



How High: Game or Slam?

OPENER	RESPONDER
♠ K Q 3	♠ A 7 6
♥ K 9 5	♥ A Q 7
♦ K Q J 4	♦ A 6 2
♣ 8 6 3	♣ K Q J 5

whether there is enough to bid a slam.

OPENER	RESPONDER
1♦	2♣ ★
2NT	6NT
Pass	

The opening 1♦ bid shows about 13 or more points. Holding 20 high-card points, responder knows the partnership has enough combined strength to go for a small slam, but doesn't yet know **WHERE**. When opener rebids 2NT, showing a balanced hand, responder can simply take the partnership to 6NT. This is a straight quantitative auction.

Although the combined strength for notrump contracts is mainly based on high-card points, long suits can be valuable as well. Most players add

OPENER	RESPONDER
♠ K J 8 7 3	♠ A Q
♥ K 8 2	♥ A 7 3
♦ Q 4	♦ A K J 8 3
♣ K 6 3	♣ J 9 5

1 length point for a five-card suit, 2 points for a six-card suit, and so on.

OPENER	RESPONDER
1♠	2♦ ★
2NT	6NT
Pass	

Opener has 12 high-card points, but adds 1 length point for the five-card suit and opens 1♠. Responder has only 19 high-card points, but adds a length point for the five-card diamond suit. The partnership reaches

6NT with only 31 combined high-card points. However, the five-card suits prove very useful. On normal breaks, declarer has twelve tricks off the top: five spades, two hearts, and five diamonds.

If it is unclear whether there is enough combined strength for slam

OPENER	RESPONDER
♠ A J 5	♠ K Q 6
♥ Q 10 7 3 2	♥ J 4
♦ K 10 3	♦ A 9 8
♣ Q 4	♣ A K J 7 5

in notrump, either partner can make a quantitative – invitational – raise.

OPENER	RESPONDER
1♥	2♣ ★
2NT	4NT
Pass	

Responder's 4NT is not Blackwood, since no trump suit has been agreed. It's an invitation to slam – in the same way a raise of an opening 1NT to 2NT would be an invitation to game.

OPENER	RESPONDER
♠ A Q J 8 2	♠ 10 4
♥ A J 5	♥ K 8 2
♦ K 6	♦ A Q J 10 4
♣ K 8 2	♣ A 10 5

With a minimum opening, opener rejects the invitation by passing.

OPENER	RESPONDER
1♠	2♦ ★
2NT	3NT
4NT	6NT
Pass	

Opener has 18 high-card points plus 1 length point for the five-card suit, a hand too strong to open 1NT. After the game-forcing 2♦ response, opener doesn't need to jump to show the extra strength; the 2NT rebid is forcing. When responder shows a willingness to play in notrump, opener now shows the extra strength with an invitational raise to 4NT. With a minimum balanced hand, opener would simply pass 3NT. Holding 14 high-card points plus 1 length point

A 2/1 Game Forcing response ★ commits the partnership to at least game, and allows both opener and responder the opportunity to explore **WHERE** the partnership belongs in a relaxed manner, without having to worry about showing both distribution and strength at the same time. Once the partnership has agreed on a trump suit, or notrump, the focus can now shift to the remaining question, **How High**: Game or Slam?

Focus on How High

Game is assured, but is there enough combined strength for slam? The basic guideline is that about 33 points are needed to consider a small slam and about 37 points to think about a grand slam. The factors to bear in mind are:

- Combining high-card points and distributional points
- Fit
- Controls

High-Card Points

Slams in notrump are typically bid in a **quantitative** manner, on combined high-card strength alone. After one partner has shown a balanced or semi-balanced hand within a narrow point-count range, the other partner can add up the combined strength and decide

Distributional Points

Long suits are typically valuable, whether the partnership plays in a notrump or suit contract. They provide a potential source of tricks. So both opener and responder count length points in addition to high-card points when valuing the hand.

