

Simple Slams
Chapter 3 : Strong Hands and Responses
 With Vera Simple

I would now like to revisit a Bridgefun magazine issue of some time ago. A good deal of discussion was generated, with differences of opinion as to how the slams should have been bid, and to what level. Here are the hands and what “Von Impski” had to say about them, along with a couple of comments from me.

BOARD 3 DEALER SOUTH E-W VUL

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

Von Impski: I fail to see how any reasonable pair of bidders could bid to anything but 7NT on the EW hands, but not one pair bid to either 7H or 7NT in our teams evening. When West opens 1C, East jump shifts to 2H and West rebids 2NT which, in ACOL, shows 15-16 HCP! (If you play a 15-17 1NT opening, as many people do these days, the bidding is even easier because West opens 1NT). East bids 4NT and West shows two aces with a bid of 5H, then East asks for kings, West showing ONE with a bid of 6D. That accounts for 11 HCP and 12 tricks ‘off the top’. You should be able to count to 12 easily enough: eight hearts, three aces, and one king. But West must have MORE than

just two aces and one king. Can West have a 15-16 count where 13 tricks would NOT eventuate somehow? If East is a pessimist, East might choose 7H rather than 7NT because 7H must have more chances than 7NT. As it is, there are fourteen top tricks in either contract.

Any new player who cannot master the art of slam bidding with hands like these MUST put some work into slam bidding. Such laydown 7NT hands don’t come up very often.

My comment: when I learnt about slam bidding, my mentor taught me that if you ask for aces with 4NT and then ask for kings with 5NT, you must NOT be missing any aces. The ask for kings is done because you are looking for a GRAND slam. You cannot be looking for a grand slam if you are missing an ace, can you? Therefore, when the above hand is being bid and EITHER West or East is doing the asking, when the bid of 5NT is made, the partner KNOWS the asker is looking for a grand slam. WEST has two tricks that East cannot know about, and EAST has, well, ANY number of extra tricks. East can show this by bidding 7H, and West can do this by bidding 6NT (ostensibly showing four kings, which is what the hand is worth. East will almost certainly have one king anyway, so West’s response will be unambiguous. With the initial 2NT rebid, East will work out that West has a solid four card club suit, or AKQ10 at worst. But, as with all bridge things, you must have a trusting partnership that understands each other, or at least has been taught the same things!

BOARD 8 DEALER West Nil VUL

NORTH

♠ A 8
♥ A K J 4 2
♦ A
♣ A K 10 9 3

WEST

♠ J 10 9 7 5
♥
♦ K J 9 6 5
♣ 7 5 4

EAST

♠ K Q 4 2
♥ 10 7 6
♦ Q 10 7
♣ Q J 8

SOUTH

♠ 6 3
♥ Q 9 8 5 3
♦ 8 4 3 2
♣ 6 2

Von Impski: While we're on the subject of slams, here is one that got away from many NS pairs. In fact only two of ten pairs in our teams contest managed to bid to 6H, which made seven.

It should be reasonably easy to bid to 6H. North has a hand good enough to be in game, irrespective of what partner has. Count your LOSERS. Given that either hearts or clubs is chosen as trumps, a reasonable expectation is one loser in each, plus a spade. That is good enough to want to be in game. Nobody will disagree with a game forcing 2C opening (and you will see why it is better to open 2C with a game forcing hand than to open 2D).

South of course responds a negative 2D. Now North bids 2H, which is still 100% forcing, because after a 2C opening ONLY a 2NT rebid, showing 23-24 HCP, can be passed. NS are now in a GAME FORCING situation. South bids 4H. This shows very LITTLE but does show trump support and enough to be sure that game will make. That's all. With any other hand including a five card suit like that and nothing else, South would bid 2NT, a 'second negative'.

The bid of 4H should be ALL that North needs to hear to warrant bidding a slam. NOW there will be NO heart losers, and that reduces the losers to just TWO: a spade and a club. Now let's look at these losers. The spade loser seems unavoidable unless partner has a KING (still possible on the bidding) or the QJ of spades, and the finesse works, or QJx of diamonds and the RUFFING FINESSE works (as long as there are sufficient entries to dummy). The clubs? If partner has the QUEEN (QUITE possible on the bidding) then there are no club losers. If partner has the JACK, a club FINESSE may be all that is required. AND if partner has FEWER THAN THREE clubs, then, because of partner's trump support, the losing clubs should be able to be ruffed out, setting up the remaining clubs for declarer.

As you can see, clubs in fact CAN be set up, and declarer is able to dispose of spades from dummy and then ruff the spade loser. Thanks to the superb five card trump support and doubleton diamond, declarer makes SEVEN! But if you THINK about it, after the raise to 4H, the ONLY bad dummy that declarer can find is one with THREE SMALL clubs and no kings and no QJ combination in spades or diamonds. Realistically, if you count your losers, partner's raise to 4H has reduced them to ONE in MOST cases, and even when dummy DOES have three small, you may receive a diamond lead from shortage, thus helping pick up the QJ, or pick up the QJ yourself.

My Comment: COUNTING LOSERS, and not points, is a far more profitable exercise when bidding slams. Once you try it, and have an understanding with partner as to what partner's raises in your suit MEAN in game forcing situations, you'll start profiting from bidding good slams, and avoiding bad ones. And if you think this is all too difficult for you, why not try and deal out a few hands for yourself with the five hearts to the queen and different combinations. Then follow the reasoning and play them out!