



*Marty Bergen*  
[www.martybergen.com](http://www.martybergen.com)

### The 10 commandments of good slam bidding — part 3

Last month, we looked at No. 2: High-card points are not the key. Some hands must be downgraded while some must be upgraded. This deal is an example of one that must be downgraded:

♠ K Q J  
 ♥ A J 6  
 ♦ 7 6 5 3  
 ♣ A Q J

♠ A 7  
 ♥ K Q 5 2  
 ♦ K 8 4 2  
 ♣ K 9 6

North	South
6NT	1NT
	Pass

North added up 33 HCP, and jumped to 6NT. What could be easier? Unfortunately, taking 12 tricks was impossible. Even if East had the ♦ A, 6NT had no chance. South can score only four hearts, three spades, three clubs and one diamond.

North's hand was not worth 18 HCP. Not only did he have the worst possible distribution, but his four-card suit was awful. In addition, North held five overrated quacks (queens and

# Better Bridge with Bergen

jacks) as opposed to two underrated aces. Therefore, he should downgrade his hand and invite slam by bidding 4NT, and South would pass.

The other side of the coin is that some hands must be upgraded:

♠ 5 3  
 ♥ A 8 3  
 ♦ A Q 10 7  
 ♣ A Q J 10

♠ A 7  
 ♥ K Q 5 2  
 ♦ K 8 4 2  
 ♣ K 9 6

North	South
6NT	1NT
	Pass

Although South has the same hand he had before, this time 6NT is a great contract. A traditional point-counter would value the North hand as 17 HCP, but I'm sure that you realize that this North hand is significantly stronger than the one in the first deal.

North loves his two quality four-card suits and so adds 1 point for each of them. It's no surprise that 6NT is an odds-on favorite to make.

Here's a deal where North-South didn't have "enough" points. Their auction, however, makes sense to me. Isn't logic what bridge is all about?

♠ A K 7 5  
 ♥ K Q 7 6 5  
 ♦ 4  
 ♣ A 5 4

♠ Q J 10 9 4 3  
 ♥ A 2  
 ♦ J 10 8  
 ♣ 7 2

North	South
2NT <sup>(1)</sup>	2♠
6♠	3♥
	Pass

(1) Asks for a feature.

North-South had no problem reaching the excellent slam. Once South opened 2♠, North realized that if South had the ♥ A, 6♥ was "in the cards." North didn't care how many points his side held. He was too busy picturing partner discarding club loser(s) on dummy's hearts after drawing trumps.

Not every player can picture partner's hand during the bidding. On many auctions, especially with balanced hands, no one can do it. You might find the following idea helpful. Bidding can be thought of as playing out the hand in advance.

Just to emphasize that you may not need many high-card points to make a slam, try this teaser:

*Question:* What are the fewest number of HCP needed for a pair to make a grand slam, assuming favorable breaks in relevant suits?

*Answer:* It is possible to make a grand slam with 5 HCP. An example:

♠ —  
 ♥ 8 7 6 5 4  
 ♦ 5 4 3 2  
 ♣ 5 4 3 2

♠ 8 7 6 5 4 3 2  
 ♥ A J 10 9 3 2  
 ♦ —  
 ♣ —

As long as hearts split 1-1 and spades divide no worse than 4-2, South can set up spades and make 7♥. □