

1 Roman Key Card (RKC) Blackwood

Most players know the first round of RKC responses but few know all the various follow-up bids and intricacies. Full RKC allows you to find out about specific kings and third round control of other suits.

Kantar's "Roman Keycard Blackwood", fifth edition is considered the definitive source. It is 244 pages long.

Assuming trumps have been selected, 4NT asks for number of key cards with the king of trumps as a key card. The ideal response is 5♣ – this allows the most room for subsequent bids. A strong hand is more likely to have 3 than 4 keycards, a weak hand is more likely to have 1 than 0 keycards. Kantar recommends 1430 replies when a strong hand is asking a weak hand and 3014 when a weak hand is asking a strong hand. Less experienced partnerships may want to agree on always using 3014 or 1430. The rest of this document assumes 3014 responses. It also assumes that spades are trumps unless otherwise stated.

After the 4NT RKC bid, the responses are:

5♣	0 or 3 key cards
5♦	1 or 4 key cards
5♥	2 key cards without the trump queen and without extra trump length
5♠	2 key cards with the trump queen OR with extra trump length
5NT	An even number of key cards (2/4) plus a void. Tends to imply trump queen or extra trump length.
6Y	Odd number of key cards (1/3/5) with void in bid suit providing suit is below trump suit. Tends to imply trump queen or extra trump length.
6<trumps>	Odd number of key cards (1/3/5) with void in suit above trumps. Typically will show 1 or 3 key cards with the trump queen and, as you did not allow partner to ask about kings, no kings.

Bid 5♠ with trump queen or extra trump length and two key cards. Extra trump length is considered to be one or two more than you have shown through bidding.

A void can cause problems. Only show it if you think the information will be valuable to opener. For example, if hearts are trumps, and responder has 2 key cards + ♥Q and a void, then we are committed to a 6 level contract because the normal RKC response is 5♠ so showing a void may help opener. Showing a void implies the queen of trumps or extra trump length or the responder must believe that showing the void is more valuable than allowing for the Queen or Specific King Ask (more on this later). The ideal situation for showing the void is with extra trump length (or queen of trumps), and, if you have kings, a bid that does not preclude opener finding out about your specific kings.

1.1 Queen of Trumps Ask

It is possible to ask if responder has the queen of trumps (or extra length) if responder bids 5♣ or 5♦ by bidding the next step. Opener must be prepared to go to the 6 level with a positive response. A rebid of the trump suit denies the queen.

Any other bid is positive and is used to help explore specific kings or third round control. Note that it is usually possible to explicitly identify all of the kings when using the queen ask. The general rule is to bid a single king at the 6 level (if below trumps). With more than one king, bid the first king if there is bidding space for asking you for other kings.

If responder shows a king as part of the queen ask, a bid of another suit below 6 of the agreed suit asks for the king of that suit. A return to the agreed trump suit denies the king of the asked suit. With the king, the simple response is to bid 7. For advanced players, there are step responses to show different holdings with the king. Responder makes a one step response to show Kxx, a two step response to show Kx and raises the ask suit (to the 7 level!) to show KQ(x). If the bid of another suit is a bid in a suit that you have denied the king for, then it asks for third round control.

A response of 5NT to the queen ask shows the trump queen, denies any other kings and shows an “extra”. The list of possible extras are:

- The queen of partner’s first bid suit (if this is not trumps)
- Third round control (Q or doubleton) of partner’s second bid suit
- Undisclosed extra trump length (in addition to the trump queen)
- Third round control in some unbid suit

If opener bids a new suit at the 6 level after responder denies a king, this is asking for third round control in the suit. Without third round control, bid 6 of the trump suit. With the queen bid 6NT, with a singleton or doubleton bid 7 of the agreed suit, with QJ(x) raise the suit.

Spades are trumps. With spades as trumps, the 4NT-5♣-5♦ response gives the most room for fully exploring a slam.

4NT-5♣-5♦	<p>5♥: I have the trump queen and ♥K. I may/may not have other kings. 5NT: What other kings do you have? 6♣: I have ♣K. I do not have ♦K (would have bid 6NT). 6♦: Do you have third round control of diamonds? 6♥: Yes 6♠: No 6♥: Do you have third round control of hearts? 6♠: No 6NT: Yes 6♦: I have ♦K. I do not have ♣K. 6♥: Do you have third round control of hearts??</p>
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	<p>6♠: No 6NT: Yes</p> <p>6♥: I do not have ♣K or ♦K. I do have third round control of hearts. 6♠: I do not have any kings other than ♥K.</p> <p>5♠: I do not have the trump queen 5NT: What kings do you have?</p> <p>6♣: I have ♣K. I may have ♦K or ♥K. 6♦: Do you have ♦K? 6♥: Yes (Kxx) [first step] 6♠: No 6NT: Yes (Kx) [second step] 7♦: I have KQ(x) [raise of suit] 6♥: Do you have ♥K? 6♠: No 6NT: Yes (Kxx) [first step] 7♣: Yes (Kx) [second step] 7♥: I have KQ(x) [raise of suit] 6♦: I have ♦K. I do not have ♣K. I may have ♥K. 6♥: Do you have ♥K? 6♠: No 6NT: Yes (Kxx) [first step] 7♣: Yes (Kx) [second step] 7♥: I have KQ(x) [raise of suit] 6♥: I have the ♥K. No other kings. 6♠: I do not have any kings. 6NT: I have all 3 kings.</p> <p>5NT: I have the trump queen, but no kings. I have an “extra”. 6♣: I have the trump queen and ♣K. I do not have ♥K. I may have the ♦K. 6♦: Do you have the ♦K? 6♥: Yes (Kxx) [first step] 6♠: No 6NT: Yes (Kx) [second step] 7♦: I have KQ(x) [raise of suit] 6♥: Do you have third round control of hearts? 6♠: No 6NT: Yes. The Q 7♠: Yes. A doubleton.</p> <p>6♦: I have the trump queen, not the ♥K or ♣K. I do have ♦K. 6♥: I have the trump queen, but no kings. I have ♥Q. 6♠: I have the trump queen but no kings and no extras.</p>
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1.2 Kings

