

Coaching NT #5 – Bidding to Slam

Note: The complete layout of the four hands for this game is shown at the end of this lesson so the cards can be set up for practice with 4 players. Beginners may find the analysis and strategies to be helpful in learning how to bid and play. (For ease of grammar, all players are designated male.)

Bidding:

South is the Dealer. This is South's hand:



South has 16 points and a balanced hand, so South's opening bid is **1 NT**.

(Both West and East are passing.)

This is North's hand:



North has 16 points and a balanced hand.

North bids **4 NT**.

North's bid of 4 NT, immediately after an opening bid by partner of 1 NT, has special meaning. It does not mean Blackwood, asking for Aces.

It means, "Partner, I have 16 points and a balanced hand. Do we have enough points for Slam?"

South's response to this particular 4 NT response is:

If South has 15 pts, he will pass. Slam is probably not there, so no point in bidding any higher. South will get the same score if he bids 4 NT and makes 5 NT as he will get if he bids 5 NT and makes 5 NT.

With 16 pts, South's bid is 6 NT.

With 17 pts, South's bid is 7 NT.

The final contract is **6 NT by South**.

Playing the hand:

West is on lead and leads the 8♥. North's Dummy hand comes down. Now South must think carefully. He can lose 1 trick. The heart has been led. South is missing the K♥. South is also missing the A♦. In a NT contract, the usual method of analysis is to count your winners. In this case, when you are in a Slam, it's best to count your losers. South has 1 loser for sure – a diamond. The K♥ could be finessed, but who has it? The opponents will be trying to take 1 more trick. Does West have the K♥ and is leading away from it, or does East have the K♥? The best case scenario is that East has the K♥. West may have led from the K♥ to signal

East to return a heart, if possible. The advantage now is that the heart has been led, toward South's **tenace***, so the first trick is a sure winner for South. Can South discard 2 loser hearts without taking a chance on a finesse? The finesse will be successful 50% of the time. A finesse is a big risk when you have 1 loser guaranteed in diamonds and you can lose only one trick if you want to make your contract. First, South might as well give up the diamond loser. E/W will, for sure, take the A♦ because they might not get in again with diamonds and they are not likely going to allow the opponents to take that trick when they have the Ace. In fact, it is very common for the defenders to lead an Ace when in a Slam contract. (***tenace** – this a term, pronounced "tennis," meaning the A/Q or K/J combination)

So the 8♥ has been led by West. South might as well play a small heart from Dummy because his J♥ and 9♥ in dummy are equal to the Q♥ and 10♥ in his hand. So he plays the 2♥ from Dummy, East plays the 3♥, so the trick is won by the 10♥ in South's hand. (Trick #1✓ — The ✓ notation after a trick indicates a winner for Declarer and the X indicates a lost trick.)

So the next step is to force out the A♦. South leads the J♦ from his hand, West takes it with the A♦, the 6♦ is played from Dummy and East plays the 3♦. (Trick #2X) This is the only trick that South can afford to lose.

Now it depends on what West does next. Will he lead another low heart? If he does, South is set! And West may realize the K♥ a sure loser now, so won't play a heart. East would have played a higher card than the 3♥ in the first trick, if he had a higher one. He may decide to lead a club, since he sees the A♣ Q♣ on the board, and perhaps he may hope that East has a high card, though based on the bidding, the K♣ is likely to be in South's hand.

Let's say he leads the 9♣. At this point, it is probably not important which suit West leads. South should be able to take all the tricks now. The 2♣ is played from Dummy. East plays low because the 9♣ is equal to his 10♣ so why play any higher? South takes it with the K♣. (Trick #3✓)

Now South will play the 9♠ towards the A♠, the 10♠ towards the K♠ and run the spades, "squeezing" the opponents. South will discard hearts from Dummy. (Tricks #4✓, 5✓, 6✓, 7✓ -- all winners). There is one danger now. What if the clubs have split unevenly? He will soon find out.

South leads the 8♣ from his hand. West plays the J♣ to cover it. The Q♣ is played from Dummy and East plays the 7♣. (Trick #8✓) The A♣ is played from Dummy and South is very relieved to see that both East and West follow suit. (Trick #9✓)

All the clubs are out. That is why it is so important to watch and count all the suits in a NT contract. Dummy's 5♣ is a winner and takes the next trick. (Trick #10✓)

Now it's easy. The K♦ and Q♦ are winners; hearts are discarded from South's hand. The J♥ is led toward the A♥ and the contract is made.

Now this game was slightly risky. If either East or West had 4 clubs, the J♣, 10♣, 9♣ and 7♣ in one hand, for example, this could have jeopardized the contract because the finesse of hearts will not be successful in this layout and the last club may lose. However, the player holding the 4 clubs may have discarded one at some point. South had to bank on the 4th club taking a trick so he did not have to try the finesse. Sometimes it's a gamble. Sometimes you have to take some risks in bridge. Sometimes the contract does not work out. Don't blame yourself when that happens.

If East had the K♥ instead of West, this hand would be so much easier to play. But no matter, the finesse is still a risk.

There are many factors that ensure the success or failure of a contract being made:

- 1) The Declarer must play the hand well.
- 2) The opponents must play defence well.
- 3) The bidding must be precise and reliable.
- 4) The layout of the hands must be advantageous – in other words, some luck in the placement of the cards.

Making overtricks does not necessarily mean you are a really good player. It could be that the opponents did not defend well. Conversely, if you lose a trick and go down, you might have played as best as anyone could.

Complete layout of hands:

Dummy

<p style="text-align: center;">West</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">North</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">East</p>
<p>South is the Dealer.</p>		
<p style="text-align: center;">South</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Declarer</p>		