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BRIDGE
CONVENTIONS
YOU SHOULD KNOW

2ND EDITION, REVISED AND UPDATED

PART 2: MORE COMPLICATED

BARBARA SEAGRAM & MARC SMITH
WITH ADDITIONAL MATERIAL BY DAVID BIRD



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To Ray Lee, my editor for so many years. This book, and many of my co-authored books, were his idea and he has worked tirelessly to make them happen, always with gentle encouragement and tremendous support.

Barbara



PUBLISHER'S FOREWORD TO THE SECOND EDITION

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.



FOREWORD TO THE FIRST EDITION

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



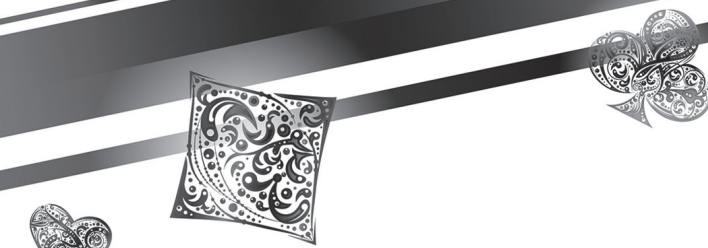
A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

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 over forty 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 over the years who have been so supportive and have become friends. And last, but not least, my thanks to my husband, Alex Kornel, my soulmate and partner in life and at the table.

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 these acknowledgements become, ah, would you believe, long and tortuous.

Marc Smith



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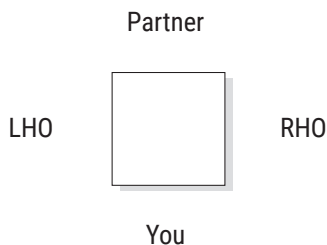


A U T H O R S ' N O T E

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, since it was used 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'.



MORE COMPLICATED




C H A P T E R

9

ROMAN KEYCARD BLACKWOOD

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

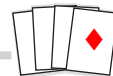
 A modern variation of the Blackwood convention, Roman Keycard Blackwood (RKCB) was first widely publicized by *Eddie Kantar* of Santa Monica, California. This convention is still developing and growing, as evidenced by the five editions of Kantar's book, *Roman Keycard Blackwood, Slam Bidding in the 21st Century*.

Just like the original Blackwood, RKCB was devised not to help you get to more slams but to keep you out of bad ones! Go back and read that sentence as many times as you wish. It is one of the keys to successful slam bidding. In addition to asking about aces, RKCB also allows you to find out whether partner has the king of trumps; sometimes you can find out about the queen of trumps, too. Because partner includes these cards in his response, you must have an agreed trump suit before you can invoke RKCB. If there is *any* doubt which suit is agreed for purposes of counting keycards, then the last-bid suit is the key suit.

You've probably bid the occasional slam with a trump suit like A10874 opposite 9653. When the trumps broke

BY THE WAY

All the rules we gave back in Chapter 1 for using simple Blackwood still apply. Before reading this chapter, you are advised to go back and review the earlier discussion. We would also suggest that you make sure you are confident that you understand the simple version before you attempt to play Roman Keycard (hereafter called simply RKCB).



3-1 (as expected) and you lost two trump tricks, all you could say to partner was: 'That was unlucky, but I had no way to find out if you had the king?'

At least in this example trumps might have broken 2-2. Even more embarrassing is when your trumps are Q10853 opposite partner's J964. Now you are bound to lose two tricks no matter how the opponents' trumps are divided. What's more, if one opponent has both the ace and the king he will probably double you to add insult to injury. Well, thanks to RKCB, there is a way to stay out of such poor slams.

How does RKCB work?

Instead of just counting the aces in your hand, you will now pretend that there is a fifth ace... the king of trumps. The four aces and the trump king are called **keycards**. As long as you can count to five, you can manage this convention. It begins in the familiar manner, with a 4NT bid:

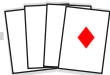
Partner	You
1♥	3♥
4NT	?

Here is how you respond:

5♣	1 or 4 keycards
5♦	3 or 0 keycards
5♥	2 or 5 (usually 2) keycards <i>without</i> the queen of trumps
5♠	2 or 5 (usually 2) keycards <i>with</i> the queen of trumps

BY THE WAY

When you meet and play with others who also play RKCB, you will discover that there are two popular sets of responses. We recommend playing 5♣=1/4 and 5♦=3/0. This version of RKCB is called '1430'. However, it is equally workable to switch the meanings of these two responses ('3014') and if you prefer to do so, that is okay. Just be sure that you and your partner agree which version you are playing.



That is not too tough to remember. You know the score for making a vulnerable 6♥ or 6♠ at duplicate — 1430. If you can remember that, you can remember the meaning of the 5♣ and 5♦ RKCB responses — 5♣ = 1/4 (1 or 4 keycards) and 5♦ = 3/0. Notice, too, the use of the 5♥ and 5♠ responses to give information about the trump queen.

Are you thinking, 'How do I know whether partner has one keycard or four?' After looking at your hand and thinking about the previous bidding, if you do not know which partner has then you should not have been asking about keycards. Trust us when we say that *if* you have a Blackwood bid you can always work out the meaning of the response.

