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This Week in Bridge

(175) Control-Showing Cuebids and Grand Slam Force

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Level: 2, 3, 4

Robert S. Todd

robert@advinbridge.com

General

When choosing to explore slam by making a Control-Showing Cuebid we discover (or share) detailed information about holdings in suits outside the trump suit. After using this tool to exchange some outside information below 4NT, we have to make a decision about how to proceed – stop in game, bid 4NT Keycard, or continue cuebidding beyond game. Here we discuss these options in detail.

Keycarding After Cuebidding

Level: 2, 3

When we have used a Control-Showing Cuebid and have nothing else to say (no extra values to show to partner) then we usually stop in game by bidding 4-Major or passing partner's 4-Major bid. But when we have further slam interest, then we can continue exploring slam. One way we do this is with 4NT Keycard.

Examples

With hands like these we may choose to continue the auction with 4NT and ask partner about their Keycards.

1. ♠ AK984	2. ♠ QT764
♥ 4	♥ A
♦ 32	♦ 76
♣ AKJ76	♣ AKQJ3

1♠ 3♠
4♣ 4♦
4NT

Once partner cuebids 4♦, showing control in the diamond suit, we know that we have control of all the suits and can use 4NT to check if partner has what we need for slam (ex 1 – ♠K ♦AK, ex 2 – ♠AK, ♦A).

4NT Keycard is useful to ensure that we are not bidding a slam missing two Aces (or Keycards) and that our combined trump holding is not too weak (missing a Keycard and the trump Queen usually makes for a bad slam.)

Cuebidding Beyond 4NT

Level: 2, 3

Sometimes after our first cuebid (and partner's response) we still do not know about having control in the vital suit. In this case, we may choose to continue cuebidding (even at the 5-level), instead of bidding 4NT Keycard. Another reason we may avoid using 4NT is that we hold a void and if we bid 4NT we may not yet know which Ace we are missing.

Example

♠ AKQ93

♥ 6

♦ Q4

♣ AKJ83

1♠ 3♠

4♣ 4♥

5♣ 5♦

6♠

Since cuebidding at the 5-level is choosing to not use Keycard (which helps us find out about partner's trump holding) we will usually have a strong trump holding.

5NT Grand Slam Force

Level: 4

When we have set the trump suit and cuebid to the 5-level then we can subsequently use 5NT to check on partner's trump holding to try for a grand slam. Our focus is on how many of the top three honors partner has in the trump suit.

Note: This is one of the worst names of a convention in bridge. It is a way to invite/explore a grand slam, so calling it Grand Slam Force (GSF) makes little sense, but that is the nature of some bridge convention names.

Example

With this hand we want to be in a grand slam of 7♠ if partner has the ♠K in addition to the ♦AK.

♠ AQ8743

♥ --

♦ QJT94

♣ AK

1♠ 3♠

4♣ 4♦

4♥ 4♠

5♣ 5♦

5NT 7♠

Responses to 5NT Grand Slam Force

Level: 4

When ♠, ♥, or ♦ are the trump suit, we have bidding space below our suit at the 6-level available to describe our trump holding. Our responses to partner's 5NT asks are about how many of the top 3 honors in the trump suit we hold. (Note: 1/3 means "one out of the top three".)

1♠ 3♠

5NT __?

- 6♣ 0/3 honors
- 6♦ 1/3 honors
- 7-level 2/3 honors

These answers to GSF are the same when ♥ or ♦ is the trump suit.

When ♣ is the trump suit, we do not have as much room to show our hand below a small slam. In this case we can show:

1♣ 5♣

5NT __?

- 6♣ 0/3 or 1/3 honors
- 7♣ 2/3 honors

If you believe that 6NT is a safe final contract, then you can bid 6♦ to show 1/3 honors.

Advanced GSF Responses in a Major Suit

Level: 4

Some partnerships try to make use of the extra space that is available when a Major suit is trump to describe their top honor holding in even more detail by playing an even more detailed set of responses.

1♥ 3♥

5NT ___?

- 6♣ 0/3 honors
- 6♦ Queen Only
- 6♥ Ace or King Only
- 7-level 2/3 honors

Conclusion

Control-Showing Cuebids are valuable tools for helping us visualize partner's hand. Choosing to use them or understanding when to continue using them, stop in game, or bid 4NT Keycard is a delicate skill that requires some experience. When we do choose to cuebid beyond 4NT (cuebid at the 5-level) then we can later use 5NT to ask about partner's trump holding to try to reach a grand slam.