When the partnership has agreed on a trump suit and is interested in exploring for slam, it is sometimes necessary to exchange information about specific first-round controls—aces and voids—and second-round controls—kings and singletons.

Once the trump suit is agreed, the bid of another suit initiates the control-showing process. It continues until the partnership returns to the agreed trump suit, jumps to slam, or bids Blackwood. The partnership can use the following guidelines:

**Guidelines on Showing Controls**

1. Once the control-showing process is initiated, partner is expected to cooperate below the game level, even with a minimum hand.
2. Controls are rarely shown if they take the partnership beyond game.
3. Both first and second-round controls can be shown.
4. Controls are typically shown ‘up the line.’
5. Controls are not shown in the trump suit. Blackwood is used to check on the total number of aces and kings held by the partnership.

In the last issue, we discussed the first two guidelines. Let’s consider the others.

**Showing First-Round and Second-Round Controls**

Although some partnerships prefer to always show first-round controls ahead of second-round controls, this wastes space, especially if a second-round control could be shown below game, while showing a first-round control would go beyond the security of game. It is generally safe to show a second-round control below game, because Blackwood is still available to check that the partnership isn’t missing too many aces.

Playing 2/1, responder’s 2♥ bid is a marathon bid (★), forcing to game. After hearts have been agreed, responder shows interest in slam by making a control-showing bid of 4♣. Opener now has to decide what to do.

A bid of 4♠ would take the partnership beyond 4♥, so opener does not want to do that with a minimum hand. However, if opener simply bids 4♥, responder will be worried about diamonds and will likely pass.

The auction is much smoother if opener instead shows the second-round diamond control:

**Openener** | **Responder**
--- | ---
1♠ | 2♥
3♥ | 4♣
4♦ | 4NT
5△ | 6♥

Pass

Once opener shows a control in diamonds, responder can confidently bid Blackwood to check for aces, knowing the opponents won’t take the first two diamond tricks. Responder isn’t too concerned that the partnership might be missing both first- and second-round control in spades, since that is opener’s first suit.

The partnership can also reach the slam if opener’s second-round control in diamonds is a singleton instead of the ♦K.

If the partnership has agreed to show both first- and second-round controls below the level of game, then bypassing a suit during a control-showing sequence denies a control in that suit. That would keep the partnership out of trouble if these were the combined hands:

**Openener** | **Responder**
--- | ---
♠ A K J 7 4 | ♠ Q 3
♥ J 10 2 | ♥ A K Q 8 5
♦ 3 | ♦ 5 4 2
♣ Q J 6 3 | ♣ A K 8

**Openener** | **Responder**
--- | ---
1♠ | 2♥
3♥ | 4♣
4♦ | 4NT
5△ | 6♥
Pass

By going back to the agreed trump suit over responder’s 4♣ bid, opener denies either first- or second-round control of diamonds. Responder isn’t tempted to bid any more, which is a good thing. The defenders may be able to take the first three diamond tricks.
Controls ‘Up the Line’
Controls are usually shown ‘up the line’—cheapest first. This helps conserve bidding space and allows partner to draw inferences when a suit is bypassed.

After hearts are agreed, opener expresses interest in slam by making a control-showing bid of 4♦. Responder has a lot of extra values, but can draw the inference that opener has neither the ♠A nor ♦A, since opener bypassed both suits. Responder settles for game.

Combining Control-Showing Bids with Blackwood
Since control-showing bids pinpoint specific aces and kings, why is there a need for Blackwood?
• Controls are not shown in the trump suit. So Blackwood may be needed to make sure that the partnership holds the ace and/or king in the trump suit.
• Since a control-showing bid may show either first- or second-round control, Blackwood may still be needed to ensure the partnership has enough aces to bid slam.

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