

Recognising a Slam

To make a slam, two things are essential. You must be able to win at least twelve tricks, and you must avoid losing more than one trick. It is in avoiding two losers that slam bidding differs most from ordinary game and part-score bidding.

Bidding and making a slam is exciting and wins lots of points, most of us make far more slams than we bid.

The well-known rule of thumb that a notrump slam with two balanced hands requires 33 HCP was established to insure that the opponents' combined HCP holding of 7 HCP will not include two aces (although if they hold an ace and king in the same suit, you may still lose the first two tricks).

So most of the effort in evaluating slam potential will be devoted to ensuring that as a minimum your partnership has first-round control of at least three suits and second round control of the suit which lacks first-round control.

Slam in No Trumps....Brute strength required!

33 HCP is needed as you can not include points for shortages,

Credit can be given for long suits, providing all suits are stopped

A slam in a suit can be explored if you recognise you have 30 points between you (including shape) Include points for length and shortages as this gives you an opportunity to ruff, and make up for lack of high cards. Since shape is important you can use the Losing Trick Count (LTC) method to evaluate whether a slam might be on. LTC takes account of strength, length and shortage.

The point count or LTC calculation is still not enough, you need to know how many aces you have and if possible where they are located... eg it is not much use having a void in hearts in your hand and the ace of hearts with partner as the void is wasted.

There are many systems devised to give you this information :

Blackwood and variations

Minorwood

Cue bidding for controls

Splinter bids

Gerber for no trump.....

These are just a few, there are many more advanced methods that depend on good partnership understanding

ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDINGS

Consider playing that a change of suit is forcing eg: 1H – 1S - 2C

A bid of the fourth suit should be a game force eg: 1H-1S -2C - 2D

Bids below the level of game are generally used to investigate games

Bids above 3NT are slam tries

A bid of 3NT when a major suit has been agreed is a mild slam try eg: 1H- 1S- 2C- 3H -3NT

The principle of fast arrival says that, in forcing sequences, game bids are weak

Cue Bidding Guidelines

Cue bids can only be made when your side has an agreed trump suit.

Our auction with 1♥ raised to 3♥, has clearly agreed hearts.

The partnership must be going to game. After your 3♥ raise, any bid is certain to take us to game.

A cue bid is a positive slam try. We must not make a slam try unless we mean it.

The first cue bid in a suit shows a first round control, that is either an ace or a void.(you can play the first bid shows first or second round control depending on your partnership agreement)

A second cue bid in the same suit shows second round control, either a singleton or a king.

Responder cue bids a first round control, in response to opener's cue bid. Responder's cue bid is obligatory below game, but need not be made above game if responder's hand is a minimum.

A couple of examples of cue bidding to slam:

♠ A K 9 7 3	♠ J 10 6 5 3	1S	3S
♥ 2	♥ A 7 5	4C	4D
♦ K 3	♦ A 9 7	4S	5H (even after the 4S sign off 5H is a
♣ A K Q 6 4	♣ J 7	6S	control bid knowing slam is on)

♠ A Q 5 3	♠ K J 9 8 2	1D	1S
♥ –	♥ 9 7 3	3S	4C
♦ K Q 9 8 5 3	♦ A 2	4H	5D
♣ K 7 3	♣ A 4 2	6S	

♠ Q 10 9 6 2	♠ –	1H by east to open	
♥ A 9 7 6 4	♥ K Q J 10 2	3H	3S
♦ –	♦ K 5 3	4D	6H
♣ J 5 3	♣ A K Q 10 2		

Your hand may only have seven points, but when partner opens 1♥, your hand has greatly improved. You have seven losers using the Losing Trick Count and could bid 4♥ but, with so few high cards, you might feel happier bidding just 3♥.

After your 3♥ raise, partner has a good shapely hand too and would expect slam to make PROVIDED there are not two aces to lose. Suppose partner bids 4NT. Your reply, showing one ace, indicates that there are two aces missing, but it won't say which two they are. Partner cannot tell if you hold the ♠A, which would be no use, or the ♥A or ♦A – either would be enough for slam to make.

Partner's 3♠ shows first round control of spades. Your 4♦ denies a first round club control but shows first round diamond control. Knowing that, partner controls diamonds, you might just jump to 6♥. Bidding 6♥ is good but if you look carefully you will see that all thirteen tricks can be made. But just be pleased with bidding 6♥, a slam that makes, with only 25 HCP