

PLAY IT SAFE

You pick up this beautiful hand:

South
♠A963
♥KQ8
♦KQ7
♣AK4

You're surprised to hear your partner open 1♠. With 25 points of your own you have visions of at least a small slam; maybe even a grand slam. You respond with 2NT. This is a very common conventional call that tells partner you have at least 4 spades and at least 13 points. This bid is forcing to game, but has no upper point limit. Partner rebids 4♠. He is saying that he hates his hand and would just as well stop at game.

Well, that is his view of the situation. You, of course, have a different view. You want to know about his aces and kings, so you launch into Blackwood. This is the bidding, so far:

West	North	East	South
	1♠	Pass	2NT
Pass	4♠	Pass	4NT

You are using a form of Blackwood called Roman Key Card Blackwood, where the four aces and the king of trump are all key cards. Your partner answers 5♦, which says he holds either three or no key cards. You assume he means three, and since you hold two yourself, you have all the key cards. You would like to find out if he holds the ♠Q. You can do this by rebidding the next higher suit on the bidding ladder: 5♥. If he doesn't hold the queen he merely returns to the trump suit at the cheapest level: 5♠. Since this slam is going to depend on finding the trump queen, you settle for 6NT. This is the complete bidding sequence:

West	North	East	South
	1♠	Pass	2NT
Pass	4♠	Pass	4NT
Pass	5♦	Pass	5♥
Pass	5♠	Pass	6NT
All Pass			

West leads the ♣Q and you see this dummy:

	North ♠ KJ542 ♥ AJ3 ♦ A85 ♣ 76	
West ♣ Q	South ♠ A963 ♥ KQ8 ♦ KQ7 ♣ AK4	East

You count 3 hearts, 3 diamond and 2 clubs. That means you need four more tricks from spades. How will you play the spades?

You can play the ♠AK from the top. That wins whenever the spades split 2-2 or 3-1. But if they split 4-0, you go down. There is a foolproof way to play this suit.

Win the first trick and lead a low spade to the ♠K in the dummy. You should play the king no matter what West does. This guards against East holding a singleton ♠Q. When you do this, West discards a diamond. Aha! East does hold all four outstanding spades, including the ♠Q and ♠10. Play the ♠K and now lead a low spade and win whatever East plays as cheaply as possible. Assume he will play the ♠10. Then you will win the ♠A and play the ♠9. East will duck that trick and you'll lead your last spade to the ♠J, won by East's ♠Q. You've lost one spade trick but your dummy's 5th spade will provide a parking place for your ♣4, and you will make your 6NT contract.

Notice that with a 2-2 split you'll make a sure overtrick. Even with a 3-2 and the ♠Q in West, you will make an overtrick. But there is value in playing it safe and reaching for only 12 tricks to ensure your contract.

This is the full deal:

D					
1		N North ♠ KJ542 ♥ AJ3 ♦ A85 ♣ 76		W N E S 1♠ P 2NT P 4♣ P 4NT P 5♦ P 5♥ P 5♠ P 6NT P P	
	W West ♠ 10762 ♥ J10942 ♦ QJ109 ♣		E East ♠ Q1087 ♥ 954 ♦ 63 ♣ 8532		
		S South ♠ A963 ♥ KQ8 ♦ KQ7 ♣ AK4			
				6NT S	NS: 0 EW: 0

If you would like to see the whole hand played out click on this link: <http://tinyurl.com/la7kcxe> or copy and paste it into your browser. Click on the “Next” button on the bottom to advance through each trick.