



Adventures in Bridge

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This Week in Bridge

(228) Preempt Keycard

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Level: 5

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General

When partner opens the bidding with a 2-level or 3-level preemptive opening bid then Responder may have a struggle to find the best final contract without getting the auction too high. One of the natural pressures is “should Responder risk going past 3NT” in order to look for a fit or a better fit. If Responder has an extremely strong hand then they may be interested in exploring slam in preemptor’s suit, but again Responder may face a concern about getting the auction too high. If Responder uses 4NT as Keycard Blackwood to explore slam, then the partnership may get too high and go down. Given the variability of modern preempts it can be dangerous to reach the 5-level when partner has taken an aggressive action. Here we look at a tool, called *Preempt Keycard*, for Responder to ask for Keycards after a preempt, but still keep the auction at a low level.

Preempt Keycard After a Weak-Two Bid

In constructing a new tool to ask for Keycards opposite a preempt we will make 2 major changes to the traditional way that we do this. First, in an effort to keep the auction below game we will use 4♣ to ask for Keycards instead of 4NT. Thus, the responses will be lower and if we do not like what partner shows then we can usually stop in game, not a level higher. Second, we will change our Keycard steps from 1430 to something that makes more when partner has preempted the bidding. It does not make sense for partner to have a way to show 3 or 4 Keycards after they preempt the bidding.

Here is our new Preempt Keycard structure:

2♦/2♥/2♠ 4♣*

- 4♦ 0 Keycards (first available bid, not our suit, asks Opener for the trump Queen)
- 4♥ 1 Keycard without the trump Queen
- 4♠ 1 Keycard with the trump Queen
- 4NT 2 Keycards without the trump Queen
- 5♣ 2 Keycards with the trump Queen.

To summarize the steps are 0, 1 w/o the Queen, 1 w/ the Queen, 2 w/o the Queen, 2 w/ the Queen, usually just written 01122.

Delayed Preempt Keycard

We play this 4C Preempt Keycard directly over a 2-level preempt or after Responder has used to 2NT to ask Opener for more information about their hand. This is the same whether we play Feature, Ogust, or even something more complex.

Example

2♥ 2NT
3♦ 4♣

This 4♣ bid is Keycard in ♥ and the step responses are 01122.

Preempt Keycard After a 3-Level Preempt

We can continue the advantage of this system after partner opens a 3♦, 3♥, or 3♠. In each of these cases an immediate 4♣ bid by Responder bid Keycard and again we play 01122 steps.

Example

3♠ 4♣
4♥ 4♣

Here is a common auction where Responder tries for slam and when they find out that partner preempted with only 1 Keycard and no Queen they choose to stop in 4♠.

If partner opens the bidding with a 3♣ preempt we need to be able to use 4♣ to extend the preempt and put more pressure on the opponents. In this case, we use 4♦ as a Preempt Keycard ask:

3♣ 4♦*

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- 4♥ Zero Keycards (first available bid, not our suit, asks opener for the trump Queen)
 - 4♠ 1 Keycard without the trump Queen
 - 4NT 1 Keycard with the trump Queen
 - 5♣ 2 Keycards without the trump Queen
 - 5♦ 2 Keycards with the trump Queen

Asking for Kings

After using either 4♣ or 4♦ to ask for Keycards then the first bid that is “free” (not our suit, nor asking for the trump Queen in the zero case) is used to ask for *Specific Kings*.

Example

3♠ 4♣

4♥ 4NT

4♥ showed 1 Keycard w/o the trump Queen. In this case 4♠ would be to play. 4NT is now the specific King ask.

Conclusion

This 4♣ Preempt Keycard ask, with 01122 steps, is a much more efficient way to explore slam after Opener starts the auction with a preempt. We give up a natural 4♣ bid, not a common action, for a slam try that will allow us to stay at a low level, usually being able to stop in 4-Major if partner does not have a good Keycard holding. Give this change a try and see if you can find ways to explore slam on those hands that you were otherwise afraid to risk getting too high.