



Adventures in Bridge

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This Week in Bridge

(159) Gerber and 1430 Keycard

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Level: 1, 2, 4

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General

When we have lots of HCP or tricks, or both, we are interested in slam. But we want to avoid slam if we have two “likely losers”. Gerber is designed to keep us out of slam in Notrump contracts when we are missing two Aces. Keycard Blackwood is designed to keep us out of slam in trump suit contracts when we have two likely losers, or when we are missing two of the 6 important cards – the 4 Aces and the King and Queen of trump.

Gerber

Level: 1

Gerber is our Ace-asking convention after notrump has been bid. “Asker” uses 4♣ to ask the Notrump bidder, the “shower”, how many Aces they hold. Here is how it works:

Example

1NT 4♣

—?

- 4♦ 0 or 4 Aces (Partner has to figure it out from context.)
- 4♥ 1 Ace
- 4♠ 2 Aces
- 4NT 3 Aces

When is 4♦ Gerber?

Level: 1

Determining when 4♦ is Gerber requires some good partnership agreements. Partnerships must agree whether they play “lots of Gerber” or a “little bit of Gerber”.

Example Sequences where 4♣ is Gerber

1NT 4♣ Gerber

1X 1Y
 1NT 4♣ Gerber

2NT 4♣ Gerber

1X 1Y
 2NT 4♣ Gerber

1X 2Y
 2NT 4♣ Gerber

Most partnerships also play the following auction as Gerber:

1NT 2♣
 2♦ 4♣ Gerber

More complex Gerber agreements come over 3NT rebids. Then, the question of whether 4♣ is Gerber is generally a matter of partnership agreement - is this 4♣ bid to be played as Gerber, natural, a splinter, or a control-showing cuebid?

Advice for Gerber Rules/Agreements

Examples of possible Gerber agreements:

- 4♣ Gerber over First or Last NT
- 4♣ Gerber over First or Last NT and Always a Jump
- 4♣ Gerber over First or Last NT when not another specific meaning (Natural, Splinter, Cuebid)

This third option is the preferred choice for when 4♣ should be Gerber.

Here is an example of a reasonable, but more complex Gerber sequence.

Example

1♠ 2♥
 3NT 4♣ Gerber?

If we choose to play “lots of Gerber” then we will play this sequence as Gerber. Otherwise, we may treat this 4♣ bid as natural.

The key is for you and partner to come to an agreement about the Gerber rules and make sure that you stay on the same page in the bidding.

1430 Keycard Blackwood

Level: 1

Keycard Blackwood is our convention for keeping us out of bad trump suit slams. It helps us not bid a slam when we have two potential losers out of the important cards.

So here is how it works – we promote the King of trump to a fifth Ace, or “Keycard”. We treat the Queen as an extra card that we want to find out about as well. If we are missing two out of these six cards, then we usually do not want to bid a slam.

Once you learn the difference between Keycard and traditional Blackwood, the reasons that Keycard Blackwood is a better slam tool than Blackwood should be obvious – one suit (trump) is more important than the others and thus should be given much greater emphasis. So, in this important suit (the “Key Suit”) we want to know about more than just the Ace – we want to know about the King and Queen as well.

Note: The 1430 name comes from the steps in the bidding, but also from the score for bidding and making 6M, Vulnerable. +1430!

Example

1♠ 3♠

4NT ?

- 5♣ 1 or 4 Keycards
- 5♦ 3 or 0 Keycards
- 5♥ 2 Keycards without the Queen
- 5♠ 2 Keycards with the Queen

Queen Ask

Level: 1

When partner shows 5♣ or 5♦, we do not know if they hold of the Queen of trump. This may be important information for us to determine if slam is a good contract. We “ask for the Queen” by making the cheapest available bid that is not our trump suit. (If asker rebids the trump suit, that is to play.)

After this “Queen Ask,” shower’s rebids are as follows:

- Without the Queen, rebid the trump suit as cheaply as possible.
- With the Queen, start showing Kings (more on this below).



