

# Winsome & Loathsome



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## The fascinating faces of 5NT

Bridge is a language with a very limited vocabulary. As with most languages, the same word(s) can have different meanings in different contexts. Take 5NT. Beyond being your favorite contract, it wears many faces. In Roman Key Card Blackwood, 5NT simultaneously asks for kings and guarantees that all six key cards are owned by the partnership, thereby also inviting partner to bid a grand slam if he has undisclosed extra values or a source of tricks. In regular Blackwood, 5NT also asks for kings and guarantees all four aces.

Traditionally, a 5NT response to a 1NT or 2NT opening bid invites a grand slam. Opener bids 6NT with a minimum, 7NT with a maximum.

In suit auctions, a leap to 5NT mandates a grand slam if you have two of the top three honors in an explicitly or implicitly agreed upon suit. Some use responses that are more descriptive.

A practical use of 5NT occurs when your side has bid notrump and a suit but no fit is found. It is forcing to slam and invites partner to investigate the best strain at the six level.

<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
♠ K 6	♠ A J 5 4
♥ A K 7 3	♥ J 2
♦ K Q J	♦ A 9 2
♣ A 10 9 5	♣ K 8 6 2

After West opens a 20–21 2NT, East will bid a slam. The partnership has the 33 high-card points said to be needed for 6NT but, especially when playing IMPs, the objective is to find the safest strain. Remember: *Without a source of tricks, 33 HCP is often insufficient to produce a good slam in notrump.*

So how does one investigate alternatives after Stayman fails to uncover a major-suit fit? *By bidding 5NT.* It says, “Partner, I have the values to bid 6NT but I have at least one other suit that might be a better option.” Partner then bids 6♣ to convert an inferior notrump slam into a better than 70% favorite. Just cash your top two trumps and go about the business of cross-ruffing.

What if you have two minors and no major? The advent of IMP scoring brought new respectability to the minor suits. At matchpoints, we stretch to bid notrump or a major, sometimes even choosing a 4–3 fit rather than the lower-scoring minor-suit game. In matchpoints, it makes no difference if you beat your competition by 10 points or 2000, you get the same matchpoint score. Playing IMPs, a slam swing could spell disaster.

Some years ago, after noting that for those who play Texas transfers 4♠ is an idle bid with no assigned meaning, I proposed that after a 1NT or 2NT, 4♠ should show a balanced hand with the values for a quantitative 4NT but with two four-card minor suits (or 5–4 or 4–5). It’s simple and you give up nothing to play it.

After I sold this treatment to my (now dear departed) friend Dottie Darcey, the following deal came up at the Orlando Regional. I was dealer and opened 1NT holding:

♠ K 10 8 6 ♥ A 9 7 ♦ A 9 7 5 ♣ A 6.

Dottie, looking at:  
♠ A 5 ♥ 10 6 5 ♦ K Q J 10 ♣ K Q J 10,  
remembered. She tried 4♠. Although minimum, my hand was rich in controls and, anxious to demonstrate my

toy in action, I bid 6♦. The field was in 4NT, making 11 tricks. 6NT failed, while I made 13 tricks in diamonds (six diamonds, four clubs, two spades and the ♥A). Who said that it’s hard to find 4–4 minor suit fits after a notrump opener? □

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