If opener responds with 5NT (some exceptions noted below) over any 5 level bid then this asks for the specific kings *ignoring the king of trumps*.

6♣	I have ♣K 6♦: Do you have ♦K? 6M: No 6NT: KQ(x) 7M: Yes
6♦	I have ♦K but not the ♣K. I may have ♥K (can ask if spades are trumps). 6♥: Do you have ♥K? 6♠: No 7♠: Yes
6♥	I have ♥K but not the ♣K or ♦K
6♠	If spades are trumps, denies any kings. For other trump suits, shows the ♠K but not the ♣K or ♦K or ♥K
6NT	I have all the missing kings.

Bidding 5NT promises all 5 keycards. Responder is encouraged to bid 7 if he can count 13 tricks. Showing a king denies the ability to count to 13 tricks.

If opener bids another suit below trumps at the six level this is asking for the king of that suit. Return to the agreed trump suit to deny the king. A one step response shows Kxx, a two step response shows Kx, a raise of the suit shows KQ(x).

The only difficulty is in showing the ♠K if any suit other than spades is trumps. The general rule is to show the king unless opener is known to be short in spades (has splintered or denied 2 spades through the bidding). If you have splintered in another suit then bidding this suit at the 6 level shows the ♠K (if hearts are trumps). Confused? If the opener is balanced, show the ♠K; if the opener is unbalanced but denies a singleton spade, do not show the ♠K.

If hearts are trumps and the sequence is 4NT-5♣-5♦-5♠ then opener knows responder has ♠K, ♥Q. 5NT asks for specific kings. With one minor suit king, bid it. With both minor suit kings, bid 6NT. With no minor suit kings, bid 6♥.

Similarly, if spades are trumps and the sequence is 4NT-5♣-5♦-5♥ then opener knows responder has ♥K and ♠Q. 5NT asks for specific kings. With one minor suit king, bid it. With both minor suit kings, bid 6NT. With no minor suit kings, bid 6♠.

In both the above auctions, bidding a king at the 6 level denies the other king. This allows opener to bid the missing suit to ask for third round control. If partner bids 6 of the missing suit, then bid 7 with third round control.

1.3 Specific Suit Ask (SSA)

If your only losers after a RKC auction are in a specific suit, say one headed by AKx then you want to know if partner has third round control (Qxx or doubleton).

A jump bid after RKC specifically asks partner what he has in that suit. SSA also applies with a jump bid after the queen ask in RKC.

The simple reply is to jump to 7 to show third round control (Qxx or doubleton) and to return to the trump suit to deny third round control.

The advanced reply is to bid in steps ignoring a return to the trump suit which denies a third round control. The first step shows xx (or a singleton with 2+ trumps), the second step shows the queen, a raise of the suit shows QJ(x) and a jump in trumps shows a singleton with 3+ trumps.

1.4 Specific King Ask (SKA)

A Specific King Ask (SKA) or secondary king ask (SKA) allows opener to find out about responder's holding in a specific suit. It occurs after responder has shown a king and opener asks in another suit where responder may have the king. It also occurs if spades are trumps in the auction 4NT-5♣-5♥.

Replies are in steps with a return to the trump suit as the negative response (xx or worse). Always ignore the ace as you have already shown it through the RKC response. Ignoring the return to the trump suit, the first step shows Kxx(x), the second step shows Kx (second and third round control), a raise of the ask suit shows KQ(x), and a jump in trumps shows a singleton in the ask suit.

1.5 RKC Over Weak 2 Openings

If partner opens 2♥ or 2♠ then 4♣ is RKC. This allows the bidding to stop at the 4 level.

Over 2M, 4♣ is RKC with the following responses:

2M-4♣-4♦	0 keycards
2M-4♣-4♥	1 without queen of trumps
2M-4♣-4♠	1 with queen of trumps
2M-4♣-4NT	2 without queen of trumps
2M-4♣-5♣	2 with queen of trumps

Easiest way to remember is step responses with each subsequent step showing a slightly better hand.

If the first response is 0 then a bid of the other major is the queen ask.

1.6 RKC Over Weak 3 Openings

If partner opens 3X then 4♣ is RKC.

The responses are the same as over a weak 2 opening:

3X-4♣-4♦	0 keycards
3X-4♣-4♥	1 without queen of trumps
3X-4♣-4♠	1 with queen of trumps
3X-4♣-4NT	2 without queen of trumps
3X-4♣-5♣	2 with queen of trumps

If the first response is 0 then a bid of the other major is the queen ask.

After a positive (>0 key card) response then a new suit is a specific suit ask (SSA), 4NT is specific king ask.