

## Picking up the scent

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In my early days of playing Teams bridge, I was on many occasions fortunate enough to have really good teammates, without whom my results would have been very ordinary indeed. One teammate in particular had a reputation for regularly reaching good slam contracts on relatively few high cards points – my partner described her as "able to pick up the faintest smell of a makeable slam".

How does one do that? The 4 key requirements for bidding a slam without some 33+ high card points (with that much strength it's usually possible to make 6NT on power alone) are (1) a fit with partner (2) an outside shortage (3) lots of top controls i.e. aces and kings (4) a long suit that is a potential source of tricks.

So ... on a deal from Wednesday 20 March, you hold:

♠K832  
♥AKJ53  
♦A53  
♣A

Your RHO passes as dealer and of course you open 1H. LHO also passes and partner responds 2D, promising a 5+ suit and 10+ hcp. Now what?

Partner is an unpassed hand so it's still possible she has 12+ hcp and a 4-card spade suit (with 6-11 hcp it is usually a very good idea to show a 4-card major rather than a minor suit, even if the minor suit is longer) and therefore your first bid should be 2S. This shows extra strength, although as partner has promised 10+ hcp you don't need to have the customary 16+ hcp for a reverse (a rebid of a higher-ranking suit) so perhaps you should promise 14 hcp or better.

Partner now jumps to 3NT, denying spade support and suggesting a limited (10-11 hcp) hand. Is that the end of the auction?

It shouldn't be. Your hand still has considerable slam potential, based on your extra strength and the criteria above. If partner holds something like Axx-Q-KQxxx-Jxxx you are cold for 6D even if trumps break 4-1. If partner has as little as say Qxx-xx-KQxxx-Kxx, you can still make 6D if trumps break 3-2 and partner can do something with the hearts. Really all you need is for partner to hold one keycard and you ought to be fine, unless she has something truly awful like xx-xx-KQJxxx-KQx, in which case you might lose 2 spades off the top – although given that your side has bid hearts, diamonds and spades, the most likely lead is a club, so partner might still be able to establish hearts for a discard.

What happens next in the auction, though, depends on your conventional agreements. To reach a minor suit slam, it's useful to play a convention commonly known as Minorwood (a contraction of minor suit Roman Keycard Blackwood) in which a bid of 4-of-a-minor in an uncontested auction is RKCB in that minor. In the

worst case, that allows you to sign off in 5-of-a-minor rather than arriving in a hopeless slam, which might happen if you use 4NT RKCB. The step responses are the same as for regular RKCB – so in the above auction, after 1H-2D-2S-3NT if you bid 4D, assuming you play 14/30 then partner's 4H response is not to play, it shows one keycard in diamonds.

Now you can bid 6D without much concern, and this turns out to be the full deal:

BOARD 15			
BD: 15		Dlr: S	
♥T96		Vul: NS	
♦K			
♣J9842			
♠K832		♠A7	
♥AKJ53		♥74	
♦A53		♦QJT842	
♣A		♣K73	
	♠Q96		
	♥Q82		
	♦976		
	♣QT65		
	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠	N	
		T	
N			5
S			19 10
E	3 7 7 5 7		6
W	3 7 7 5 7		

Declarer will inevitably take the losing diamond finesse, allowing the singleton ♦K to score, but making 6D is effortless.

So next time you have a hand that meets the key requirements listed at the beginning of this column, you should go sniffing for slam!

