

A featured hand submitted by club member Mike Graham

Not All Kings Are Equal

Hand played at MBC on 18/10/2007, Board 17, Red Section, Dealer North, Love All

	Spades	Hearts	Diamonds	Clubs
North:	KQ876	A	Q97643	J
East:	Void	KJ72	J105	KQ8754
South:	AJ543	986	A2	A109
West:	1092	Q10543	K8	632

This deal highlights a useful principle of slam bidding - sometimes it is a question of not *how many* high cards you have, but *which ones* they are. North has a choice of opening bids, but 1D is better as it is the longer suit. If partner gets insistent you can keep repeating spades, and eventually partner will get the message about your suit lengths.

After 1D, East bid 2C. 2H / 2S from South would be non-forcing here, so South doubled, showing a reasonable hand. With 5/6 shape opposite what is in effect a take-out double the North hand looks good, so I jumped to 3S. South cue bid 4C, and I had an easy cue of 4H.

South now realised that he had very good cards indeed - he bid 4NT, asking for key cards. I responded 5S, which showed two key cards (the heart ace and the spade king) plus the queen of spades. With all the key cards accounted for, under our style South could have bid 5NT, asking me to cue-bid my lowest significant king - if I have the king of diamonds there will be 13 tricks, as diamonds can be set up by ruffing. This use of 5NT, when one of the hands is known to be distributional, is more useful than the traditional approach of simply asking how many kings are held. Here, not all kings are equal - the king of diamonds is infinitely more valuable than the kings of clubs or hearts. Six diamonds over 5NT would have shown the king of diamonds - here, lacking it, I simply sign off in Six Spades.

Unfortunately, instead of trying 5NT, South jumped to 7S, assuming I had to have the king of diamonds for my jump to 3S. 7S-1 proved to be the only negative score for North / South on the board. Oh well, better luck next time!

Editor's note:

I played this hand as South and I faced a similar problem to Mike Graham's partner. My partner and I play a different scheme for enquiring about critical Kings. After partner's 5S bid, I could try 6D, which asks specifically about partner's holding in the diamond suit: with neither the king nor queen of diamonds, partner bids the next step up, i.e., 6H, with the queen but not the king he would bid 6S, with the King and not the queen he would bid 6NT, and to complete the set, with both the critical cards he would bid 7C. However, on this particular hand 6D from me would have been ambiguous, as partner had opened 1D initially, and I might just have been agreeing to his first suit all along... At match-pointed pairs I couldn't risk the hand being passed out in 6D, so I faced a guess. Our bidding had gone slightly differently - East had bid 3C rather than 2C - so now partner's 3S was forced rather than a jump. As well as the possibility of losing to the King of Diamonds I was mindful of the risk of a club lead and trumped at trick one, so I just bid 6S - and then I was mightily relieved when the Ace of clubs held at trick one but the King of diamonds was won by West! But despite the events on this board, Mike and his partner went on to win the wine, and I suspect that the analysis offered by Mike on this hand illustrates why that was the case!