

Showing Shortness

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Why?

- ▶ Why show shortness – singletons and voids – when you can show length?
- ▶ Presence of shortage:
 - Suggests suit contracts with fit, rather than no-trumps; even 5♣/♦ become attractive.
 - Dictates the effectiveness of trumps and helps gauge level.
 - Helps partner evaluate high cards.

Suit or No-trumps

- ▶ ♠ Q 7
- ▶ ♥ 5 2
- ▶ ♦ A Q 10 7 6 3
- ▶ ♣ K Q 4

▶ West	North	East	South
1NT	Pass	??	

- ▶ Teams: 3♦ or 3NT or something else?
- ▶ It isn't "will 3NT go down" but "can we make 5♦ when we can't make 3NT" and "*can we find out?*".

Suit or No-trumps (2)

▶ ♠ Q72

♥ 5

♦ AQ10763

♣ KQ4

▶ **West**
1NT

North
Pass

East
??

South

▶ Teams: 3♦ or 3NT or something else?

▶ Now 5♦ is a live possibility and there is much less hiding from hearts. Wouldn't it be great to show a shortage and have opener look at her heart holding?

Suit or No-trumps (3)

▶ ♠ Q72
♥ 5
♦ AQ10763
♣ KQ4

▶ 3NT opposite

▶ ♠ AK83
♥ AJ10
♦ J82
♣ J83

▶ Or... ♠ Q72
♥ 5
♦ KQ10763
♣ KQ4

▶ But 5♦ opposite

▶ ♠ AK83
♥ J83
♦ J82
♣ AJ10

Suit or No-trumps (4)

- ▶ Can we do this? Yes we can...
- ▶ 'Shortness after minor transfers':
 - 1NT – 2NT = Clubs, weak or strong. Opener bids 3♣ in case responder simply wants to play there but responder's follow-ups of 3♦/♥/♠ are **short**.
 - 1NT – 3♣ = Diamonds. After opener's conversion to 3♦, responder's 3♥ and 3♠ show shortages there.
 - The astute among you will have spotted that this does not cater for diamonds with short clubs. That is part of your 1NT – 2♠ kit...
- ▶ This approach obeys **The Balanced hand Principle**: the shapely hand should describe itself allowing the balanced hand to evaluate and decide.

Trump Effectiveness

▶ ♠ A8642

♥ 7532

♦ 8

♣ 652

♠ K9753

♥ 4

♦ 9543

♣ 873

▶ How many tricks?

▶ What contract do you expect to be playing?

Trump Effectiveness (2)

▶ ♠ A8642
♥ 753
♦ 82
♣ 652

♠ K9753
♥ 964
♦ 43
♣ 873

- ▶ How many tricks?
- ▶ Or slightly more reasonably,

▶ ♠ A8642
♥ 753
♦ 82
♣ 652

♠ K9753
♥ 64
♦ 943
♣ 873

- ▶ Let's reinstate East original shapely 5=1=4=3

▶ ♠ A8642
♥ 753
♦ 82
♣ 652

♠ K9753
♥ 4
♦ 9543
♣ 873

- ▶ This is the '5-3-3-2 trap': if you 'raise to the level of the fit' without shortage, you will discover you will not get the value of your trumps:
length opposite shortness generates tricks.

Trump Effectiveness (3)

▶ West has a minimum opener:

▶ ♠ AJ642

♥ Q532

♦ 8

♣ A52

♠ K9753

♥ 4

♦ Q543

♣ 873

▶ How many tricks now?

▶ How good are the red queens?

▶ How much better if they were kings?

▶ We're now talking about evaluation...

Evaluation

► Let's redistribute those wasted queens

► ♠ AJ642
♥ 9532
♦ 8
♣ AQ2

♠ K9753
♥ 4
♦ 9543
♣ J73

► How many tricks now?

► Lastly, let's move an ace

► ♠ AJ642
♥ A532
♦ 8
♣ Q62

♠ K9753
♥ 4
♦ 9543
♣ J73

Evaluation – key points

- ▶ Minor honours, queens and jacks, are very poor opposite shortage.
- ▶ Kings are devalued
- ▶ Aces take a trick and provide control but they are not as effective as side-suit fits
- ▶ When the level of a trump-contract is uncertain we need to know:
 1. If the two hands have shortages
 2. Where they are and if the high-cards opposite are working.

