



## Control-Showing Bids

### SHOWING CONTROLS AFTER 2/1

Once the trump suit has been agreed, the bid of another suit is a control-showing bid with interest in slam.

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

OPENER	RESPONDER
1♠	2♦ ★
2♠	3♠
?	

The Blackwood convention only tells us *how many* aces and kings partner holds. **If we need to know *which* aces and kings partner holds, we must use control-showing bids.** Control-showing bids also help us deal with voids and singletons.

### CONTROLS IN A SUIT CONTRACT

First-round: Ace or void  
Second-round: King or singleton

### Control-Showing Process

Showing controls takes a different approach to slam bidding than Blackwood. Instead of asking partner about the number of aces held, we show an ace — or some other control — that we hold. In turn, partner is expected to show a control, and the auction continues until the partnership discovers whether there are enough controls to bid a slam.

### Recognizing a Control Bid

How do we know when we're into a control-showing situation in a 2/1 auction? Once the partnership has agreed on **WHERE**, the only remaining question is **HOW HIGH**: Game or Slam? If we aren't interested in slam, we simply stop in game in the agreed trump suit. So:

Playing 2/1, responder's 2♦ bid is a marathon bid (★), forcing to game. After responder raises to 3♠, the trump suit has been agreed. Opener has enough to take the partnership to slam, but using Blackwood right now won't help. Responder will show one ace, and whether opener stops in 5♠ or continues to 6♠, the partnership is too high. The defenders can take the first three heart tricks.

**Before taking over the captaincy and using Blackwood, opener should be reasonably sure the partnership has at least second-round control in every suit.** Opener knows that's the case in spades, diamonds, and clubs, but needs to find out whether responder has either first- or second-round control in hearts. So opener initiates a control-showing sequence:

OPENER	RESPONDER
1♠	2♦ ★
2♠	3♠
4♣ ← Control Bid	4♦ ← Control Bid
4♠	Pass

With no interest in slam, opener would simply bid 4♠ once spades have been agreed upon. So opener's

4♣ bid is a control-showing bid. Responder cooperates with a control-showing bid of 4♦. Opener doesn't have a control in the heart suit, so opener returns to the agreed trump suit, 4♠. Responder also doesn't have a control in the heart suit and doesn't want to venture beyond game, so responder passes and the partnership stops safely at the game level.

### Stopping the Process

How does responder know opener's 4♠ bid isn't a further control-showing bid? The partnership needs a way to stop below slam when it doesn't have the required controls, so **the trump suit is not included when showing controls.** A return to the trump suit says, "I have nothing further to show." It doesn't necessarily end the auction. Partner may still have more to say, but it does allow the partnership to stop in a game contract.

There are other ways to stop the control-showing process. With enough information, either player may simply jump to the slam level. Or either player may switch to the Blackwood convention by bidding 4NT.

### STOPPING THE CONTROL-SHOWING PROCESS

The partnership can stop the control-showing process by:

- Returning to the agreed trump suit.
- Jumping to slam.
- Bidding Blackwood.

Why use Blackwood after the partnership has been showing controls?

- Controls in the trump suit are not included in the control-showing process. Blackwood may still be needed to confirm that the partnership has enough controls.
- There may be some ambiguity between first- and second-round controls. Blackwood can be used to clarify the situation.

Let's modify the earlier hands to see how effective control-showing can be.

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

OPENER	RESPONDER
1♠	2♦ ★
2♠	3♠
4♣	4♥
4NT	5♦
6♠	Pass

After the trump suit has been agreed with responder's raise to 3♠, opener makes a move toward slam with the 4♣ bid. Responder cooperates by bidding 4♥. That's exactly what opener wanted to hear. There's no longer a concern that the opponents can take the first two heart tricks, so opener bids Blackwood to confirm that the partnership isn't missing two aces, and confidently goes to slam when responder shows an ace.

Control-showing bids followed by Blackwood will often work when an early jump to Blackwood needs to be avoided.

### Guidelines for Controls

The control-showing process can be challenging. It requires both partners to be on the same wavelength. Here are some useful agreements:

- Once the control-showing process is initiated, partner is expected to cooperate below the game level, even with a minimum hand.
- Controls are rarely shown if they take the partnership beyond game.
- Both first- and second-round controls can be shown.
- Controls are typically shown 'up the line.'
- Controls are not shown in the agreed trump suit. Blackwood must be used to check on the total number of aces and kings held by the partnership.

Let's take a closer look in this issue at the first two guidelines.

### Cooperation

If partner makes a move toward slam with a control-showing bid, do we *have* to cooperate? Obviously if we have extra values, we want to help get to slam. We might even take charge and use Blackwood. After all, if partner is interested in slam and we are also interested, what's stopping us?

However, if we don't have extra values, do we have to make a control-showing bid once partner starts the process? In general, **we cooperate with partner below the game level when we have something useful to show**, even when we have no extra values.

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

OPENER	RESPONDER
1♠	2♥ ★
3♥	4♣ ← Control Bid
4♦ ← Control Bid	4NT ← Control Bid
5♥	5NT
6♣	6♥
Pass	

After agreeing on hearts as the trump suit, responder shows interest in slam with a control-showing bid of 4♣. Although opener has no extra values, showing the ♦A doesn't take the partnership beyond game.

It turns out that a diamond control is exactly what responder was looking for. Now responder can safely use Blackwood to check for aces. When the partnership has all the aces, responder can even make a try for a grand slam by asking about kings. When opener shows none, responder settles for a small slam.

### Avoid Control-Bidding Beyond Game

With rare exceptions, avoid making a control-showing bid that takes the partnership beyond game. When bidding beyond game, the default action is to bid Blackwood to check for aces and kings.

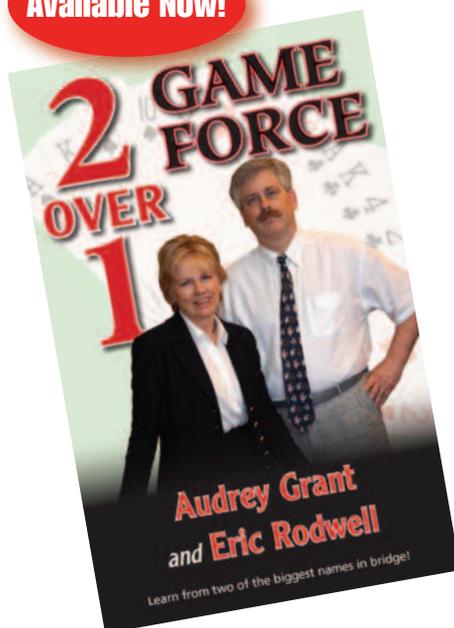
OPENER	RESPONDER
♠ A K 9 7 3	♠ Q 6
♥ Q J 5	♥ A K 10 8 6 3
♦ 8 7 5	♦ J 4 2
♣ K 6	♣ A Q

OPENER	RESPONDER
1♠	2♥ ★
3♥	4♣ ← Control Bid
?	

If opener continues the control-showing process by bidding 4♠, the partnership will get too high. So opener simply returns to 4♥, leaving any further move to responder. Here, responder passes, knowing that the partnership doesn't have a control in diamonds.

(To be continued) 

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