

Splinter bids

OUR second convention is a tool which allows for greater accuracy when judging whether to bid towards slam with minimal values. When seeking to bid low point count slams, it is important to determine whether the partnership's hands are fitting together well. The key to this often lies in the ability to judge whether a player's short suit holdings are going to either generate extra tricks by ruffing or reduce the number of losers held in the short suit.

How can this be achieved?

Hand A
 ♠ K 7 4
 ♥ A Q 6 5
 ♦ K 8 4 3 2
 ♣ 7

While it is helpful to count points when supporting partner with a balanced hand, it is usually advisable to be bolder with unbalanced hands.

This is especially true when supporting to the game level. For example, partner opens 1♥ and responder holds a hand such as *Hand A*. Without any conventional tools, the responder could either bid 4♥ (leaving partner to guess whether the 4♥ bid is based on high cards or just distributional values), 2♦ (hoping to make a 'Delayed Game Raise' – a treatment which is no longer particularly fashionable), or 4NT Roman Key-Card Blackwood (gambling that the hands will have a play for slam if opener has at least three key cards). However, it would clearly be better to be able to show a hand with the values for game with primary support and a shortage (singleton or void) in clubs – the essence of a Splinter bid.

How can a Splinter be recognised?

Let us first consider Splinter bids by the responder. In this case, a Splinter is defined as a double jump in a new suit. Thus, holding *Hand A*, the responder would bid 4♣ (note: with a singleton spade, the response would be 3♠). Having fully described his hand type and values, he would now expect the opener to judge whether to bid towards slam.

Can the opener make Splinter bids?

Hand B
 ♠ A Q 4 3
 ♥ K Q 7
 ♦ 2
 ♣ A Q 8 3 2

Splinters can also be employed by the opener, and typically involve a double jump in a new suit. Holding *Hand B*, the opener would bid 1♣ and following a 1♠ response could just raise to 4♠. However, it would be better to show a raise with short diamonds, so he rebids 4♦, a double jump in a new suit, allowing responder to assess if the partnership should try for slam.

Do Splinters always involve a double jump?

While a double jump is often needed when agreeing a suit, *only a single jump is necessary once a suit has been agreed*, i.e. 1♥ – 2♥ – 4♣. Also, it is worth noting that *any jump to the four level should be treated as a Splinter*, e.g. 1♠ – 2♥ – 4♦. This should be logical, as the opener could simply bid 3♦ with a non-minimum hand, and can only afford to go beyond 3NT when confident that the partnership already have a fit. Lastly, *a single jump in an opponent's suit should also be treated as a Splinter*. Again this should make sense, as a principle of Splinters is that the Splinter bid should not take the partnership beyond game, but merely allow partner to decide whether to go that step further.

How does one evaluate one's hand opposite a Splinter?

When partner makes a Splinter bid, an effective approach is to consider the impact of knowing that partner has at most one card in the suit bid. Thus A-x-x should be considered a very good holding as two potential losers have effectively been reduced to none, while K-Q-x would be a bad holding as there is still one loser and the five points held in that suit could be used more effectively in any of the suits in which the Splinter bidder has length.



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Thus, it is generally the case that one should be encouraged by length and/or possession of the ace in the Splinter suit, while being discouraged by shortage and/or possession of the king, queen and jack in the Splinter suit.

Here is an example of Splinters in action:

♠ K J 5 3		♠ A Q 8 6 2
♥ 5		♥ A 7 6 4
♦ A Q 7 6 3	W	♦ K J 5
♣ J 7 6	E	♣ 3

West	East
1♦	1♠
2♠*	4♣*
4NT†	5♠*
6♣	All Pass

* Not strong enough to Splinter.

† Splinter

‡ Roman Key-Card Blackwood

§ Two key cards and the ♠Q

In summary:

- A Splinter bid typically involves a double jump in a new suit, and shows at least four-card support and values for game, as well as a shortage in the suit bid.
- Only a single jump is necessary once a suit has been agreed, if a double jump would take the partnership beyond game, or when jumping in the opponents' suit.
- When evaluating opposite a Splinter bid, be bold with length and/or the ace of the Splinter suit, but be cautious with shortage and/or the king, queen or jack of the Splinter suit. □