Fit-announcing shortage-bids

- ▶ ...Or **splinters**
- ▶ So important is shortage to trump-effectiveness and valuation that almost everyone uses splinters.
- ▶ Splinters meet last seminar's 'good convention' and usability criteria:
 - a) Useful
 - b) Easy to spot, hard to confuse with other meanings
 - c) Simple message – easy to interpret
 - d) Do not unnecessarily tangle existing system

Splinters

- ▶ ...Are jumps in response to partner's suit bid at a level one above that which is natural and forcing.
- ▶ As an immediate response:
 - $1\spadesuit - 4\clubsuit$ = singleton or void club, 4+spades, sufficient values for the 4-level, say 11+ HCPs
 - Same for $4\diamond$ and $4\heartsuit$. In each case $2\clubsuit/\diamond/\heartsuit$ are natural and forcing for a round, $3\clubsuit/\diamond/\heartsuit$ are natural with a good hand (16+) and a good 6-card suit (or better).
 - The same applies over $1\heartsuit$; $3\spadesuit$ and $4\clubsuit/\diamond$ are splinters.
 - And over 1-minor, $3\heartsuit/\spadesuit$ show a shortage and deny 4 or more cards in the other major. $1\clubsuit - 3\diamond$ is also a splinter but $1\diamond - 4\clubsuit$ is a rare beast because it loses the chance of declaring 3NT and obliges $5\diamond$.

Splinters (2)

- ▶ ...Are not just responses to opening bids, the same guide of “one above that which is natural and forcing” occurs elsewhere:
- ▶ 1♣ – 1♥
3♠ Short spade, 4(+) hearts, values for game.
- ▶ ♠ 6
♥ AQ76
♦ K94
♣ AKJ108
- ▶ 4½ losers; slam will certainly depend on whether responder has wasted values in spades (bad) or extra (5+) hearts, ♦A and ♣Q – all of which she will appreciate given the information about opener’s spade shortage.
- ▶ Note: opener’s 1♠ is natural and non-forcing, 2♠ is game-forcing.
- ▶ In the above sequence 4♦ would show the same hand with spades and diamonds reversed.

Splinters in competition

- ▶ Say when partner overcalls – should jumps be shortages?
- ▶ Perhaps. Arguments about gauging the value of trumps and high-cards certainly still apply. There are several camps:
 - A. Natural: jumps in a competitive auction are long, strong suits. After all, going slow, via a minimum bid, may leave a 7- or 8-card suit significantly unbid.
 - B. Except in opponents' suit(s) advancer is unlikely to be short. It makes sense to employ jumps to show fit but new-suit jumps show length in the bid suit; a **fit-jump**.
 - C. The mix: splinters are possible in a competitive auction – as well as fit-jumps. Single jumps are fit but double-jumps are splinters. If it looks like a splinter, it is a splinter.
 - D. In (B) or (C) jumps to game are excluded. Or perhaps only jumps to game in higher-ranking suits, lower-ranking are fit.

Splinters in competition (2)

- ▶ I recommend (C), the mix, both splinters and fit-jumps excluding jumps to any game, which are natural.

West	North	East	South
1♥	2♣	??	

- 2♥: usually 3-card support
- 3♣*: high-card raise, 3+ trumps
- 3♦*: diamonds and 4+ hearts, INV+, **fit-jump**
- 3♥*: semi-pre-emptive raise, 4+ hearts
- 3♠*: spades and 4+ hearts, game values, **fit-jump**
- 4♣/4♦: **splinters**
- 4♥: pre-emptive raise
- 4♠/5♦: TO PLAY (not fit-jumps, splinters or anything)

After a splinter

- ▶ Let's follow up a classic splinter auction. We'll assume a 1♠ opener and responder's 4♣ splinter.
- ▶ ♠ AQ765
♥ K103
♦ Q9
♣ KJ5
- ▶ Although we have 15 HCP (and have opened much poorer hands) this hand has gone down in value because the 4 points in clubs are devalued.
- ▶ This is a clear sign-off in 4♠.

