Board of the Week 54

By Dick Chapman

Today's board is quite similar to Board of the Week 53, where we reached a 28 point slam in a fun auction. This time I was West, holding these cards:

♠KQ108 ♥KQ854 ♦K87 ♣7

Partner Skip H. deals and opens 1 heart. Just like last week, my hand just grew. At this point, systems will vary. You know you are going to game, and I venture many pairs would bid Jacoby 2NT.

[Repeating my note to newer players from last week: 2NT over an opening call of 1 heart or 1 spade promises 4+ trump support and game forcing values. Responder is asking for a further description of opener's hand. Opener's first responsibility is to bid shortness at the 3 level (or if two-suited, Opener bids a lower second suit at the 4 level to show shortness in the other two suits). If there is no shortness, Opener will reveal strength. There are variations, but many pairs bid 4 of the major with 11-14, 3NT with 15-16, and 3 of the major with 17+. The call of 2NT and all rebids by opener are alerted.]

Let's say you bid 2NT and partner responds 4 hearts ("I have no shortness and I'm on the low end of the range"). What is your call? Pass, right? It's cold for 4 or 5, but did you miss slam? You don't have a clue until the board is over. If you did miss slam, I'm guessing your defenders will not let you redo the auction. That's just a guess, of course.

If there another way? As I said, systems will vary. Others will bid 4 clubs to show short clubs and game forcing values. Let's say you do that and hear partner bid 4 hearts. What is your call? Pass, right? Did you miss slam? You don't have a clue until the board is over.

Is there another way? Uh…"systems will vary." Here is the way my partner Skip and I handled the board. I bid <u>three clubs</u>. What is <u>this</u>? No, it's not a strong jump shift, weak jump shift, intermediate jump shift, or Bergen raise of hearts. In our methods it's a <u>mini-splinter</u>.

There are variations, but here is our method. A bid of 3 of a lower suit over a major suit opening shows one of three hands:

a. A void with invitational values (a limit)
b. A singleton with invitational values (a limit)
c. A singleton with game forcing values (this is the hand that I held, but Skip doesn't know)

N.B. Using this treatment, any bid of 4 of a lower suit always promises a void. Opener won't have to guess whether Responder's shortness is a singleton or void. But let's continue.

What if you have (c), as I did, and Opener attempts to sign off with 3 of the major? It's easy: Responder ignores the signoff and bids game anyway.

So what's the advantage over just bidding the old fashioned splinter at the 4 level? Answer: Responder with a game forcing hand and a stiff gets to learn a lot about Opener's hand. Let's take two scenarios:

1. In today's hand, had the auction gone 1H-3C*-3H, Responder would meekly sign off at 4H and that's fine. Opener is going to make the contract.
2. In today's hand, when the auction goes 1H-3C*-4H, Responder knows Opener has additional values. Opener, not knowing the strength of Responder's hand, was willing to go to game opposite a limit raise with club shortness.

Ok, you have a mini-splinter hand (in this case, the third option, singleton with game forcing values) but Opener doesn't know which of the three hands you have. Opener bid game anyway. Do you like your hand better than you already did?

In my view, the hand grew enormously when Opener was willing to bid game opposite a limit raise. So I started a slam try. We play kickback for the heart suit, 4 spades. Now North doubles (lead directing). My hand decreased in value slightly because I know North has the spade ace on top of my KQ108.

The next problem was that we didn't have an agreement about kickback when there is interference. Partner bid 5 clubs. What is this? I finally decided that it was a "normal" response, the second step up (we were 1430, so this is 0 or 3 key cards). Has to be 3, right? North has the spade ace, so Partner must have 3 aces. What's your call now?

6 hearts, why not? The full board:

	♠A53 **♥97** **♦Q965** **♣Q965**	
♠KQ108 **♥KQ854** **♦K87** **♣7**		**♠62** **♥AJ8632** **♦A10** **♣A43**
	♠J974 **♥** **♦J432** **♣KJ1082**	

South followed orders and led the 9 of spades, won in North. Declarer won the next trick and because we were facing experienced players could have claimed. However, as a courtesy, he drew trump and played a couple of more tricks before claiming. 26 points and Skip breezed to 12 easy tricks.

[Side note: claim early if you can, but if it's not abundantly clear, play tricks until it <u>is</u> clear. If you are

going to have to make a lengthy explanation, it's better to play on. First, you might be wrong! Second, it takes more time to explain complex play than it does to actually play the tricks.]

The board was played 13 times. Five pairs bid the slam. Seven pairs were in four and one was in five. Of course we don't know the auctions at those tables, but I suspect in many cases it went 1H-2NT-4H. It might have gone 1H-4C-4H.

You can see from today's boards that mini-splinters can work. But, like all conventional treatments, you have to give up something. With mini-splinters (1 Major – 3 Lower) you have to give up another meaning. But that's true with Bergen raises or weak jump shifts or whatever. You choose your methods and you live with them.

Getting back to responding over interference with an ace-asking call, one player I occasionally partner has recommend we play DIPS and RIPS. What's <u>that</u>?!?

After interference with a bid

- Double is the first step up
- Pass is the second step up

After interference with a double (as in today's case)

- Redouble is the first step up
- Pass is the second step up

Using this method, partner would have passed rather than bid 5 clubs. Pass shows the second step in the sequence (0 or 3 key cards). But, as mentioned, Skip and I had no agreement so I took it on faith that he would make the old fashion responses: the second step up is 5 clubs, so I assumed (correctly) he held 3 key cards.

Others will use DEPO/REPO or DOPI/ROPI depending on the level of the interference. I admit to having trouble remembering which to use in which scenario, and I like DIPS/RIPS for its simplicity.

See you at the table.