Playing RKCB, you will never get to a small slam missing two keycards (one missing is OK) and never get to a grand slam missing any keycard. Yes, it is true that this way you will also not get to a slam that depends on a finesse for the king of trumps, but this is not such a bad thing in the long run. If you can avoid any slam that needs

a finesse you will be a consistent winner on these hands. (Slams 'on a finesse' are never really 50% since bad trump breaks, defensive ruffs, and similar unpleasant things tend to scupper them too).

Asking for kings

As in ordinary Blackwood, you can continue with 5NT after the initial RKCB response to ask partner how many kings he has. This applies no matter which response partner gave to the RKCB inquiry. Since you have already counted the king of trumps, do not show it again; just respond as you would to regular Blackwood, but only count kings outside the trump suit. You should only ask about kings if your side has all the keycards and you are contemplating a grand slam.

BY THE WAY

This is a part of RKCB where there are more sophisticated methods available to you when you are ready to learn them.



Asking about the queen of trumps

When partner responds 5♥ or 5♠ to your RKCB 4NT, he immediately tells you whether or not he has the queen of trumps. When he responds 5♣ or 5♦, he does not. You therefore need a second asking bid to discover that information. Once you know how many keycards are missing, perhaps you want to bid a slam (or a grand slam) only if partner has the queen to solidify the trumps.

Read this next sentence two or three times until you are sure you understand it. After the first RKCB response, *the lowest available bid that is not your agreed suit asks about the trump queen*. Do you want to go back and read that one more time? We'll wait right here for you.

Okay. Ready to proceed? So, after you bid 4NT, if partner responds 5♣, 5♦ asks about the queen *except* when diamonds is your agreed suit, when 5♥ asks. If partner responds 5♦ to your 4NT, 5♥ asks about the queen *except* when hearts is your agreed suit, when 5♠ asks. These bids are called the **queen ask**. If you did not understand that, go back and read it again.

How do you respond to the queen ask?

The *lowest available* bid in the agreed trump suit *denies* the queen of trumps (this will usually be at the five-level, but may be at the six-level). If you have the queen of trumps and a higher-ranking king, or you have no outside kings, bid 5NT.

Any other bid *promises* the queen of trumps. A *jump* in the agreed trump suit shows the queen of trumps but denies an outside king. A bid of a suit other than the trump suit shows the queen of trumps and the king of the bid suit. (As when cuebidding, you bid your lowest king if you have more than one). However, you may not bid higher than six of the agreed suit. If you have the queen of trumps and a higher-ranking king, bid 5NT.

An example auction:

Partner	You
1♥	3♥
4NT	5♦ ¹
5♠ ²	6♦ ³
7♥ ⁴	

- 1) 3 or 0 keycards
- 2) Queen ask (hearts is the agreed suit)
- 3) Heart queen and diamond king, denies club king
- 4) That's what I wanted to know!

Summary

- All the rules that applied to using Blackwood in Chapter 1 still apply.
- There are five keycards — the four aces plus the king of the agreed trump suit.
- If there is *any* doubt which suit is agreed, the last-bid suit should be considered the key suit for purposes of counting keycards.
- Responder bids 5♣ with 1 or 4 keycards, 5♦ with 3 or 0 keycards, 5♥ with 2 (or 5) keycards but no queen of trumps, 5♠ with 2 (or 5) keycards and holding the queen of trumps.
- 5NT by the RKCB bidder asks how many of the three non-trump kings partner has (use regular Blackwood responses).
- The next non-trump step after a 5♣/5♦ response asks about the queen of trumps. Responder signs off at the lowest level in the trump suit if he does not have it. Holding the trump queen, responder bids his lowest-ranking outside king, and bids 5NT with no outside king or if bidding his lowest outside king would mean going past six of your agreed trump suit.

ROMAN KEY CARD BLACKWOOD

NEWCOMER/INTERMEDIATE

Since its publication in 1999, *25 Bridge Conventions You Should Know* has sold more than 300,000 copies in six languages. It has become a much-valued learning tool and reference for everyone from social players to those who regularly spend time at their local bridge club.

But bridge has changed in the last twenty-odd years. Bidding has changed. Some of the conventions in the original book have fallen into disuse, while others have gained in popularity and importance. Many basic conventions have changed in subtle ways as bidding methods have developed. It is now time, therefore, to update this modern classic so that today's players can be in tune with what is happening and stay current.

This new edition has been thoroughly updated, while retaining the approach and features that made the original so popular. Each convention in the book has been carefully revised to explain its use in the modern game. Students are now universally taught to play transfers in response to a strong notrump opening, and the new edition reflects that change. Three chapters (Landy, Grand Slam Force and Ogust Responses to Weak Twos) have been dropped completely in favor of Bergen Raises and the DONT and Meckwell defenses to 1NT.



BARBARA SEAGRAM (Canada) is one of North America's top bridge teachers, with over thirty books to her credit. *Barbara's Bridge Tips* (MPP) was named Book of the Year in 2021 by the American Bridge Teachers' Association.



MARC SMITH (UK) is a well-known author, a regular contributor to various magazines and a commentator on top bridge events. His most recent book for MPP is a new edition of *Over Hoffman's Shoulder* (with the late Martin Hoffman).



DAVID BIRD (UK) is the most prolific bridge author of all time, having produced over 150 books. Somehow, he still finds time to produce his popular stories featuring the Abbot and the monks of St. Titus, which regularly feature in magazines around the world. His most recent book for MPP is *Play it Safe!* (with Barbara Seagram).



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