

“Splinter” Bids by Responder or Opener Showing a Singleton ‘Loser’ or Void And Inviting a Possible Slam Bid”

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One of the hardest contracts to find is a slam bid that can be made with **28** or so *points* (rather than **32** or **33**) due to the distribution fit of the two Partner’s Hands. Such Hands typically involve a singleton or void in one Hand or both of the Partners’ two Hands. The present explanation of “**Splinter**” bids assumes the Partnership is only doing the “**Splinter**” bid over the bid of a **Major**.² A “**Splinter**” bid shows Partner **4** things all at one time in a single bid, but does so at the cost of eating a lot of bidding space, all in service of exploring a potential slam bid.

“Splinter” Bid

A “**Splinter**” bid is a Partner **double jumping** while bidding a new unbid Suit. A “**Splinter**” bid can be made either by the Responder (e.g., Opener: **1S**, Responder: **4C**; or **1S**, **4D**; or **1H**, **4C**) or by the Opener (e.g., Opener: **1H**, Responder: **1S**; Opener: **4D**).

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¹ As noted in an article in the Winter/Spring, 2024 article in The American Bridge Teachers’ Association (ABTA) Journal, https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/ABTA_1_24.pdf, Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen in fact is a hypothetical, and not a real person! So this article was really, really written by **Bruce Thompson**.

² A “**Splinter**” bid also can be performed in a Minor. For discussion of “**Splinter**” in a Minor see the excellent more extended discussion of “**Splinter**” bids in Marc Smith’s excellent article, “**Splinter Bids**”, on the **BridgeBum** website:

<https://www.bridgebum.com/splinters.php>

The first example presented here is based on one pair of Partnership Hands presented by Mark Smith in his web posting.

The "Splinter" bid shows (1) either a **singleton** small "loser" (not a singleton Ace) or a **void** in the "Splinter" bid Suit,³ *AND* (2) **4+** card support for Partner's level-1 bid Major, *AND* (3) if you are the Responder exactly **11** to **16** points *including* **distribution points**,⁴ *AND* (4) first- or second-round **control in BOTH the other 2 Suits** (not the Opener's bid Suit, and not the Suit that involves a Void or a "loser" Singleton). This is because the "Splinter" is a Slam-seeking bid, and these conditions must be met to make a Slam likely.

Because "Splinter" bids are artificial, the "Splinter" bid must be alerted (!). As noted previously, the "Splinter" can be made by *Responder* immediately in response to Partner's opening bid, such as:

NORTH: 1**S**; WEST: PASS; SOUTH: 4**C**!.

Or a "Splinter" bid by *Opener* can emerge later in the bidding, such as:

NORTH: 1**C**; EAST: 1**D**; SOUTH: 1**H**; WEST: PASS; NORTH: 4**D**!.

Note that this last "Splinter" is (1) performed by *Opener* rather than *Responder*, and (2) shows (a) a void or a "loser" singleton in what in this case was the Opponents' bid Diamond Suit and (b) at least 4-card Heart support.

When "Splinters" May Lead to Slam Bids

E/W PASS at each turn within the auction. NORTH sitting as Dealer opens 1**S** holding:

³ A bid showing a void or singleton can similarly be made by Partners playing the "Jacoby 2NT" Convention in response to Opener bidding 1**H** or 1**S**. Responder bids an "artificial" 2NT! saying, "Partner, I hold (1) **4+** cards in your bid Major and (2) ~**13** HCPs." If the Opener then bids a *new* Suit at the 3 level the Opener is showing either a void or a singleton in the *newly* bid Suit. Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons", see: "Jacoby 2NT Response Bid" at:

<https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/jacoby2NT.pdf>

⁴ If you are the Opener, you might hold as many as **21** or **22** points. With a void or singleton you cannot open 2NT, and you may not hold **22-24** HCPs or see **8** Tricks in your Hand, so you cannot open 2C.

NORTH (18; "SQT Score" = 5 + 3 = 8⁵)
S: A K J 4 2
H: J 8 4
D: K Q 4
C: A 9

Here SOUTH as **Responder** holds:

SOUTH (11)
S: Q 9 7 3
H: 6
D: A J 5 2
C: K J 7 4

SOUTH WOULD "Splinter" by bidding 4**H!**.⁶ NORTH's 4**H!** bid shows (1) a Heart void or singleton, (2) **11** to **16** points *including distribution points*, and (3) "strong" Spade "support" and "forces" to at least Game (4**H** or 4**S**). Once SOUTH "Splinters" NORTH knows that SOUTH's "shortness" in Hearts also will provide opportunities to ruff some of Declarer NORTH's "losing" Diamonds in the SOUTH Dummy. Holding a "big" Hand NORTH can then bid 4**NT** to ask for "key cards" using the "Roman Key Card 1430" Convention.⁷ If NORTH "asks" for "key cards" (Aces and the Trump King) once SOUTH shows only **1** "key card" NORTH can decide whether or not to proceed further to slam. In this case NORTH now knows that (1) SOUTH holds **11+** HCPs, (2) **4+** Trump Spades to complement NORTH's Trump **5** Spades, (2) **1** Ace which can't be a Heart since SOUTH "Splintered" in Hearts *denying* the Heart Ace and so must be NORTH's missing Diamond Ace. NORTH sees 1st-Round "control" in 3 Suits and 2nd-Round "control" in Diamonds so NORTH is likely to then bid 6**S**.

