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This Week in Bridge

(290) 5NT Grand Slam Tries

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Level: 3

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General

Grand slams are not particularly common, but they are extremely frustrating to miss, especially when we can count 13 tricks as soon as we see the dummy. Our primary tool for reaching a grand slam is 5NT. Here we look at the ways we may use 5NT to explore a grand slam.

5NT King Ask

The traditional use of 5NT, after having bidding 4NT, is to ask for Kings. This simple version of this is to answer with your number of Kings.

of Kings Answers to 5NT

6♣ 0 Kings
6♦ 1 King
6♥ 2 Kings
6♠ 3 Kings

A more sophisticated approach is to show Specific Kings, because sometimes a grand slam depends on partner having the “right” King, not more than one of them.

Specific Kings Answers to 5NT (In this example assume ♠ is our Keycard suit)

6♣ ♣K
6♦ ♦K, No ♣K
6♥ ♥K, No ♣K or ♦K
6♠ No Outside Kings

Note: After a 6♣ or 6♦ answer, the asker can bid a new suit to ask partner to tell them more or to bid a grand slam holding that King.

5NT Grand Slam Force

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Another use of 5NT is to check on partner's trump suit quality for a grand slam. With some hands (especially hands with voids) we know that Keycard will not help us - we want to bid a small slam for certain but a grand slam if partner has good trump (2 of the top 3 honors).

Example 1

1♠ 3♠
5NT ___

This asks Responder to bid a grand slam with 2 of the top 3 honors and to stop in a small slam with a weaker holding. This is called Grand Slam Force (GSF).

Some partnerships use a more sophisticated answering structure to 5NT GSF. When ♠, ♥, or ♦ are the trump suit, we have bidding space below our suit at the 6-level available to describe our trump holding. Our responses to partner's 5NT asks are about how many of the top 3 honors in the trump suit we hold. (Note: 1/3 means "one out of the top three".)

Example 2

1♠ 3♠
5NT ___?
• 6♣ 0/3 honors
• 6♦ 1/3 honors
• 7-level 2/3 honors

These answers to GSF are the same when ♥ or ♦ is the trump suit.

When ♣ is the trump suit, we do not have as much room to show our hand below a small slam.

Example 3

1♣ 5♣
5NT ___?
• 6♣ 0/3 or 1/3 honors
• 7♣ 2/3 honors

If you believe that 6NT is a safe final contract, then you can bid 6♦ to show 1/3 honors.

Advanced GSF Responses in a Major Suit

Some partnerships try to make use of the extra space that is available when a Major suit is trump to describe their top honor holding in more detail by playing a more detailed set of responses.

1♥ 3♥
5NT ___?
• 6♣ 0/3 honors
• 6♦ 1/3 honors (Queen Only)

- 6♥ 1/3 honors (Ace or King Only)
- 7-level 2/3 honors

Example 4

Here is an example of a hand that might use 5NT (GSF) to try for a grand slam.

♠ KJTxxxx
♥ -
♦ KQJxx
♣ A

1♠ 3♠
4♣ 4♦
5NT —

Courtesy 5NT

Another important part of using 5NT is to let partner know that we have all the Keycards and are interested in a grand slam. This is especially true when partner's hand is unlimited or may contain a source of tricks.

In these situations, 5NT by Opener confirms that our side has all the Keycards (and the trump Queen) and invites partner to explore a grand slam. 5NT traditionally asks for Kings (either # or specific), but if Responder can count 13 tricks then they can choose not to show their Kings and instead just bid a grand slam.

Example 5

1♠ 2♣
2♠ 3♠
4NT 5♥
5NT 7NT

♠ KQxxxx ♠ Ajx
♥ Ax ♥ Jx
♦ Axx ♦ Jx
♣ Ax ♣ KQJxxx

With these two hands we would use the courtesy 5NT to bid a grand slam.

Note: Even with little interest in a grand slam, when we hold all the Keycards, we should be sure to bid 5NT if partner's hand could contain enough tricks to make a grand slam possible. Bidding 6♠ in this auction should deny holding all the Keycards - so partner is not tempted to bid on to Grand Slam.

Conclusion

Bidding a grand slam (and making it) can be fun. Missing a cold grand slam is annoying. The best tool for exploring a grand slam in a cooperative fashion is 5NT. Make sure that you and partner are on the same page about the meaning of 5NT. Also make sure that you do not lazily bid a small slam when a grand slam is possible - when you have all the Keycards and may have 13 tricks. Use 5NT (the courtesy one) to let partner know that your side has all the Keycards and that grand slam is possible.