four-level or a slam investigation at the five-level or a dramatic leap to slam or choice of slams.

The alternative path, from the initial announcement to an intervention transfer, leads to a signoff in one of three strains or a systematic slam investigation in one of announcer’s suits.

In describing the overall approach, I have coined some new terminology. These new terms (launch, announcement and intervention) beget a few other new terms (announcer, announcee, and intervention transfer). There will be a few more (launch space and intervention space) in the ensuing chapters. All of them are defined in the glossary on pages 179-180. “Queecard” is self-explanatory in context. Similarly, keycard has its usual meaning, except that it now includes a second king. Relays for one queen will now cover both queecards; relay continuations for side-suit kings are essentially the same as in RKC auctions.



## SIX KEYCARD RKCB HAS COME OF AGE!

As soon you identify a double fit, don't ask for keycards... just "launch" and tell. You can find out about all six keycards — and two "queecards" — below the game level. Part I of the book lays out a set of basic rules for any casual partnership to apply quickly and easily. Part II gets more advanced and complex, but operates along the same principles. Apply Sixpack throughout your notrump structure and expand it to a wide range of standard bidding situations.

With many examples and four extensive quizzes for partners to practice the convention together, *Sixpack* gives the reader the experience and confidence to use the convention effectively at the table.



**ALLAN DeSERPA** is a professor of economics at Arizona State University. He continually dabbles in bridge bidding theory and, every ten years or so, he writes a book. Other titles include *The Mexican Contract* (1980) and *Principles of Logical Bidding* (1997). His motivation for writing *Sixpack*? He woke up one morning and decided that the sixth keycard deserved more respect.