



Splinter raises

The splinter bid is a useful addition to any pairs' bidding arsenal. It is a specialized type of raise that sometimes allows a partnership to bid a game or slam that might otherwise be missed.

A splinter raise is an unusual jump that shows four-card or longer support for the last bid suit, game-going values and shortness (a singleton or void) in the suit in which the jump occurred. For example:

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
1♥	4♣

Responder shows at least four hearts, opening values (approximately; more on this later) and club shortness.

How can you tell which jumps are splinters? They're usually defined as any new-suit response beyond a double jump. That means that after a 1♥ opening, 3♠, 4♣ and 4♦ are all splinter raises, each showing a different singleton or void. After a 1♠ opening, 4♣, 4♦ and 4♥ are all splinter bids.

Why are these bids useful? Let's look at an example:

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
♠AK654	♠Q10987
♥KQ6	♥A542
♦862	♦5
♣A6	♣KQJ

After opener begins with 1♠, responder bids 4♦. From opener's point of view, this is good news. She knows that her partner has at most one diamond, making it safe to explore for slam. Why? Opener doesn't have to worry about the three low diamonds in her hand.

Whether opener uses Blackwood

or cuebids, 6♠ is easy to reach and almost certain to succeed. Notice that the partnership has a combined total of only 28 points, far less than the textbook 33 points suggested for bidding a small slam.

If responder had splintered in a different suit (hearts, for example) opener should take a more pessimistic view of things and settle for game only.

How strong does responder need to be to make a splinter bid? Partnerships may, of course, define them as they please, but many players have found that restricting responder to 13 to 15 points (which includes distribution) makes it easier for opener to know what to do. With a weaker hand, other types of raises are available to responder. The same is true for stronger hands.

Opener may make a splinter bid as well. Here's an example:

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
♠AJ65	♠KQ743
♥9	♥876
♦KQJ4	♦932
♣AQ102	♣J4

After 1♦ by opener, responder bids 1♠. Opener then jumps to 4♥, a splinter bid. What does it mean when opener uses this type of jump? It shows a fit for responder's suit (at least four cards), an excellent hand (remember, responder could have a minimum hand, as in the example) and shortness in the bid suit.

Responder will retreat to 4♠ after the 4♥ splinter, but will be pleased when he sees the dummy. With only 22 combined HCP, the spade game

is a virtual lock, and 11 tricks are possible if the club finesse works.

Note that if splinters weren't being used on this deal, opener might have rebid 3♠. Responder, with such a weak hand, would certainly have passed, and the good game would have been missed.

Can you use splinters after a 1♣ or a 1♦ opening? Yes, as long as you discuss this with partner. After a 1♣ opening, 3♦, 3♥ and 3♠ would all be splinter bids. If opener starts with 1♦, 3♥, 3♠ and 4♣ would be splinters.

There are other applications for splinters in different auctions. Consider this:

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
1♣	1♥
2♥	3♠

Since the partnership has already agreed on hearts, should 3♠ be a natural bid? Many partnerships believe that it should not. Instead, they treat it as a splinter raise, showing game-forcing values and spade shortness.

Remember, you must discuss this treatment with partner. It's important to specify the strength of splinter raises as well as whether they can be used in other constructive auctions such as the last example. □

Did you know?

ACBL Hall of Famer Dorothy Truscott (formerly Hayden) is credited with popularizing splinter raises in the early Sixties.