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Bidding Slams With Voids

by [Linda Lee](#) on June 15th, 2010

I was watching a few hands played in an expert team game on BBO yesterday. At both tables the East-West pair had some problems bidding this hand.

East
♠7
♥AKQ985
♦QJ82
♣Q10

Nobody was vulnerable and South started it off with a pass. West opened with 1♦. Here is what happened at one table. Let's follow along as East.

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| | | | pass |
| 1♦ | pass | 2♥ | 2♠ |
| 3♣ | pass | 3♦ | pass |
| 3♠ | pass | 4♦ | pass |
| 5♦ | pass | ? | |

East 2♥ bid was game forcing and West 3♣ showed a good hand with diamonds and clubs. East showed diamond support and West's 3♠ bid showed a first or second round spade control. I like East's 4♦ bid. It suggests to me that East is still looking for controls. You might ask why East doesn't just bid Blackwood since if he has enough aces slam is quite a good possibility. We will see why in a minute. What would you do over 5♦?

West had bid all he had. The heart void didn't look that great. So he signed off in the diamond game. And now I think East made a mistake. He bid the slam anyway.

| | |
|---------|---------|
| West | East |
| ♠KJ2 | ♠7 |
| ♥- | ♥AKQ985 |
| ♦AK1043 | ♦QJ82 |
| ♣K9763 | ♣Q10 |

Now let's see what happened at the other table. That was the table I was watching and it was what interested me about the deal.

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| | | | pass |
| 1♦ | pass | 1♥ | 1♠ |
| 2♣ | pass | 2♠ | pass |
| 3♣ | pass | 4♦ | pass |
| 4♠ | pass | ? | |

At this table East just bid 1♥ but after West showed his clubs East created a game force with a cuebid of 2♠. Now West was able to clearly show his 5-5 hand (or even a possible 6-5 hand) by bidding 3♣. East was trying to show his slam interest and diamond fit with the 4♦ bid. West showed his spade control with a spade cuebid (which might have been important if East had two little spades). Now East had a problem. He had great cards for his partner with a fit in both minors and a source of tricks in hearts. So he bid Keycard Blackwood with 4NT. Do you see the problem?

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| | | | pass |
| 1♦ | pass | 1♥ | 1♠ |
| 2♣ | pass | 2♠ | pass |
| 3♣ | pass | 4♦ | pass |
| 4♠ | pass | 4NT | pass |
| 5♥ | pass | ! | |

East showed 2 keycards without the diamond queen. Now East knew that no slam was possible since they were missing two aces or the diamond ace and king or if he was really lucky the ♣A and the ♦K (which means the slam would be on a finesse for the ♦K at best). He really didn't want to bid the slam. As it turns out 5NT is the only contract that has a chance.

Just bidding 5NT is out. That bid is a grand slam try promising all the aces and the king and queen of trump. But in this auction I think 5♠ would have asked partner to bid 5NT to play. In different circumstances it might be a grand slam try asking about spades but that doesn't make much sense since West has already cuebid spades and it seems very unlikely that additional spade cards are needed. But there is a lot of risk in bidding 5♠ here unless you and your partner are on the same wavelength. Anyway West decided to tough it out in 5♥. If partner had one heart with his 5-5 minor suits then it would make if there was a heart split. We know that this bid didn't work out when partner turned out to have a heart void.

There are a couple of lessons to take away from this hand. First, if you bid Blackwood it is a good idea to have some place to play the hand if you are short keycards. You may want to think about how you can end up in 5NT if that is the spot you want to play.

You might also consider having some other way to ask for aces if you plan to play in a minor. Some players (me included) use four of an agreed minor as ace asking. Here 4♦ asks aces.:

| West | North | East | South |
|-----------|-------|------|-------|
| | | | pass |
| 1♦ | pass | 1♥ | 1♠ |
| 2♣ | pass | 2♠ | pass |
| 3♣ | pass | 3♦ | pass |
| 3♠ or 3NT | pass | 4♦! | |

Now when West has too few East can sign off in a safe 5♦ contract. Notice that in all cases West should not show (or even get too excited about) a void in partner's suit.