

39. Using Blackwood with a void

The 4NT ace-asking convention originated by Easley Blackwood is very useful for bidding slam in a trump contract (you do not use it for 6NT — provided the partnership hold 33 points, you cannot be missing two aces). It's a safety check — avoiding slam when the opponents hold two aces.

However, Blackwood tells you only how many aces partner holds, not which one(s). If you hold a void, bidding Blackwood is pointless, for there's a huge difference between partner's ace being opposite your length (good) and it being opposite your void (bad).

As opener, holding South's hand on our featured deal, you bid 1♠ and hear partner jump to 3♠. Say you now bid 4NT and hear a 5♦ (one-ace) reply. At this point you're guessing, because you don't know which ace partner holds.

Responder (a)	Responder (b)
♠10963	♠10963
♥Q974	♥AQ74
♦AQ3	♦Q93
♣Q2	♣Q2

Facing (a), 6♠ is easy-peasy, losing only ♠A. Facing (b), disaster — you'll lose ♠A and ♦A. And that's precisely what happened ...

What Happened

After South's unsophisticated approach (that's being tactful), West led ♦A then ♦4. Declarer won and forlornly led a spade. East won ♠A and led a third diamond. West rudely ruffed — two down.

What Should Have Happened

The only way round the problem is to play ace-showing cue bids, which should normally begin only after

Dealer: South, Vulnerability: Neither

	♠10963										
	♥AQ74										
	♦Q93										
	♣Q2										
♠85		♠A7									
♥J9532		♥K1086									
♦A4		♦J10876									
♣10874		♣95									
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	N										
W		E									
	S										
	♥-										
	♦K52										
	♣AKJ63										

What Happened

S	W	N	E
1♠	Pass	3♠	Pass
4NT(1)	Pass	5♦(1)	Pass
6♠(2)	end		

- (1) How many aces? Answer one.
- (2) Hoping it's not ♥A.

Contract: 6♠, Opening Lead: ♦A

What Should Have Happened

S	W	N	E
1♠	Pass	3♠	Pass
4♣(1)	Pass	4♥(2)	Pass
4♠(3)	end		

- (1) Natural ("Trial bid").
- (2) Ace-showing cue bid, showing ♥A and denying the cheaper ♦A.
- (3) Slam looks a whole lot less appealing facing a partner with the wrong red ace.

Contract: 4♠, Opening Lead: ♦A

opener has bid a (natural-ish) second suit. Here, after partner cue bids the wrong red ace (hearts), South signs off in 4♠.

If West leads ♦A then ♦4 (not clear v game), carefully win ♦Q and shed ♦K on ♥A. Only now lead a spade, able to ruff East's third diamond (high) — a safe 11 tricks. andrew.robson@thetimes.co.uk