⁵ The Ron Klinger "Suit Quality Test ('SQT') Score" = (1) number of Trump cards held when considering a Suit contract plus (2) the number of Trump Honors (including the Ten) held. In Suit bids contracts set no higher that "SQT Score" – 6 level are generally safe.

⁶ This is a **triple-jump** bid rather than a double-jump bid. SOUTH "Splinters" at the 4 level his Partnership plays jumps to the 3 level as showing Aces bid "up the line". See "Esther Bridge Lesson #57": "Showing Partner *Specific* Aces via 'Cue Bidding' Aces 'Up the Line', and Asking Partner for 'Key Cards':

https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/aces_cue.pdf

⁷ Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons", see: "Convention Lesson #3: RKC-1430 or RKC-3014":

https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/RKC_1430.pdf

When "Splinters" May Lead Only to Game Bids

E/W PASS at each turn within the auction. NORTH sitting as Dealer opens 1**H** holding:⁸

NORTH (18)

S: J 8 6
H: A K J 4 2
D: A 7
C: K Q 5

SOUTH (11)

S: A 9 5 3
H: Q 8 7 3
D: K Q 8 2
C: 7

SOUTH holds (1) **3** "Distribution Points" for the Club singleton, which can be counted by SOUTH because a Heart Trump "fit" has been established, (2) **11** HCPs, and (3) **4** "supporting" Hearts, so SOUTH "**Splinters**" by bidding 4**C!**. Here NORTH sees a likely Club "loser" and possibly multiple Spade "losers" and thus decides not to pursue a slam bid and instead simply bids 4**H** as a "drop dead" bid.

Benefits of the "Splinter" Bid

The "**Splinter**" bid allows the Partner on the receiving end of a "**Splinter**" bid to **promote** certain values when the fit is good, such as when the Responder "**Splinter**" bidder bidding 4**D!**, and the Opener holding A,K,x,x of Diamonds. Alternatively, Responder to the "**Splinter**" bid may need to lower the value of certain cards, as when Partner "**Splinter**" bids 4**D!**, and Responder to the "**Splinter**" is holding "*soft*" honors, such as Q,J,x,x of Diamonds. In summary, "**Splinter**" bids can help in the evaluation of "Quick Tricks" and "losers" and facilitate informed decisions about correctly bidding a "stop", or a slam.

⁸ This example is based on a pair of 2 Hands presented in Vic Quiros' article, "**Slam Investigation After a Major-Suit Opening: Splinter Bids**", in the October, 2024 issue of the ACBL Bridge Bulletin.

"Jacoby 2NT!" as an Alternative to "Splinter" Bids

"**Jacoby 2NT!**"⁹ is an alternative convention with which a Responder can show Opener (1) ~13+ HCPs and (2) 4+ card "support" in Opener's bid Major. And in "**Jacoby 2NT!**" the Opener (but *only* the Opener) once 2NT! has been bid can show Responder that Opener holds a void or a singleton. However, there are some differences between bidding "**Splinters**" versus "**Jacoby 2NT!**":

1. In "**Splinter**" bids Distribution Points are counted because a Trump "fit" has been established during the bidding. Note that Distribution Points are not initially counted when bidding "**2 Over 1**"¹⁰ because in a "**2 Over 1**" auction it is possible that a 3NT contract will be finalized and so Distribution Points are not relevant, and considering Distribution Points therefore may lead to finalizing "unmakeable" 3NT contracts.
2. A "**Splinter**" bid can be made by the Responder with only 11 Points, *including* Distribution Points. A Responder when making either a "**Jacoby 2NT!**" or a "**2 Over 1**" response will not make one of these response bids unless the Responder holds 13+ (or perhaps 12+) HCPs, again because the final contract may be set at 3NT.

"Splinter" Bids in Conjunction With Playing "Jacoby 2NT" and/or "2 Over 1"

Finally, it is important to note that "**Splinter**" bids can be played *alone*, and the important "Jacoby 2NT" can be played *alone*, and the all-important "**2 Over 1 ('2/1') Convention**" can be played *alone*. But these 3 conventions also can be played in any combination the Partnership chooses. But *magic* can happen when these conventions are played together!

⁹ Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons", see: "Convention Lesson #2: Jacoby 2NT":

<https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/jacoby2NT.pdf>

¹⁰ Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons", see: "Convention Lesson #1: "'2 Over 1' ('2/1') Convention":

<https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/2 over 1.pdf>

"Splinter" Bidding Practice Website

A great website to *actually practice* bidding "**Splinters**" is Gwen and Jim Baker's "Baker Bridge" website:

<https://bakerbridge.coffeecup.com/Jacoby/Start.html>