Short suits may or may not be of value. In notrump contracts, they can be a liability. In suit contracts, they can be very valuable in a side suit after a trump fit has been found. They can prevent the opponents from taking winners in a suit, and may provide an additional source of tricks for declarer through ruffing. However, shortness won't be of much value if it is in partner's suggested trump suit or opposite a lot of high-card strength in partner's hand. So the guideline is to **value points for shortness – dummy points – only after a trump fit has been found.**

DUMMY POINTS

Void	5 points
Singleton	3 points
Doubleton	1 point

OPENER	RESPONDER
♠ A K J 4 3	♠ Q 5
♥ K Q 9 4	♥ A J 10 7 3 2
♦ 5	♦ Q 7 2
♣ A 8 5	♣ Q 6

OPENER	RESPONDER
1♠	2♥ ★
3♥	4♥
4NT	5♦
6♥	Pass

Opener has 17 high-card points and can add 3 dummy points for the singleton diamond once the heart fit is uncovered. That's enough to check for aces, even though responder shows nothing extra. The combined hands have only 28 high-card points, but the added points for distribution – responder for length and opener for shortness – make slam a good bet.

Fit

An advantage of 2/1 Game Force is that it provides the partnership a leisurely way to explore for a suitable trump fit. **Finding a fit is crucial, especially when it comes to slam bidding.** Distributional factors can't effectively be brought into play until a fit is found.

OPENER	RESPONDER
♠ A Q J 7 5 3	♠ 4
♥ A K Q J	♥ 9 8 3
♦ 5 4	♦ K Q J
♣ 3	♣ A Q J 6 4 2

OPENER	RESPONDER
1♠	2♣ ★
2♥	3♣
3♠	3NT
Pass	

Opener has 17 high-card points plus 2 length points for the six-card suit. Responder has 13 high-card points plus 2 length points for the six-card suit. That's a total of 34 combined points, more than enough for slam. But when no suitable trump fit can be found, the partnership has to settle for game. It will be very challenging to find a good source of tricks, and entries back and forth between the hands will be difficult or non-existent.

OPENER	RESPONDER
♠ A J 8 6 3	♠ 4
♥ A 7 4	♥ K Q 10 8 6 3 2
♦ K 9 3	♦ A 4
♣ 7 3	♣ K Q 4

OPENER	RESPONDER
1♠	2♥ ★
3♥	4NT
5♥	6♥
Pass	

When the partnership finds a fit, all the distributional factors come into play. Here there are only 26 combined high-card points, but once opener agrees on hearts as the trump suit, responder can imagine that there will likely be twelve tricks if opener has two aces.

Controls

Once the partnership has found a suitable trump fit and knows there is likely enough combined strength to consider a slam, one final consideration is controls. **A control is a holding that prevents the opponents from taking too many tricks in a suit.** An ace is a first-round control, since it stops the opponents from taking the first trick in a suit. In a trump contract, a void can also serve as a first-round control, since it prevents the opponents from taking the first trick in a suit.

A king represents a second-round control. The opponents can take the first trick with the ace, but the king will stop them on the second round. In a trump contract, a singleton can serve the same role as a king – a second-round control.

CONTROLS IN A SUIT CONTRACT

First-round control	Ace or void
Second-round control	King or singleton


When bidding a small slam, it's important that the partnership holds first-round control in three suits, and at least second-round control in the fourth suit. Otherwise, the opponents can take the first two tricks before declarer even gets started. To bid a grand slam, the partnership needs first-round control in all four suits. It's disconcerting to watch the opponents take the first trick when we have contracted to take all thirteen!

CONTROL REQUIREMENTS

Small slam	First-round control in 3 suits; at least second-round control in the 4th
Grand slam	First-round control in every suit.

How does the partnership discover whether it holds enough controls to bid a slam? There are two principle methods:

- Blackwood
- Control-showing bids

And that's what we'll start to look at in the next issue! 

Coming Soon!

Two-over-One Game Force by Audrey Grant and Eric Rodwell

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