Roman Key Card Blackwood

Roman Key Card Blackwood (RKC) was developed on the belief that the King of the trump suit is as important as an Ace. Thus, there are five key cards: the four aces and the king of trumps. There are two main systems of responses: 3014 ("thirty-fourteen") and 1430 ("fourteen-thirty"). Each system also provides information about the trump Queen. Like Blackwood, the basic asking bid is 4N. The responses are:

	3014	1430
5C	0 or 3 key cards	1 or 4 key cards
5D	1 or 4 key cards	0 or 3 key cards
5H	2 or 5 key cards without the queen	2 or 5 key cards without the queen
5S	2 or 5 key cards with the queen	2 or 5 key cards with the queen

Thus, if responder has 2 or 5 key cards, the response will also show the presence or absence of the queen of trumps. If responder has 0, 1, 3. or 4 key cards, the initial response doesn't give any information about the trump queen. Sometimes, the "asker" will have the queen. If he does not, he can ask about the trump queen by bidding the lowest available non-trump bid. For example, if the bidding has gone 1H-3H-4N-5C, then 5D would ask about the queen. However, if the bidding has gone 1H-3H-4N-5D, then 5S would ask about the queen (skipping over 5H, since that was the trump suit). The responses to the queen ask (no differences between 3014 and 1430) are:

A. No trump queen — Bid 5 of the trump suit if room is available; otherwise bid 5N.

B. Trump queen, no outside kings — Bid 6 of the trump suit.

C. Trump queen, 1 or more outside kings — Make the cheapest available bid in a suit in which you have an outside king.

Special note: Sometimes the responder gets to "pretend" that he has the queen when he really doesn't. That occurs when he has extra length in the trump suit. Suppose opener bids 1 H (showing at least 5), and responder bids 3H (limit) or 2N (Jacoby), showing 4, but responder actually has 5 trumps. Responder can pretend to have the queen and respond as if he does, because in the vast majority of cases, a ten-card fit with the AK will have no trump losers.

So what about asking for kings? There are two cases: (A) asker doesn't use the queen ask and (B) asker does use the queen ask. Case (A) usually occurs because asker has the queen or received a 5H or 5S response to the initial RKC response. In this case, asker simply bids 5N to ask for kings. Just as you had a choice about 3014 responses vs. 1430 responses, you also have a choice about responding to the request for kings. The choice is between "number of kings" or "specific kings". If you choose "number", the responses are just like Blackwood (5C=0 or 4, 5D=1, 5H=2, 5S=3). If you choose "specific", you bid your cheapest outside king.

Special note: If you ask for kings, you guarantee that the partnership has all the key cards and the trump queen and that you are interested in 7. The reason is that by asking for kings, you are forcing the partnership to 6. If you are willing **and able** to do that, why ask for kings unless you are interested in 7? Sometimes you may have a side suit such as AQJxx and you will be cold for 7 if partner has your missing king (this is a reason to play specific kings). Another reason is to simply send the message to partner that you have all the key cards and the trump queen and to invite 7 if he has an undisclosed source of tricks (e.g., KQJxx in a side suit).

In Case B (asker used the queen ask), asker will only ask for kings if partner showed the queen. The way to do this is to bid the cheapest available non-trump bid (can be a side suit or NT). Again, responses are either "number" or "specific". If the agreement is "number", the first "step" is 0, second "step" is 1, etc.

Special note: There are many experts who use 3014 and many who use 1430. Some use 3014 in some circumstances and 1430 in other circumstances. Flip a coin, or check with your prospective partners for a preference. Be sure that you have agreement on responses to the king ask. When you are ready for more esoterica, there's Exclusionary RKC, Kickback, Minorwood, and void-showing responses.