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This Week in Bridge

(184) Splinter Bids by Responder

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Level: 2

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General

The “cousin” of Jacoby 2NT is a *Splinter Bid*. Traditional Major suit splinters are made in response to 1-Major opening bids. Just like Jacoby 2NT, these splinters are artificial bids that show at least 4-card support for Opener’s Major suit and game forcing values, allowing the partnership to explore for slam below the level of game. A splinter differs from Jacoby 2NT in that instead of showing values and a large fit while asking for more information about Opener’s hand (asking for shortness), it shows both value and fit while showing Responder’s shortness – allowing Opener to make the decision about the possibility of slam. Let’s see how this works.

Splinter Bids in Response to 1-Major Openings

A splinter bid by Responder is a special conventional bid that shows:

- Minimum game forcing values (usually 11-14 HCP).
- 4+card support for Opener’s Major suit.
- A singleton or void (S/V) in a side suit – allowing Responder to show their “support points”.

A splinter in response to Opener’s 1-Major bid is a “Double Jump Shift”.

Examples

1♠ __?

- 4♣* Minimum game forcing values (11-14 HCP), 4+card ♠, S/V in ♣
- 4♦* Minimum game forcing values (11-14 HCP), 4+card ♠, S/V in ♦
- 4♥* Minimum game forcing values (11-14 HCP), 4+card ♠, S/V in ♥

1♥ __?

- 3♠* Minimum game forcing values (11-14 HCP), 4+card ♥, S/V in ♠
- 4♣* Minimum game forcing values (11-14 HCP), 4+card ♥, S/V in ♣
- 4♦* Minimum game forcing values (11-14 HCP), 4+card ♥, S/V in ♦

Notice that these bids are limited to about 14 HCP. This is because a bid that eats up so much bidding space (as does a double jump shift) should be a “picture bid” –

precisely defining the hand in both strength and shape and allowing partner to make a good decision about what to do next.

Splinters are powerful bids that show all of the features of Responder's hand in one call. This leaves Opener well positioned to make a good decision about the possibility of slam. If the hands fit together well, then slam may make with fewer HCP and if the honors do not fit together well, game may be difficult even with 25+ HCP.

More Splinters - Splinters by Responder after 1-minor Opening

When partner opens the bidding with 1♣, then a double jump shift is a splinter bid just as if partner had opened a 1-Major. These double jump shifts after a 1♣ opening bid are:

1♣ __?

- 3♦* Minimum GF values (11-14 HCP), 6+card ♣ suit, S/V in ♦
- 3♥* Minimum GF values (11-14 HCP), 6+card ♣ suit, S/V in ♥
- 3♠* Minimum GF values (11-14 HCP), 6+card ♣ suit, S/V in ♠

These bids all show a S/V in the suit bid, 11-14 HCP, and a large fit for Opener's suit - usually a 6+card ♣ suit. Additionally, this splinter agrees with Opener's minor suit, showing no interest in a Major suit and denying a 4-card Major.

When partner opens the bidding 1♦, then a double jump shift is a splinter.

1♦ __?

- 3♥* Minimum GF values (11-14 HCP), 5+card ♦ suit, S/V in ♥
- 3♠* Minimum GF values (11-14 HCP), 5+card ♦ suit, S/V in ♠

These bids are splinter bids opposite a 1♦ opening bid. Additionally, these splinters agree with Opener's minor suit, showing no interest in a Major suit and denying a 4-card Major.

These splinter bids show a large minor suit fit and game forcing values. With a large minor suit fit, 3NT is still a likely final contract - if Opener has lots of values opposite Responder's shortness. Thus, these splinters opposite a 1-minor opening happen below 3NT.

There is another splinter bid after a 1♦ opening bid that goes beyond 3NT.

1♦ 4♣*

This can also be used as a splinter - denying a 4-card Major and showing a fit, values, and shortness. This is usually something like a 3-3-6-1 shape with no interest in playing 3NT - a rare hand, often actually having a 7-card ♦ suit.



Conclusion

Splinter bids are very useful conventions because they simultaneously show Responder's fit, game forcing values, and shortness (S/V) - insisting on game and allowing the Opener to make a decision about slam at a low level. Learning to make use of splinter bids is one of the best ways to improve your slam bidding. Try adding them to your bidding system.