Showing Kings after an Ace-Asking (or Keycard) Auction

Level: 1

If the asker, the player that bid 4NT, is interested in a Grand Slam then more information may be needed to determine if this is possible. Now that Aces (or Keycards) have been described, the asker needs to know about outside Kings. In both Gerber and 1430 Keycard auctions, Kings can be shown either by *Number of Kings* or *Specific Kings*. Number of Kings is the simplest approach and what we shall look at first.

Number of Kings

Level: 1

When playing number of Kings, the shower describes their hand in steps, similar to showing their Aces.

Example – Gerber Number of Kings

1NT 4♣ Gerber
4♥ 5♣ Asks for Kings

—?

- 5♦ 0 or 4 Kings
- 5♥ 1 King
- 5♠ 2 Kings
- 5NT 3 Kings

Example – 1430 Keycard Number of Kings

1♠ 3♠
4NT 5♥
5NT —?
• 6♣ 0 or 4 Kings
• 6♦ 1 King
• 6♥ 2 Kings
• 6♠ 3 Kings

Specific Kings

Level: 2

Having the answering partner describe their specific Kings is a better approach than number of Kings because often a grand slam depends on which King answerer has, not just how many Kings.

Example of Specific Kings - Bid “Cheapest King”

1♠ 3♠

4NT 5♥

5NT __?

- 6♣ ♣K (could have other Kings)
- 6♦ ♦K, no ♣K
- 6♥ ♥K, no ♣K or ♦K
- 6♠ No Kings

After a relatively cheap bid, like 6♣ or 6♦ in the above example, the asker can bid another suit to ask the shower to bid a grand slam with that King.

Example - Further King Ask

1♠ 3♠

4NT 5♥

5NT 6♣

6♥ This says bid the grand slam with the ♥K and stop in 6♠ without it.

Specific Kings can be played in both Gerber and 1430 Keycard auctions. Whichever method of King showing you choose to play, Number of Kings or Specific Kings, it is best to play the same style in Gerber auctions and 1430 Auctions.

Advanced Topic - Queen Ask 5♠

Level: 4

When ♥ is the trump suit and answerer's answer to 4NT is 5♦, then there is no space to ask for the Queen of trump and keep the auction below 5♥. In this case, the asking partner must guess when thinking about bidding a small slam. But if asker is interested in playing in a Grand Slam, then 5♠ (the first "available" bid) is used to ask for the Queen.

Answerer answers as follows:

- Without the Queen, answerer bids 6♥.
- With the Queen, answerer bids their cheapest King (playing Specific Kings).
 - 5NT bid shows the trump Queen with no outside Kings.
- When the answerer has the ♥Q and only the ♠K, then they must use their judgment about whether to bypass 6♥ and show the ♠K with a 6♦ bid. They must believe that this will be enough to make either 6NT or 7♥ a good contract.

Advanced Topic – King Ask 5♠

Level: 4

When playing Specific Kings, if ♥ is the trump suit and the answer to 4NT Keycard ask is either 5♦ or 5♥, then the 5♠ bid can be used to start the King Ask at a lower level. This allows for answerer to be able to describe their Kings at a lower level. Specifically, the answerer can now show the ♠K below 6♥.

Example

1♠ 3♠

4NT 5♥

5♠ __?

- 5NT ♠K (may have other Kings, Asker can ask in traditional way)
- 6♣ ♣K, no ♠K
- 6♦ ♦K, no ♠K and no ♣K
- 6♥ No Kings

This use of 5♠ allows asker to find out about the ♠K and can be useful when this is the card most needed to bid a grand slam.

Note: If there is a conflict about what the meaning of the 5♠ bid is, a Queen Ask or a Specific King Ask, then the Queen Ask takes priority because 5NT can still be used to ask for Specific Kings.

Conclusion

Gerber and 1430 Keycard are good bidding tools for keeping us out of bad slams; use them when you think that slam is likely!