



Adventures in Bridge

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This Week in Bridge

(409) Splinters by Opener

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Level: 6 of 10 (2 of 6)

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General

Splinters are not just a bid for Responder to try for slam. Just as the Responder shows values, a fit for partner's suit, and shortness with a splinter in response to partner's opening, so can Opener. When Opener starts with a suit bid at the 1-level and Responder bids a new suit, Opener can show good values, a fit for Responder's suit, and shortness by making a splinter bid with their first rebid. Let's see how this works.

Splinters by Opener – “Full Strength” Splinters

When Responder makes a splinter bid it is a double jump shift – implying a fit, shortness in the new suit bid, and enough combined values to insist on game. When this is opposite an opening bid, then this splinter bids shows 12+ points. Opener can also make a double jump shift on their first rebid to imply a similar situation – fit, shortness, and enough combined values to insist on game.

Splinter Auctions by Opener

Example 1

1♣ 1♠
4♦/4♥

Example 2

1♦ 1♠
4♣/4♥

Example 3

1♣ 1♥
3♠/4♦

Example 4

1♦ 1♥
3♠/4♣

One major difference in a splinter by Opener is that they are forcing to game opposite a simple response from partner, which only showed about 6+ points. This means that Opener's splinter bid shows a very strong hand, about 18+ points in support of Responder's suit. These splinter bids show 4-card support for Responder's Major suit, a singleton or void (S/V) in the new suit bid, and a powerful hand (18+ points). This splinter is game forcing and drives the auction to at least 4-Major.

Opener can also splinter with a jump to 3-Major in auctions that start 1♣ – 1♦, showing a strong hand, support for Responder's ♦ suit, and shortness in the Major suit bid.

Note: Splinters also exist in 2/1 auctions and other more complex situations.



Example 5

♠ AT6
♥ AQ93
♦ 5
♣ AK876
1♣ 1♥
4♦

This hand has enough values and fit to insist on playing 4♥ when partner responds 1♥. But with shortness in ♦, Opener should splinter into 4♦, showing this shortness to Responder and allowing them to re-evaluate their hand for a possible slam.

Mini-Splinters by Opener

In some auctions Opener can use other bids to show special splinters that promise a fit and shortness, but fewer values or not enough values to insist on game. These bids are called *Mini-Splinters* by Opener and are only forcing to the 3-level in Responder’s suit, but hoping that Responder has enough values to reach game.

Mini-Splinter Auctions by Opener

<i>Example 6</i>	<i>Example 7</i>	<i>Example 8</i>
1♣ 1♠	1♣ 1♥	1♦ 1♠
3♦*/3♥*	3♦*	3♥*

These bids are all raises to the 3-level in Responder’s suit, showing 15-17 points, with 4-card support for Responder’s Major suit, but also showing a S/V in the suit jumped into.

Note: These bids are distinguishable from traditional jump shifts, natural bids showing length and strength, by the fact that they are “jump reverses”. In each of these cases, bidding the same suit one level lower (at the 2-level) would be a reverse showing length, a strong hand, and forcing values. Thus, this jump reverse is not needed to show a strong hand and can be used to show shortness – as a mini-splinter.



Conclusion

Just as Responder can make a splinter bid to show a fit, shortness, and enough values for game, so can Opener in support of Responder's bid suit. Opener's double jump shift splinter shows fit, shortness, and a strong hand – enough values to insist on game opposite a 6-pt hand. This aggressive bidding by Opener is often done with powerful distributional hands, establishing a game force, and simultaneously exploring slam. These splinters also allow Responder to further evaluate their hand and have a good idea what cards may be useful for slam, and which are likely wasted values. Keep these descriptive splinter bids in mind when you discover a fit for Responder and you hold a powerful distributional opening hand. These splinters by Opener allow Responder to make much better slam bidding decisions. Keep adding more ways to show shortness and fit to your bidding system.