

Wacky Hands & Gadgets – by Dave Bort

Splinter, Italian Cuebids, RKCB

In a recent matchpoints club game, N-S bid to 4S, making 6. Naturally, I wondered if a more "optimistic" sequence was possible (OK, some might say "foolhardy", but tow-may-tow, tow-mah-tow). Well, let's see - I suppose the bidding could have proceeded as shown (with the opponents silent throughout). Note that bids above 3N are handled as "post-alerts" (explained to opponents after completion of the auction).

Dir: S
Vul: NS

12
6 8
14

♠ A J 7 5 2
♥ K 2
♦ 9 7 5
♣ A 8 5

♠ 10 9 6
♥ Q J 9
♦ 10 8
♣ Q J 7 6 4

♠ 4
♥ 10 8 5 4
♦ A J 4 3
♣ K 10 3 2

♠ K Q 8 3
♥ A 7 6 3
♦ K Q 6 2
♣ 9

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Bidding:

North	South
	1D
1S	4C (1)
4H (2)	4N (3)
5H (4)	6S (5)
Pass	

Double Dummy Makes ?

N/S: 4♦ 2♥ 6♣ 2NT ♠6
E/W: 1♠ ♦3 ♥5 ♠1 NT3

Notes:

- (1) Splinter, implying four-card Spade support, with a singleton or void in Clubs.
- (2) Italian Cue-bid, implying a first- or second-round control in Hearts (an A, K, singleton, or void). Responder thinks: "Wow, your splinter really helped my hand, partner, I guess it couldn't hurt to show you my Heart control (showing controls up the line), in case that gets you excited."
- (3) Roman Keycard Blackwood (or Kickback) for Spades. Opener thinks: "Yes, I'm excited by your Heart control, partner, since I have some good Diamond honors, so let's check whether we need to avoid slam (if we're off two keycards). If slam isn't there, I think we'll be safe at the five level."
- (4) Two keycards in Spades, without the Spade Queen
- (5) We're only missing one keycard, partner, and your Heart control definitely helps, so although I probably wouldn't risk this in a team game, this is matchpoints, so let's try the slam!

Discussion: During a question-and-answer session in the famous Hunt Valley Friday night panel discussion years ago, I asked Jeff Meckstroth (um, you know who he is, right? One of the best players in the world!) his opinion of Italian cue-bids. He responded by first saying: "Well, I don't know about Italian (amusingly, meaning he wasn't signing up to that name for the bids, although most everyone does – just sayin'), but (continuing his exact quote!) the correct way to play cue-bids is showing first- or second-round control." So, there you have it, and good enough for me (although I do play it differently, when partners request so).

References:

- 1) "25 Bridge Conventions You Should Know", by Barbara Seagram & David Bird, Chapter 10: Splinter Bids.
- 2) "Roman Keycard Blackwood, The Final Word" (5th Edition), by Eddie Kantar.
 - Everything you could ever want to know (and probably more) about keycard!

Exclusion Blackwood, Third-Round Control-Ask

In the same matchpoints club game last month, N-S again bid to 4S, but this time making 7, so I (OK, again!) set off in search of a viable path to the elusive grand. I decided the bidding could have proceeded as shown, with the opponents likely initial interference shown, for our first round of consideration, and with their possible continued interference considered later.

Dir: W
Vul: EW

13
5 9
13

♠ 4 3
♥ K 9 7 6 5 4
♦ 5
♣ Q 10 5 3

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

♠ J 10 6
♥ A Q J 10 8 3 2
♦ J 8
♣ 8

♠ Q 9 8 7
♥ -----
♦ A K 10 9 3 2
♣ A 6 4

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Bidding:

West	North	East	South
Pass	1C	2H (1)	X (2)
P (3)	2S	P	3H (4)
P	4C (5)	P	5H (6)
P	6C (7)	P	6H (8)
P	7S! (9)	All Pass	

Double Dummy Makes ?

N/S: 7♣ 7♦ 7♠ ♥4 NT6
E/W: 3♥ 3♣ 3♦ 3♠ NT0

Notes:

- (1) Even with three Spades, a third-seat East may very likely attempt to make the N-S auction difficult.
- (2) Negative, implying four Spades, but not yet committing to more than just enough points to compete.
- (3) "If I increase the preempt, partner, N-S will know we have a fit, which helps them know they have a fit, so I'm passing for now, although I may come in later with a sacrifice, if they get to game.
- (4) I want to hear more about partner's hand, so I'll cue-bid the opponent's suit to show my strong hand.
- (5) Italian Cue, showing first- or second-round control of Clubs (again, an Ace, King, singleton, or void). Looks like partner wants to hear more about my hand; OK, I'll bid controls up the line, as usual.
- (6) Exclusion Blackwood (Danger, Will Robinson!), implying a Heart void, and asking partner to provide a Roman Keycard Blackwood response, but without showing the Ace of Hearts (even if they have it).
- (7) Two keycards, without the trump Queen, from among the step responses: 1st = 0 keycards, 2nd = 1 KC, 3rd = 2 KCs, without the Spade Queen, 4th = 2 KCs, with the SQ, and 5th (though unlikely) = 3 KCs.
- (8) Bidding the void suit is a third-round control-ask in what would be the Queen-Ask suit (here, Diamonds, the next suit up from partner's Exclusion response), asking partner to bid a grand slam, holding either a low doubleton (or stiff, aka a singleton) or the Queen of Diamonds.
- (9) Wow, really, partner? OK, I do have the Diamond Queen, so here goes (thank you, Eddie)!

Discussion: Even if West competes more vigorously (say, with 4H on their first opportunity), N-S still have viable options: in that case, N could bid 5H, Exclusion, South would respond 6D, and N could bid 6H, asking partner for anything else of value, whereupon South could bid the grand, given their previously undisclosed Diamond King and Diamond length (and the Spade Queen).

References:

- 1) "Roman Keycard Blackwood, The Final Word" (5th Edition), by Eddie Kantar. 'Nuff said!
- 2) "25 More Bridge Conventions You Should Know", by Seagram & Bird, Chapter 10: Exclusion Blackwood.

Stay tuned next month for more *Wacky Hands & Gadgets*.