

♠♥♦♣ A SLAM OF EXCLUSION ♠♥♦♣

You are the dealer, with this hand:

S	South
♠	A85
♥	KQJ1098
♦	A532
♣	

You open 1♥ and your partner responds 2♣. You are playing 2/1 game forcing, so his response is forcing to 3NT.

You have 14 HCP and a quality 6-card Heart suit. So far, this hand is worth about 17 total points. Since there is no need to jump here, you rebid 2♥ to show your 6-card suit. Your partner raises to 3♥. Now you have agreement on the trump suit and you can revalue your hand. The 6th Heart adds a point and the Club void adds 4 points. Finally, the presence of a 4-card side suit adds another 1 point. You are up to 23 total points and your partner has promised at least 12 HCP. You've plenty of values for slam.

You would like to find out about the ♥A. But, if you bid 4NT and partner shows one Ace, you won't know if it is the ♥A or the ♣A. The ♥A gives you an extra trick; the ♣A doesn't help at all.

You can distinguish between the two Aces by using a special Ace asking convention: Exclusion Blackwood. Here's how it works:

After the trump suit is confirmed, a jump shift into your void suit is Key Card Blackwood. The special factor is that your partner is asked to exclude your void suit from the reporting. He uses steps similar to regular Key Card Blackwood: 1st step is 1 or 4 Key Cards; 2nd step is 0 or 3 Key Cards; 4th step is 2 Key Cards without the Queen of trump; and the 5th step is 2 Key Cards with the Queen of trump. Here's how the bidding would go for this deal:

West	North	East	South
			1♥
Pass	2♣	Pass	2♥ ¹
Pass	3♥ ²	Pass	5♣ ³
Pass	5♦ ⁴	Pass	6♥
All Pass			

- 1 Probably 6 Hearts
- 2 2 or more Hearts
- 3 Blackwood with a void in Clubs. Don't count the ♣A in your response
- 4 1 or 4 Key Cards

West leads the ♠Q and the dummy descends:

N	North
♠	K62
♥	A32
♦	K64
♣	QJ109

West's Lead: ♠Q

S	South
♠	A85
♥	KQJ1098
♦	A532
♣	

You have a Spade loser and 2 Diamond losers. You consider ruffing 1 of the Diamonds in the dummy. But that will require either Hearts to break 2-2 or the defender with the 3rd Heart to also have four Diamonds. These are both low probability plays. In addition, you still have one too many losers.

A better solution to use the dummy's Clubs. This can give you two discards from your Diamond suit. The play is called a Ruffing Finesse.

Here how it works. You win the first trick in the dummy with the ♠K. You must conserve your dummy entries because you need to return there 3 times.

Lead the ♣Q to trick 2. You plan to discard a diamond if East plays low. If East comes up with the ♣A or ♣K, you will ruff that. Whatever happens you regain the lead and draw trump, ending in the dummy. From there, you lead the ♣J, planning to do the same thing if East plays low or plays the remaining top honor. You'll use the K to get back to the dummy and discard your final losers on the ♣10 and ♣9. This play works if the ♣A and ♣K are either split between the opponents; or they are both in East. The play has a 67% chance of success.

This is the entire deal:

		N	North	W N E S				E	East																									
		A	3	2	K	6	2	K	6	4	Q	J	10	9	♣																			
		♥	♥	♥	♠	♠	♠	♦	♦	♦	♣	♣	♣	♣	♣																			
		5	4					7	6																									
		♥	♥					♥	♥																									
		Q	J	10	9					7	4	3																						
		♠	♠	♠	♠					♠	♠	♠																						
		J	8					Q	10	9	7																							
		♦	♦					♦	♦	♦	♦																							
		K	7	4	3	2					A	8	6	5																				
		♣	♣	♣	♣	♣					♣	♣	♣	♣																				
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W	N	E	S																															
Pass	2 ♣	Pass	2 ♥																															
Pass	3 ♥	Pass	5 ♣																															
Pass	5 ♦	Pass	6 ♥																															
Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass																															
		K	Q	J	10	9	8	A	8	5	A	5	3	2	♠																			
		♥	♥	♥	♥	♥	♥	♠	♠	♠	♦	♦	♦	♦	♠																			
		S South																																

You can see how this hand should be played by clicking on this link: <https://tinyurl.com/ya2z6unt>, or copy and paste it into your browser. Click on the "Next" button on the bottom to advance through each trick. If you don't want to see the opponents hands, click on the white area in the South hand before you start.

Alternatively, by clicking on "Play" you can play all four hands and see if you can make the hand on your own.

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