

Kickback

Anyone who uses Roman Keycard Blackwood (RKC) to investigate slam must have at some time been frustrated when the bidding got too high before they could get stopped. They voluntarily bid a slam slated to fail because a response to 4NT showed too few keycards and they couldn't back the bidding up. A solution to this dilemma is Kickback; a form of Blackwood that allows you to sign off at the five-level.

Kickback is not without problems though. Attempting to use Kickback instead of 4NT as RKC is guaranteed to give you and your partner many headaches and at least 10 bad or below average boards until you BOTH begin to remember it and use it to your advantage. However, don't knock it until you've tried it.

How does it work? Instead of using 4NT as Roman Keycard Blackwood, you use the suit above the agreed trump suit to ask for keycards. This keeps the auction at a lower level plus it clarifies the trump suit.

The responses are the same as for RKC, just at a lower level. For example, in the following auction:

1♣ P 1♦ P
4♥ P 5♣ P
5♦ All Pass.....

4♥ is RKC with diamonds the intended trump suit, 5♣ shows 2 or 5 Keycards without the Queen of Trumps and 5♦ is a sign off, as from opener's hand he knows you are missing two Keycards. Using normal RKC, a bid of 4NT by opener would have given a response of 5♥, which would have forced the partnership into a slam missing 2 Aces or Keycards. See how well it works!! (This time anyway.)

Playing Kickback 4♦ is RKC for clubs, 4♥ is RKC for diamonds, 4♠ is RKC for hearts and 4NT is RKC for spades. The step responses are the same as regular keycard (0314 or 1430) but they start at a lower level.

There are some disadvantages of using Kickback. One is that the now RKC asking bid is no longer available as a cuebid. Likewise, you can't splinter in that suit. For example, in the auction:

1♠ P 3♣ P
4♣ P 4♦.....

4♦ would normally be a cuebid, showing an Ace or Void in Diamonds. However, playing Kickback it would be RKC. One solution to cuebidding is to play that 4NT is the equivalent of a cuebid in the Kickback suit.

It is very important to agree when a bid is RKC and when it is natural. For

example: 1♠ P 2♣ P
4♥ P 4♠.....

Is 4♠ RKC or natural? The usual agreement is that if there is no agreed trump suit, bidding or supporting a previously bid suit is natural.

Partnership agreements like Kickback are fraught with danger. Ask anybody who plays it.....they will have a few stories for you. The following is one of my favorites:

North
♠KQ1087
♥Q3
♦94
♣AKJ3

South
♠A2
♥AKJ76
♦A5
♣Q654

Auction:	North	South (opponents silent throughout)
	1♠	2♥
	2♠	3♣
	4♣	4♦ (1)
	4♥ (2)	4NT (3)
	5♦ (4)	6♣ (5)

- (1) Playing Kickback 0314.
- (2) Belated heart supportnot on same page as partner
- (3) OK, partner, I don't believe you. Let's try RKC 0314 then.
- (4) Well I have 1 or 4 keycards but obviously have no idea what's trump (still not on same page as partner)
- (5) OK I give up....hope we can make 6♣

When a friend of mine shared this hand with me, I offered that South needed one more method to ask for keycards in order to get to the grand slam.