

Board of the Week 61

By Dick Chapman

You may think that today's board is merely hindsight, and you may be right. But I'll submit it as another example of mini-splinters at work.

As a reminder, the mini-splinter methods in the system I use with many partners are: with four card support for opener's major and shortness, bid 4 of the short suit with a void and game forcing values. Bid 3 of the short suit with any of these hands:

- A void with invitational values
- A singleton with invitational values
- A singleton with game forcing values

Ok, here's your hand: You are East and pass. West opens 1 spade in third seat:

♠		♠AJ1064
♥	D: E	♥2
♦	Vul: NS	♦A42
♣		♣J863

As intermediate players we learned that with 5 trump, 7-9 points, and shortness, we can just bid game. But this is a third seat opener. Do you still want to blast game?

Some might blast if opener has a full opener, so would use Drury to find out if that's the case. 2 clubs (or 2 diamonds in some agreements) would find out. If a full opener, you might get to game. But is your shortness working for you? What if partner is sitting over there with four dead clubs?

The solution might be the mini-splinter bid: 3 hearts. Now let's look at the combined hands:

♠KQ985		♠AJ1064
♥KQ63	D: E	♥2
♦J10	Vul: NS	♦A42
♣Q5		♣J863

West, you do have a full opener, so if the auction went 1S-2C (Drury), you would bid 2 hearts as "full opener and this is my second suit." Now East might want to rethink that shortness. It's wasted and East might want to bid 3 spades, highly invitational but not forcing. West, would you go to game on that auction? No. Too many losers.

But getting back to the mini-splinter bid, it could go 1S-3H. West do you like that bid? Absolutely not. You hate it, because your heart values are wasted. You would bid 3 spades. Now back to you, East. You made your call (it's "b" from the list of 3 options above) and your partner refused the invitation. Trust your partner and pass.

As a reminder to newer players: strength opposite shortness is "wastage" and should be discounted. As West, you would much prefer partner have a singleton

club or diamond. If East responds 3C or 3D (shortness and invitational values, since East had passed) you would happily bid game. But not with a mini-splinter of 3H.

Ok, you stopped at 3S and made it on the nose, +140. Did you get a good board?

Of course you didn't. Sometimes it's not your day. You are playing in the LRDBC Sectional. The board was played 16 times. 12 of those times EW bid game and made it! So your 140 got a terrible score. But better than a -50 you would get for bidding game and not making it.

The full hand:

	♠	
	♥J1075	
	♦Q983	
	♣K10742	
♠KQ985		♠AJ1064
♥KQ63	D: E	♥2
♦J10	Vul: NS	♦A42
♣Q5		♣J863
	♠732	
	♥A984	
	♦K765	
	♣A9	

The defense can grab 1 heart, 2 clubs, and 1 diamond. I don't know the opening leads (we don't record them for tournaments, not sure why) so I don't know how the defense went at those 12 tables. Wait, I see it now: if North leads the heart jack, the contract will make. The losing diamond will disappear on the two good hearts. At our table we got a diamond lead to start. When I lost the heart, they cashed their three other winners.

Now for true confessions. I was just kidding about our contract being 3 spades. I was just kidding about mini-splinters. We used Drury, not a mini-splinter, and bid game just like the other 15 EW pairs. We were unlucky enough to get the "right" lead at trick 1 and had no chance to make. Did the defense lead a heart 12 times out of 16? I will never know.

The question for the experts is this: (a) should we bid game and hope to make on a favorable layout or lead, or (b) should we use our fancy toys and avoid a contract that can be defeated, or (c) does it depend on the field of your fellow declarers or how you size up the defenders at your table? The field went for it, got the lead that makes, and scored well. We went for it, got the lead that sets it, and scored poorly. Maybe I should write this up to bad luck and move on to the next board...and the next article.

See you at the table.