

Simple Slams

Chapter 2 : Some Slam Basics

With Vera Simple

For the benefit of some of our less experienced readers, I would like to go back to some basic information that will help the improving player with their slam bidding. SLAMS are only a very small part of bridge, yet there seems to be some compulsive fascination with them. From the moment learners find out what a slam is, their major bridge ambition seems to be to be able to bid and make a "Grand Slam". But Grand Slams you can easily do without at the learning and very first level of club play, even SMALL slams can be dispensed with without any great damage to your score, which is why newcomers should be taught ONLY the very basic things about slams. These are the approximate point count required for the slams (33 for 6NT and 37 for 7NT on BALANCED hands opposite each other), and how to ask for aces and kings. Even THAT is often too difficult for learners!

This series on slam bidding takes the reader from that first experience with asking for aces through to more sophisticated, yet still comparatively SIMPLE, ways to bid and make slams. ALL the hands are REAL hands that actually occurred in play, and have NOT been selected to show any CLEVER ways of bidding slams. Rather, they have been chosen to show the LOGICAL ways to bid them, and WHY they should have been bid, or NOT bid, and HOW they might have been bid with a modicum of common sense and imagination.

The slams reported are in chronological order, and you'll see that most can be bid WITHOUT many of the 'gadgets' which we will be reviewing during the course of this series. Tools which can assist slam bidding, such as GERBER, BLACKWOOD, ROMAN KEY CARD BLACKWOOD, TRUMP ASKING BIDS, TNT (Total Number of Tricks), will be reviewed during the full series as suitable hands come up, but the BASIC theme will concentrate on just TWO important features of slam bidding which we ourselves have found of immense help. Firstly, the CUE BID and secondly the principle of deciding WHO in the partnership is 'in charge' in the bidding of any given hand.

Allied to that is the factor of 'who knows something that PARTNER does not?' The simplest example is a hand like:

♠ K Q J 10 9 8 7 6 5 ♥ A K Q J ♦ VOID ♣ VOID.

You can see that all you need is the ace of spades to make a Grand Slam, but HOW do you find out about it? There ARE various methods available for finding out about specific aces not just the number of them. On this hand, knowing partner has TWO aces is still of no use to you is it? ONE and ONLY one will suffice but it MUST be the right one! To us, the answer is SIMPLE. You open with a bid of SIX SPADES. If partner has the ace of spades, surely they will bid SEVEN since it must be obvious to them that you've bid ONLY six because you expect one loser, and THEY have it covered!

Or your hand might be ♠ A Q J 10 9 8 7 6 5 ♥ A K Q J ♦ VOID ♣ VOID. Open 6S and partner, holding the KING, will also realise that it is the all important card. Try locating the king with any other methods!

Often with many other hands the answer is less obvious. But, if YOU have cards which partner can not possibly know about, but partner STILL bids strongly WITHOUT that knowledge, your hand becomes correspondingly better. We shall see how it works in practice.

Interspersed with the actual slam hands will be a series of commentaries and tips on different aspects of slam bidding and play. If any of these you find to be worth including in YOUR repertoire, then you should do so, as long as your PARTNER knows about it and neither of you forgets when the time comes! That is why we prefer to keep things simple to start with and build on the things we play in a slow and consistent manner. Much easier NOT to forget that way! Coincidentally, we start our review of slams with a couple that illustrate just what Simon and I have been talking about in our little preambles. Well, perhaps it's not 'coincidentally', because we started our slam collections with these hands because of the very fact that they seemed difficult for MOST people to bid, yet SHOULD have been easy enough. With the aid of a modicum of common sense and additional bidding armoury by way of the cue bid, let me show you how.

