



Raising Partner – Part III

by Michael Byrne

IN the last two articles I have looked at raising partner and the new ways in which you can show support. While the basic structure remains the same with a weak raise (5-9) and a limit raise (10-11), when you hold hands that are worth game you are able to choose between a different selection of bids that show or ask various things of partner. In the last issue we looked at the Jacoby 2NT response which showed opening values and asked about partner's hand; this month we are going to look at splinter bids, which show something to partner and let him decide how to proceed.

Splinter Bids

The splinter bid was originally called 'The Impossible Leap' (you can see why they changed the name) and was invented by Dorothy Hayden Truscott in the 1960s. It takes the form of a double jump to just below game, and shows several things:

- i) Support (four cards or more) for partner's suit;
- ii) Values for game (10-13 points); and
- iii) A singleton or void in the suit bid.

(Note that the point count can be shaded slightly depending on shape; a hand with five-card support and a void is much more powerful than one with four-card support and a singleton.)

Hands like the following are ideal for a splinter in response to (for example) 1♠:

Hand 1	Hand 2	Hand 3
♠ K J 9 6	♠ A Q 8 7	♠ Q 8 7 3
♥ Q J 8	♥ K J 2	♥ 3
♦ 6	♦ Q 10 8 5 4	♦ A J 9 7 6
♣ K J 9 7 5	♣ 9	♣ K Q 8

In each case the splinter (4♦ for Hand 1, 4♣ for Hand 2 and 4♥ for Hand 3) describes the hand well and lets partner make the final decision. Note that there are a few important points about splinter bids that are occasionally brushed over by keen

advocates who take them on board without fully appreciating the ramifications.

Health Warnings

The first thing to note is that the singleton is supposed to be a small one. Anything up to singleton jack is perfect, singleton queen and king are not ideal but tolerable, and singleton ace is a bad idea. The reason for that is if partner has length and strength opposite your splinter bid he will be put off, thinking that K-Q-J-4 is a bad holding. Of course, if your singleton is the ace then the suit will run for four tricks and provide discards, which partner won't realise.

The second thing comes more as a warning: the sequence 1♠ – Pass – 4♥ has countless victims who have been left to play in a 3-1 fit with one hand thinking 4♥ is natural and the other thinking it is a splinter. If you do play it as a splinter (and I would suggest for completeness you do) make sure you discuss it with your regular partner, and any new partner with whom you play.

The final point to mention is that hands that have a trick source (such as their own suit of A-K-J-x-x or K-Q-J-x-x-x) should not splinter, as they are too powerful and will produce too many tricks. Instead, bid your long suit via a strong jump shift or agree partner's major with a Jacoby bid (see my December 2014 article).



(Although here I am concentrating on responding to an opening bid, it is worth mentioning that splinter bids crop up in many different guises. You can also use them when you are the opening bidder and partner has responded at the one or two level, or if you or partner have overcalled.)

Responding to a Splinter Bid

How does partner respond to a splinter bid? Since a splinter is such a well-defined bid, the opener should instantly have some idea of whether or not a slam is on.

If the opener is certain there is no slam, then he simply signs off in four of the agreed major suit. *The splinter bidder is not allowed to bid on* – if he wants to carry on looking for a slam then he should have started with 2NT Jacoby and asked the questions, as opposed to making a splinter bid and showing partner the answers.

If the opener is certain he can make a slam if there are enough aces (or key-cards) present, then he can launch into Blackwood.

If the opener's hand is in between and he can see the likely possibility of a slam without being certain, then he must use cue-bidding and investigate.

Let's see a few hands you might hold for a 1♠ opening bid and what you would do with each of them when partner splinters with 4♣:

<p>Hand A</p> <p>♠ K J 9 7 6</p> <p>♥ J 3</p> <p>♦ A 2</p> <p>♣ K J 9 3</p>	<p>Hand B</p> <p>♠ A J 9 7 5 4</p> <p>♥ K</p> <p>♦ A 2</p> <p>♣ 7 6 4 3</p>
<p>Hand C</p> <p>♠ K J 9 7 6</p> <p>♥ A K J 6</p> <p>♦ Q 3</p> <p>♣ Q 8</p>	<p>Hand D</p> <p>♠ A K Q J 9</p> <p>♥ Q 3 2</p> <p>♦ J 8 3</p> <p>♣ K J</p>

Hand A has a lot of wasted values in clubs, and only 9 points outside the splinter suit; the odds of a slam are almost zero, so sign off in 4♠.

Hand B by contrast is ideal. The 6-4 trump fit will make the play very easy, and you have a full opening bid outside the club suit. Blackwood will get all of the answers you need and lead to a slam on most occasions.

Hand C has a good 14 points (discounting the useless ♣Q) and goodish spades and hearts, so a slam might be on. You need quite a lot of help from partner though, and a cue-bid of 4♥ is the right move. If the splinter bidder now signs off in 4♠ then you must respect his decision and pass. Even facing a *perfecto* of ♠A, ♥Q, ♦A-K, which is 13 points, you still need to pick up the queen of spades to make a slam, barely a 50/50 chance.

Hand D looks very impressive, with solid trumps and a bit outside. Remember that the ♣K-J are useless, however, and you lack any controls in the red suits. Stay safely in 4♠ and pocket the money.

Let's review the dos and don'ts of splinter bidding:

Do:

- Agree to play splinter bids with partner and remind him about 1♠ – Pass – 4♥ lest you end up in the 'inevitable' 3-1 fit.
- Discount any points you have in the splinter suit (apart from the ace) if partner makes a splinter bid and you are wondering whether to bid on.
- Appreciate that a void is significantly better than a singleton, especially when accompanied by massive trump support.

Don't:

- Splinter with singleton aces, it will just cause partner to mis-evaluate his hand.
- Splinter on good hands (14+); if you are wondering whether or not to bid on after partner signs off, then you made the wrong bid on the previous round.
- Splinter when you have a long, strong source of tricks for partner: when you splinter, you are telling him that the main highlight of your hand is the shortage. □

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