After a splinter (2)

- ▶ Beginning 1♠ – 4♣
- ▶ ♠ AQ765
♥ KQ103
♦ Q9
♣ J5
- ▶ This is better because less of the hand is 'written off' by responder's club shortage and 13 useful HCPs remain. But it's still a bit thin: partner needs ♠K, ♥A, ♦AK and that's quite a hand. If your partner won't take you seriously unless he has that, 4♥ is a possibility.
- ▶ But 'caution around slams' suggests 4♠.

After a splinter (3)

- ▶ Beginning 1♠ – 4♣
- ▶ ♠ AQ765
 - ♥ KQ10
 - ♦ A9
 - ♣ J52
- ▶ Now we're cooking... Though in terms of losing-trick-count we're in the same bracket, this hand has 15 quality HCPs in the three suits outside partner's shortage.
- ▶ Timeout...

The Rule of 26

- ▶ “If your partner makes a splinter bid if you can add up all your points outside the splinter suit and it comes to 26 or more you should consider bidding a slam.”

Harold Schogger

- ▶ This seems to be pretty good. I know a critical audience won't take things like this on trust so I dealt 100 deals opposite,
- ▶
 - ♠ KJ93
 - ♥ AJ72
 - ♦ K752
 - ♣ 7
- ▶ The only stipulation for opener's hand being it had 11+ HCP and the longest highest-ranking suit was spades.

The Rule of 26 (2)

► The results

R26	<=14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	>=30
Number	0	2	4	4	7	11	13	13	10	14	10	6	3	2	0	0	1
Slams	0	0	1	0	2	1	2	6	1	3	2	5	2	1	0	0	1
	-	0%	25%	0%	29%	9%	15%	46%	10%	21%	20%	83%	67%	50%	-	-	100%

► I wondered what effect the ace of the splinter suit had...

R26A	<=14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	>=30
Number	0	0	0	0	2	5	10	9	13	19	16	11	5	4	1	3	2
Slams	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	2	3	8	3	2	1	3	2
	-	-	-	-	0%	0%	10%	0%	15%	11%	19%	73%	60%	50%	100%	100%	100%

The Rule of 26 (3)

- ▶ A larger simulation: 500 deals, opener has 11+ HCP, five spades (but may be 5-3-3-2), responder has 11+ HCP, a club shortage (but not singleton king or ace).

R26	<=14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	>=30
Number	0	3	12	15	38	50	55	66	58	55	60	40	20	17	6	5	0
Slams	0	0	2	2	10	11	22	39	32	25	41	28	16	13	5	5	0
	-	0%	17%	13%	26%	22%	40%	59%	55%	45%	68%	70%	80%	76%	83%	100%	-
R26A	0	0	0	3	5	20	36	40	64	70	69	66	44	34	27	17	5
Slams	0	0	0	0	1	1	6	14	20	20	38	43	34	27	25	17	5
	-	-	-	0%	20%	5%	17%	35%	31%	29%	55%	65%	77%	79%	93%	100%	100%

After a splinter (3 cont.)

- ▶ Beginning 1♠ – 4♣
- ▶ ♠ AQ765
♥ KQ10
♦ A9
♣ J52
- ▶ Partner is marked with 11 HCP outside clubs so we can account for the magic 26. Because of the great controls.
- ▶ 4NT is indicated; if partner shows an ace, 6♠ ought to be good.
- ▶ What about ♠K? Did I hear someone say?

After a splinter (4)

- ▶ Beginning 1♠ – 4♣
- ▶ ♠ AQ765
♥ K10 95
♦ 9
♣ A52
- ▶ It would be great if (in addition to ♠K) partner held ♥AQ and ♦Q – not the other way around. But sadly there is no mechanism to show opener's shortage.
- ▶ 4♥ for the time being, a **slam-try**: if responder bids 4♠, time to call it a day.

