

Splinter Bids

A Splinter bid is a convention whereby a double jump response in a side suit indicates excellent support (at least four cards), shortage in that side suit and at least game going values. It is my number one favourite convention. Once you learn what a Splinter is – you will then need to recognise it - when it is bid, how to re-evaluate the strength of your hand and then - what to bid.

How Can I Tell Partner I have a Void?

If you repeat a bid in the splintered suit – this shows the void!

Tell Me More

Marty would say: “Points Schmoins”. Points are valuable when holding balanced hands – but not as much when holding unbalanced hands. This is the whole thrust of Splinter bids. It gives us the power to evaluate our hands based on known shortage. For example, partner opens 1♠ and you hold the hand in fig.1. Now there are several ways to attack this hand regarding your choice of responses. If I were to

♠ QJ 7 6
♥ 9
♦ A J 7 6 5
♣ A 9 8 4
fig. 1

say that you could show your 4-card spade support, your singleton heart and the values for game with one bid – what would you say? Well that is exactly what you can do if you play Splinter Bids. Jump to 4♥. This is an unusual bid, but because 2♥ would be forcing and 3♥ would be a strong jump shift and ‘really forcing’ – then a jump to 4♥ seems unnecessary to show hearts. Hence, when responding to a suit bid by opener (partner) a double jump in another suit is a Splinter bid.

1. 1♠ - 4♣/4♦/4♥ are all splinter bids in support of spades.
2. 1♣ - 3♦/3♥/3♠ are all splinter bids in support of clubs.
3. 1♥ - 3♠/4♣/4♦ are all splinter bids in support of hearts.
4. 1♦ - 3♥/3♠/4♣ are all splinter bids in support of diamonds.

Are Splinters Easy to Recognize?

Yes. They will jump off the table and hit you right in the eye. That is how easy they are to recognize. The startling jump in the auction should rouse you from any stupor.

Are Splinters always a Double Jump?

Exception #1

If you jump in a suit the opponents bid – you need only make a single jump to Splinter. 1♥ - (2♣) - 4♣ Partner opens 1♥ RHO overcalls 2♣ and you jump to 4♣. This is a Splinter showing all the required accoutrements. (4+ card heart support, shortage in clubs and game values)

You	Partner
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1♦	1♠
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3♥	
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fig. 2

Exception #2 The 3♥ bid is only a single jump. However, assuming you play that a 2♥ bid here would be a ‘Reverse Bid’ showing hearts, 17+ points and forcing for one round – then a jump to 3♥ as a natural bid is not necessary. It would be redundant. Hence, it is logical to conclude that the jump to 3♥ is a splinter bid in support of spades.

You	Partner
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1♥	1♠
----	----

3♦	
----	--

fig. 3

Note that in this auction that 3♦ is not a Splinter. A double jump to 4♦ would be a Splinter. That is because a 2♦ bid here would be natural and forcing. It is not promising 17+ like a ‘Reverse Bid’ of 2♥ in fig. 2. Hence, the jump-shift to 3♦ is natural and is forcing to game and perhaps beyond.

You	Partner
-----	---------

1♥	2♥
----	----

4♦	
----	--

fig. 4

Exception #3 You and partner have already agreed on a suit. Because the trump suit (hearts) has already been established as by both you and partner bidding hearts – a single jump to 4♦ here is a Splinter. I would not want to have to jump to 5♦ (double jump) to show my stiff diamond. This would be going by the safety net of game (4♥) and not very practical.

Can Opener Splinter?

See above. (Are Splinters Always a Double Jump). Yes, opener can splinter. In fig. 4 you open 1♦ and hear partner respond 1♥. Your hand has gotten better. Jump to 4♣, revealing your happiness. Once you and your partner undertake to play Splinters – you will see possibilities to do so. Logic will be your guide.

♠ Q 9 4

♥ A K 7 6

♦ A K 8 6 4

♣ 2

fig. 5

STRENGTH OF A SPLINTER BID

When partner opens and you splinter – you show 13-15 total points. When you open, responder bids a new suit and you splinter you promise enough strength to be at the 4-level (or 3-level see fig 3.) opposite a hand that may be only 6 points.

What About Hand Evaluation?

♠ A Q 10 6 3

♥ K 8

♦ A 6

♣ 9 8 6 3

fig. 6

Basically – if you have weakness opposite a splinter suit – this is good. If you hold the hand in fig. 5 you would open 1♠. You should be pleased if partner responds 4♣. Any concerns you had about all those club losers will dissipate. It also makes the high-cards you do have ‘working high-cards; complementing the high-cards partner is known to hold.

♣ K J 2

♣ K Q 5

♣ Q J 3

♣ Q 6 4 2

♣ 9 6 2

♣ A 6 3

fig. 7

Again, assume you open 1♠ and partner splinters in clubs. With all the club holdings in fig. 6 the last two are the only ones I am pleased with. Basically, it is not good to have values in a suit partner splinters in unless it is the ace. The first four holdings have values which would be well placed elsewhere. Hence with the first four I would take a conservative stance of my values - while I would be very encouraged – if holding the last two.

Splinter Bids Quiz

Fill in the bids you would make holding the hand to the right.

1.

W	N	E	S
	1♠	pass	?
pass	5♣	pass	?
pass	6♠	pass	?

♠ K Q J 4 3

♥ A Q 8 7

♦ 7

♣ J 10 9

fig. 8

2.

W	N	E	S
	1♠	pass	?
pass	4♥	pass	?
pass	6♠	pass	?

♠ K Q J 3

♥ Q 8 7 3

♦ ---

♣ K J 10 9 4

fig. 9

3.

W	N	E	S
	1♦	pass	?
pass	4♣	pass	?
pass	6♣	pass	?

♠ A J 3

♥ 3

♦ A Q J 9 4

♣ Q 8 3 2

fig. 10