Dlr S EW VUL

	♠ K 9 6 3 2	
	♥ A J 10 8 4	
	♦ A 2	
	♣ 3	
♠ Q 5 4		♠ J
♥ 6 5 3		♥ Q 9 7
♦ Q 8 5 3		♦ J 7 6 4
♣ Q 7 5		♣ K J 10 9 2
	♠ A 10 8 7	
	♥ K 2	
	♦ K 10 9	
	♣ A 8 6 4	

South opened a very respectable (12-14) 1NT. North had enough for game and of course was going to bid it in the better major, so started with a bid of 3S, intending to rebid 4H if South bid 3NT. South had great spade support and without any further thought bid 4S. North was satisfied and proceeded to make SEVEN. The usual unhappy post mortem followed: "if ONLY we had been playing TRANSFERS" or "Why didn't you ask for aces" and more of that nonsense. Yes, had NS been playing transfers, then North would have bid 2H as a transfer, intending to then bid 4H. SOUTH, had they been playing the 'super accept', would then have bid THREE spades instead of just two, but why should North get excited even opposite a 14 count and four spades? Two losers were a distinct possibility anyway. Of course if NS had ALSO been playing CUE BIDS, North could THEN have instigated a cue bidding sequence after South's 3S. But let's look first at how WE would have bid to the SMALL slam in spades with our 'SIMPLE' way of bidding.

Over North's 3S, South would bid 4C. NO, NOT asking for aces since that is NOT South's prerogative, having limited their hand to a maximum 14 HCP in the first place. 4C says: "I have a MAXIMUM with GREAT trump support and the ACE of clubs. (Note that the FIRST cue bid should always be FIRST round control. You can have other agreements for whether you then cue bid first OR second round controls, or just bid them in order, first round first then second round, but more of that at a later stage). North is now VERY interested, not because of their preponderance of high card points but by virtue of their shape. North bids 4D, also showing interest and diamond control. If showing first round controls first, South would not be able to now bid 4H as a further

cue, but when South 'signs off' in 4S, North knows enough to make a further try with a bid of 5C. South now has both the king of diamonds and king of hearts which they haven't shown yet. Hence south bids 5NT. This also should be clear enough to North. Now North can place South with the aces of clubs and spades and the two red kings. Clearly, that's ALL South can have, so the GRAND slam is out of the question since THAT would require South to have four spades with the suit breaking 2-2, as well as no heart losers. Not impossible and maybe worth a shot if you're desperate enough, but the art on this particular hand was merely to reach the SMALL slam, which nearly the whole field managed to miss, and that happened in the top grade at a 'top' club.

(hands repeated for convenience)

Dlr S EW VUL

	♠ K 9 6 3 2	
	♥ A J 10 8 4	
	♦ A 2	
	♣ 3	
♠ Q 5 4		♠ J
♥ 6 5 3		♥ Q 9 7
♦ Q 8 5 3		♦ J 7 6 4
♣ Q 7 5		♣ K J 10 9 2
	♠ A 10 8 7	
	♥ K 2	
	♦ K 10 9	
	♣ A 8 6 4	

East led a low diamond, to dummy's nine, West's queen and declarer's ace. A trump to dummy's ace and declarer noted the jack from East. When dummy's seven was led and West played low, declarer let it run. There were two very good reasons for doing so. Firstly, had the seven lost to East's queen, the trumps would have broken and declarer could now safely ruff two hearts, thereby surely setting the fifth heart up. Secondly, the 'theory of restricted choice'. This mysterious theory tells us that if either opponent drops the queen OR jack when both those cards are missing, the odds are that they do NOT have the other card. WHY? Because given that with BOTH they are likely to play one OR the other at random, or by choice, when they produce one of them, the odds are that they had NO choice as to which one to play and therefore do NOT have the other one. Personally, I prefer to look at it a different way: if I'm looking for two missing cards, i.e. specifically the queen and jack, the odds are that they are NOT in the same hand. After all, the cards are as they were dealt in the first place, not according to one opponent's choice of which card they play or not! Call me SIMPLE if you like! In a field of 24 pairs, only TWO bid 6S and made seven, for an equal top!