

Better Bridge with Bergen



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The joy of slams – part 1

You pick up the following hand:

♠ K Q 7 6 2 ♥ Q 7 4 2 ♦ K Q 4 ♣ A.

You open 1♠ and partner jumps to 3♠, promising a limit raise with at least four-card support. The question is: Are you interested in slam?

In May 2008, I asked 60 experienced players what they would do after a limit raise. Many of the players are Life Masters. The group also included a sprinkling of teachers and experts. Here is how they voted:

Five players said that they would bid 4♠ at matchpoints, but would try for slam if playing in a team game.

There were 26 players who bid 4♠. Here are a few of their thoughts:

“Slam was possible but unlikely.”

“Responder is unlikely to have exactly what you need, and even if he does, there’s no way to find out.”

“The heart weakness will probably doom 6♠.”

There were 29 players who were interested in slam. A few optimists bid 4NT, but most bid 4♣ to show a club control and invite a slam. Here are a few of their comments:

“Partner could have the magic hand. 4♠ is a lock, and it costs nothing to control bid the ♣A along the way, and find out whether partner has any interest in cooperating with the mild slam try.”

“I would look for it by control bidding the ♣A, then seeing how it goes, stopping at 4♠ or 5♠, depending on partner’s responses.”

A penny for my thoughts? I would bid 4♠.

The hand is not strong enough to look for slam. I don’t like the singleton ace or the fact that I have no intermediates. Slam will be worthwhile only if partner has the perfect hand, such as one of these:

♠ A 9 8 4 ♥ 6 ♦ A 8 7 6 2 ♣ 8 6 2
♠ 10 8 5 4 ♥ A K 6 ♦ A 7 6 ♣ 9 5 4.

Of all the possible hands partner could have, the likelihood of his having exactly what you need is not good. The moral of the story is: Never play partner for the perfect hand.

If you intended to bid 4♣ followed by 4♠, what’s the harm? If partner has a maximum limit raise, once you suggest a slam with your 4♣ bid, partner is fully entitled to bid past 4♠ on his own. You are not “the boss” — partner has rights, too.

Here is the complete deal:

Dlr: South ♠ 9 5 4 3
Vul: None ♥ A 3
♦ A 10 6 5
♣ K 7 5

♠ A 10 8 ♥ J 8 6 ♦ 8 3 ♣ Q J 10 3 2	N W E S	♠ J ♥ K 10 9 5 ♦ J 9 7 2 ♣ 9 8 6 4 ♠ K Q 7 6 2 ♥ Q 7 4 2 ♦ K Q 4 ♣ A
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North	South
	1♠
3♠	4♣
4♦	4♠
4NT	5♠ ⁽¹⁾
6♠	Pass

(1) Two key cards plus the queen of trumps.

West led the ♣Q and 6♠ was down two. Declarer lost two spades and one heart.

Did these 29 experienced players overbid? In my mind, they did. You have 16 high-card points, plus 1 point for the five-card suit. Once you find a fit, you can add 2 points for the singleton. Therefore, your hand is now worth 19 points.

Partner’s limit raise showed 10–12 points, so the partnership total is at most 31. You don’t have the 33 points that are usually needed for a small slam.

What caused so many experienced players to try for slam with a hand that wasn’t worth it? I’ve given a great deal of thought to that question. Here is the best answer I’ve come up with. Bridge players love slams. I think it’s even fair to say that the idea of bidding and making a slam fascinates bridge players like nothing else. Because of this infatuation, too often a player can’t resist the temptation of trying to “land the big one.” The result is that he overbids, gets to a bad slam and goes down — not exactly the euphoria he was dreaming about. That’s what I call “The joy of slams.” □

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