Trying for game

- ▶ I'm not a fan of game-tries...
- ▶ Say after $1\spadesuit - 2\spadesuit$ opener is in a quandary about bidding game. The trouble about 'making a move' is that the 3-level is reached. And now, if things go against us, we might go down.
- ▶ But if you must make game-tries (and perhaps you must), these are the ones to play.

Romex game-tries

- ▶ After 1♠ – 2♠ opener can either show a shortage (default action) or switch to showing a suit – how can he do both?
- ▶ 3♣/♦/♥ = short in ♣/♦/♥
 - Responder uses her skill and judgement based on the valuation ideas discussed and bids 4♠ or 3♠
- ▶ 2NT = “I am about to tell you my long suit”
 - Opener uses the cheapest call and responder can bid 3♣ if interested or 3♠ with a dead minimum. After 3♣:
 - ▶ 3♦/♥ = long diamonds/hearts
 - ▶ 3♠ = long clubs!

Romex game-tries (2)

- ▶ What about hearts, that is after 1♥ – 2♥?
- ▶ Again, the default is to show shortage but the cheapest call switches to long suits:
- ▶ 3♣/♦ = short in ♣/♦
 - Responder uses her skill and judgement to bid game – or not. (If she really doesn't know what to do, she can try a 'last train' 3♦ over 3♣.)
- ▶ 2♠ = Long suit intro
 - Responder bids 2NT if interested (3♥ etc.). Now,
 - ▶ 3♣/♦ = long clubs/diamonds
 - ▶ 3♥ = long spades!
- ▶ 2NT = short spades!

Trying for slam

- ▶ I **am** a fan of slam-tries...
- ▶ At the 4-level, say after $1\spadesuit - 3\spadesuit$ opener can try for slam with a bid less than $4\spadesuit$. But that **does not increase the level**.
- ▶ The advantages of showing shortage are even more important in the slam zone as we saw with splinters.
- ▶ How could we employ long- and short-suit slam tries...?

Romex slam-tries

- ▶ After 1♠ – 3♠ opener can either show a shortage (default action) or switch to showing a suit:
- ▶ 4♣/♦/♥ = short in ♣/♦/♥
 - Responder uses her skill and judgement etc.
- ▶ 3NT = long suit intro
 - Responder bids 4♣ with non-minimums, opener shows length
- ▶ Yes, same as Romex game-tries but a level higher.
- ▶ NB: using the cheapest bid for compound meanings is part of the **Useful Space Principle**
- ▶ NB2: showing multiple aspects (whether shortage or length) by using as many natural calls as possible is **Natural Goes First**.
 - Bids are natural if they can be and the missing one(s) are placed on the calls that “don’t make sense” (like NT or bids of the trump suit).

Key Points

1. Shortness critically affects valuation and how well trumps work.
2. For your regular partnership, splinters are a must. Even playing with the host "Splinters?" is unlikely to go wrong.
3. If you're serious discuss with partner incorporating other shortage-showing mechanisms:
 1. Splinters in competition
 2. Shortages after 1NT
 3. Romex game- and slam-tries

Credits

- ▶ Rule of 26 – or Twenty Six Small Slam Splinter Rule (TSSSSR) is reliably associated with Harold Schogger, teacher and bridge club proprietor.
- ▶ The Balanced Hand Principle by DLH Morgan, a New Zealander, appeared as an article in *The Bridge World* (1989 Dec.). Many artificial systems have originated in NZ as a response to its liberal regulatory policies. The BHP arose from observations on those hand-types where ask-tell relays were more or less successful.
- ▶ The Useful Space Principle was first articulated by Jeff Rubens, again in *The Bridge World*.
- ▶ George Rosenkranz is architect of the Romex bidding system. A world-famous chemist who fled Nazi Germany and settled in Mexico, his ingenuity manifested itself in many innovative bidding ideas. 'Three-way Game Tries' is described in *Bridge: The Bidder's Game* (1985 Dervyn Press), see also, *Win With Romex* (1975).
- ▶ I first met fit-jumps in *Partnership Bidding at Bridge, the contested auction* by Andrew Robson and Oliver Segal (1993). Previously referred to by Chris Green, this is now out of copyright and available free online as a PDF.