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# The Coolest Gizmos and Gadgets

## Key card confirmation: an interactive moment

One of the most popular forms of Blackwood is Roman Key Card, which elevates the status of the king of trumps to that of an ace. Thus, the responses reflect a total of five key cards, not four aces. After the initial response is made, the asker will face one of these situations: he is missing too many key cards to continue; he is missing one key card and needs to ask about the queen of trumps; he is missing one key card but has the queen of trumps himself; he has all five key cards but does not know about the queen of trumps; or ... drum roll please ... he has all five key cards *and* the queen of trumps. That last case is the one we are going to talk about.

If you have heard the phrase, "the asker always asks and the teller always tells," you should know that it applies to the early stages of the ace-asking process. I bid 4NT. I am the asker. You respond number of key cards (or aces). You are the teller. I ask you to cuebid your kings up the line. I am still the asker. You tell me which specific king you have. You are the teller. You understand.

Here is a hand that a player held many years ago. He opened 1♥ with:

♠A J ♥A Q J 7 6 2 ♦A 5 4 ♣10 7.

His partner responded 2♣ (game forcing). He rebid 2♥ and his partner raised to 3♥. Looking for slam, he bid 4NT (Key Card Blackwood). His partner answered 5♥ (two key cards without the queen of trumps). He thought about a grand and asked for specific kings (up the line): 5NT. Partner bid 6♣ (showing the ♣K). He now asked for the ♦K by bidding 6♦.

Having neither the ♦K nor the ♠K, responder dutifully signed off in 6♥. Here was responder's hand:

♠7 5 ♥K 10 8 ♦J 3 ♣A K Q J 6 4.

A sad ending: They were too low. (They had not read this article!)

On most ace-asking auctions, this asking/telling conversation results in the asker placing the final contract. But in the exciting case of the asker finding out that the partnership owns all five key cards and the queen of trumps, the asker makes a bid that removes the straightjacket the teller has been wearing. All of a sudden, the teller has permission to leap to a grand slam without responding to the king-ask question like a robot. This might be one of the best opportunities that the aspiring player/partnership overlooks. Why? Because it might be undiscussed. It might be misunderstood. It might just be plain shocking. "I never knew I could do that!" Yes, you can, and this is why.

The only time the asker will ask for kings is when he *knows* he has all five key cards and the queen of trumps. (If there is no agreed trump suit in the auction, then asker has all four aces.) By asking for kings (either up the line or simple number of kings), asker is

also *telling* partner that he can confirm all five key cards and the queen of trumps (or all four aces if you are not playing Key Card Blackwood). Therefore, if the teller happens to have a side source of tricks, knowing that the partnership has all the first-round controls, instead of making the robotic king-showing response, he simply bids the grand, right on the spot! No need to answer kings.

If teller has a side suit such as K-Q-J-10-x, the queen, jack and 10 will take tricks just like every other ace and king because he knows partner has the ace of that suit. In fact, if teller answers to the king-ask and *does not* jump to seven, asker should assume that teller *does not* have a side source of tricks.

Playing 2/1 game forcing, you pick up:  
♠A J 2 ♥7 5 ♦K 2 ♣K Q J 10 7 4.

Partner opens 1♠. You respond 2♣. Partner says 2♠. You bid 3♠. Partner says 4NT. You respond 5♦ (one or four key cards). Partner says 5NT. What do you bid now? That's right: Give partner 7NT. Forget about spades. Don't risk a ruff. Partner has all the aces and the ♠Q. Must be cold. You rate to have 15 top tricks.

Remember, the asker *never* asks for kings unless the partnership has all the key cards (or aces). That is a solemn rule that cannot be violated. It is a must for this interactive moment to come to life. When I learned about this, bridge became much more exciting. The first few times I jumped to a grand as the teller it was thrilling. My results improved. I know you will be paying more attention the next time a key card auction develops. This gizmo needs a catchy name. Any ideas?