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# Our Readers Ask

Dear Eric,  
This deal came up in a matchpoint game:

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

<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
1♥	2♣
3♣	3♦
4♦	

a) After 4♦, East-West reached 6♣ which has a play, but can't survive adverse breaks. (The slam went down at the table.) Should responder start as he did with the two-over-one 2♣ bid or a forcing 1NT, followed by 3NT?

b) After West's raise, is 3♦ reasonable, or should East bid 3NT at this point?

c) Is opener's hand worth a 4♦ cuebid or should he bid 5♣ or a "last train" 3♠? 4♣ would have been Roman Key Card Blackwood (1430) by agreement.

d) Do you favor a 4♥ jump as

RKCB in clubs in these kinds of auctions?

**Bill Treble, Winnipeg MB**

a) I despise 1NT unlimited, so if you can't bid an old-fashioned natural, forcing 2NT (my preferred method, by a wide margin, as it allows responder to get his 13-15 or 18-plus high-card point balanced hand across without sending a "suit-oriented" message), I'm afraid 2♣-R-Us.

b) If West's 3♣ is acceptable for the partnership with a balanced minimum, then you will have some problems deciding whether to simply bid 3NT, try for 3NT or look for slam. It's a good minimum with great clubs, but would be a more promising raise with the ♥A and ♦K. Indeed, some (myself included) would rebid 2♥ because they prefer to reserve the minor-suit raise for hands with both four-card support and some extra values. The rationale in this approach is to relieve responder of some of the uncertainty about his objectives (3NT vs. 5♣ or 6♣). Players who favor this style might continue: 2♥-2NT; 3♣-3♥; 4♣-4♦; 5♣-Pass, or a scientific West might bid 4NT (no spade control, no ♥A) over 4♦, then pass 5♣. Or West might retreat to 3NT over 3♦. Some delicate judgment is required. If the raise to 3♣ could be virtually anything, how can responder identify his most likely target? As 3NT could be easy or ridiculous, I would bid 3♦, as East did, because I may need some help in spades for notrump, or may belong in 4♥. 3♦ is not a slam try but, at least initially, a try for 3NT with concern about spades.

c) 4♦ is a big bid. 3♠ would

normally be interpreted as a last ditch try for 3NT, but would typically deliver some "help" in spades, like J-x-x, Q-x or perhaps even (by agreement) three low cards, catering to both hands having three spades, where 3NT is best. You can't bid 3♠ with this weak short holding, so over 3♦ I recommend 4♣, which explains why I bid 3♣. Nothing else suggests strong clubs and a moderate hand so 4♣ is it ... at least for other folks. For you guys, Bill, it looks as if 5♣ is all you've got left, which hints at this hand type.

I suggest you use 4♦ as Kickback instead of 4♣ because being able to slow down the auction with 4♣ is an invaluable treatment. I believe, however, that you'll help yourselves considerably by firming up the requirements for opener's raise to three of a minor, which often leaves responder awkwardly placed, and this combination really puts some of those problems in perspective.

*Ed. note: Kickback is a Roman Key Card Blackwood variation, typically used when the agreed suit is a minor. The ace-asking bid in Kickback is four of the suit above the agreed suit, i.e., 4♥ for diamonds and 4♦ for clubs.*

d) Not unless you're sure 4♥ can't be natural. I'd start with one-over-four-of-our-minor as a concept, then make a list of exceptions in which four-of-opener's-major would be more appropriate. If your style and partnership personality favors using jumps in opener's major as picture bids of some sort, you would be far less inclined to redefine these useful sequences as key-card asks.