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## Useful bidding agreements — part 2

### A special Blackwood

Someone is always inventing something in bridge. A fairly new invention is gaining adherents and actually has enough merit that it might gain some more.

Consider this situation. Your partner opens with a preempt, and you are lucky enough to have a hand which is so good that you want to ask for key cards. 4NT is always available, but it has the drawback that it forces you to the five level whether you want to be there or not. It would be nice if there was a way to ask for key cards and to end up at the four level when it was appropriate.

This deal illustrates this problem:

♠ AK98  
♥ AKQ87  
♦ KQJ  
♣ 9

♠ QJ107642  
♥ 3  
♦ 873  
♣ K3

With no one vulnerable, South opens 3♠ in first seat, a bid that most would agree with. North gets excited about his hand and takes a

# Mike's Advice

chance on 4NT, asking for key cards.

Too bad. South has none. Normally, the tiny indiscretion of playing a hand like this in 5♠ instead of 4♠ does not matter, but on this occasion it does. West leads the ♦4 to East's ace, East returns a diamond and West ruffs. West takes his ♣A for down one. Definitely unlucky.

There is, however, a solution.

First, a question: When is the last time your partner opened with a preempt (in a suit other than clubs) and you wanted to bid a natural 4♣? I cannot recall this happening and I expect you can't either.

If you agree that 4♣ is not used for anything, then you can use it to ask for key cards.

Here is how it works. Say partner opens with one of these preempts: 2♦, 2♥, 2♠, 3♦, 3♥ or 3♠. In response to these preempts, a 4♣ bid asks for key cards. The responses are as follows:

- 4♦ = No key cards.
- 4♥ = One key card, no trump queen.
- 4♠ = One key card, plus the queen of trump.
- 4NT = Two key cards, no trump queen.
- 5♣ = Two key cards, plus the queen of trump.

This structure allows you to play in game if opener does not have enough key cards and it gives you a hidden benefit. You can use a 4NT response to ask for aces instead of key cards. For instance, partner opens with 3♥, finding you with this hand:

♠AKJ ♥2 ♦KQJ107643 ♣A

You would like to ask for aces. But if all of your asking bids are of the key-card variety, they won't help you. But if you use 4♣ to be key card for partner's suit, you can use 4NT to ask for aces and

only aces.

On this hand your partner announces one ace, so you can bid 6♦ knowing that it will be cold or on a spade finesse. It's worth bidding.

You may have noted that opening preempts in clubs were not discussed. There is a corollary that lets you do the same thing when partner opens 3♣.

A 4♦ bid in response to 3♣ asks for key cards in this one case. Opener bids the same way as before, the first step showing no key cards and the higher steps showing better holdings.

Points to discuss include knowing if this convention is "on" in competition.

West	North	East	South
	3♥	3♠	4♣

West	North	East	South
	3♥	Dbl	4♣

If one of these sequences comes up, there will be some questions. You need to know for sure whether 4♣ is key-card asking. I suggest that you do *not* use this convention in competition.

It makes good sense to play that 4♣ shows clubs after the overcall and it makes sense to play that 4♣ shows club strength and a fit for hearts when bid over a takeout double.

It is recommended that you go back to using 4NT as keycard Blackwood on these two sequences. But take heart. If East is showing a good hand, it is not likely that you will have a hand that wants to ask for aces anyway. □

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