

Ace-showing cue-bids

IN this article I will discuss a treatment which is useful when developing auctions in which at least one member of the partnership has some interest in looking for a slam. My approach is aimed at players who have not used cue-bids before, and wish to continue using other slam-going methods covered in this series so far.

What is an ace-showing cue-bid?

While the term 'cue-bid' is used in several different contexts, 'ace-showing cue-bids' are control-showing bids which may be used to help the partnership to assess the prospects of a slam. Either player may bid a suit in which he has the ace (or occasionally a void), until the decision can be made to commit the bidding beyond game.

What is the difference between a splinter bid, a trial bid and an ace-showing cue bid?

Just like splinter bids (see *English Bridge*, February 2009) and trial bids (see *English Bridge*, April 2009), ace-showing cue-bids are a useful method when assessing whether a partnership has good trumps and a source of tricks. In order to distinguish which bid is which, the following scheme is helpful.

Once a trump suit has been agreed:

1. Splinter bids show shortage. They are usually made on a double jump.
2. A trial bid is the first bid in a new suit following suit agreement, and always occurs at the lowest level. Trial bidding for slam aims at finding out which positive assets (if any) partner holds in the suit bid.
3. Ace-showing cue-bids typically occur as a positive continuation following a splinter or a trial bid.

When is it useful to make an ace-showing cue-bid?

Ace-showing cue-bids tend to be used once the partnership has decided to explore for slam. They are an effective way of con-

tinuing an exchange of information when either player feels it is not appropriate to ask for key cards (via Roman Key-Card Blackwood). This will either be because it is not clear whether the partnership should bid beyond game, or alternatively due to the possession of a suit holding which will be awkward when using RKCB. These include suits with no control (two or more cards missing the ace and king), and suits with no cards (voids).

How can an ace-showing cue-bid be recognised?

As stated earlier, ace-showing cue-bids most commonly occur following a splinter or a trial bid, when it is often the case that there will be a desire to cooperate without wishing to take control. Ace-showing cue-bids tend to occur at the four level and above, and indicate a positive response to partner's splinter or trial bid. It therefore follows that *ace-showing cue-bids can only be made in suits which have not been agreed as a trump suit, since a return to the trump suit is a negative continuation following a splinter or a trial bid.*

How should one continue following an ace-showing cue-bid?

Since ace-showing cue-bids show positive slam interest, they will often be followed by another positive move towards slam. So, the next player will either show the ace of another (non-trump) suit, jump to slam, or, most commonly, bid 4NT (RKCB). With nothing further to add, the most negative bid will simply be a return to the trump suit at the lowest level.

Here is an example of ace-showing cue-bids in action:

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



David Bakhshi

West	East
1♥	3♠ ¹
4♣ ²	4♦ ²
4♠ ²	4NT ³
5♣ ⁴	5♦ ⁵
6♥ ⁶	Pass

¹ Splinter; ² Ace-showing cue-bid;

³ RKCB; ⁴ 0 or 3 key cards;

⁵ ♥Q ask; ⁶ ♥Q, no side kings.

Following the 3♠ Splinter, the opener has a great holding in the splinter suit, but having two small diamonds cannot afford to bid 4NT in case the responder holds neither the ace nor the king of diamonds. So he makes a cooperative bid of 4♣. The responder now knows that the opener is interested in slam but either lacks the values to bid 4NT or has a suit which he is worried about. He continues the exchange of information by showing the diamond ace. At this point, opener can either bid 4♥ (with nothing further to say), 4NT, or 4♠ (showing the ace of spades). With no minor-suit kings, he does best to bid 4♠, at which point responder can take control and bid 4NT, leading to a small slam on minimal values.

In summary:

- An ace Showing cue-bid is a way of continuing a conversation about slam prospects without having to bid beyond game.
- It is a useful tool when faced with holdings which are not ideal for RKCB, i.e. voids and suits without first or second round control.
- Ace-showing cue-bids typically occur as a positive continuation following a splinter or a trial bid.
- They can only be made in suits which have not been agreed as the trump suit. □