

SPLINTER BIDS - Revisited

By Neil H. Timm

When opening one of a major suit, most bridge players play direct splinters in duplicate bridge where the direct splinter is a double jump in a side-suit showing at least 3-card support or more likely 4-card support for the bid major with 13+ support points. The bid shows shortness in the suit bid with either a singleton or a void. The Jacoby 2NT* bid is used for hands without a singleton or a void and 13+ support points.

The purpose of the splinter bid is to show slam interest in the bid major. If the opponents double the direct splinter, it usually asks partner to lead a suit below the splinter-suit. For this reason, some employ reverse and ambiguous splinter bids. Direct, reverse, and ambiguous splinter bids are used with unbalanced hands.

For balanced hands when a major suit is raised (by opener or responder) at the 3-level and at least a 4-4 major suit fit is found without shortness, a fairway splinter is used if a slam try seems appropriate.

An anti-splinter bid is used to show support for partner's suit with extra values not knowing where partner's shortness may exist and may be used by both responder and opener to show a fit with slam interest.

In this bridge tip I will briefly review direct, reverse, ambiguous, fairway, and anti-splinter bids. All splinter bidding agreements require 13+ fit/support HCP, suit length, shortness, and suit quality points: NEVER just HCP.

With unbalanced hands we use splinter bids:

Direct Splinter

| Open | Response |
|-------------|--|
| 1♠ | 4♣*/4♦*/4♥* - singleton/void in bid suit |
| 1♥ | 3♠*/4♣*/4♦* - singleton/void in bid suit |

Reverse Splinter

| Open | Response |
|-------------|--|
| 1♥ | 3♠* singleton/void in clubs 4♣* singleton/ void in diamonds |

4♦* singleton/void in spades

1♠ 4♣* singleton/void in clubs

4♦* singleton/ void in diamonds

4♥* singleton/void in spades

Ambiguous Splinter (Preferred approach)

| Open | Response |
|------|---|
| 1♥ | 3♠* singleton somewhere - Next Step 3NT by opener asks in what suit? e.g., 4♣/4♦/4♥=spades |
| 1♥ | 4♣*/4♦* void in bid suit 3NT* = void in spades and initiates exclusion Keycard Blackwood |
| 1♠ | 3NT* singleton somewhere - Next Step 4♣* by opener asks in what suit? e.g., 4♣/4♦/4♥ |
| 1♠ | 4♣*/4♦* void in bid suit 3NT* = void in hearts and initiate exclusion Keycard Blackwood |

The above splinter bids as well as mini-splinter and fragment bids are effective because they show support with shortness in a single bid!

The bids are effective because they conform to the balanced hand principle. “The Balanced Hand Principle” is described by David Morgan in “The Bridge World” magazine, December 1989, and states:

the unbalanced hand should describe itself to the balanced hand as it is the balanced hand that can tell how well the hands fit, whether partner's hand is opposite three small or King-Queen third.

However, a bridge auction does not always allow a shortness-showing raise to be made; to overcome this problem one may invoke both fairway and anti-splinter bids.

A balanced hands uses a fairway splinter when at least a 4-4 major fit is established at the 3-level and slam may be of interest.

Fairway Splinter Rule – Morten Andersen, “Dansk Bridge” magazine, March 1999.

When a major suit (opener or responder) is raised at the 3-level and at least a 4-4 major fit is guaranteed, the hand will not play in 3NT. The 3NT bid is used as a slam invitation in the agreed trump suit.

Anti-Splinter Rule – David Morgan, “The Bridge World” magazine, July 1997.

An anti-splinter bid is made in a suit in which partner’s shortness will duplicate secondary honors (normally a K/Q or both).

It is most effective when one player shows support for partners last bid suit along with strength concentration in a side bid such that it duplicates partner’s strength (e.g., duplication of strength or opposite unknown shortness).

While most club partnerships are familiar with splinters, a few examples of fairway and anti-splinter bids should help to clarify these splinter bids.

Examples: Fairway splinters

Example 1 - Spades

Opener ♠KJ82 ♥KQ852 ♦K4 ♣A7 Responder ♠AK743 ♥J7 ♦AQ5 ♣1052

| Opener | Responder |
|-------------|--|
| 1 ♥ | 1 ♠ |
| 3 ♠ | 3NT* Fairway splinter no singleton or void |
| 4 ♣ cue bid | 4 ♦ cue bid |
| 4NT 1430 | 5 ♠ 2 keycards with Q |
| 6 ♠ | Pass |

Example 2 - Hearts

Opener ♠Q5♥AKQ852 ♦A97 ♣A7 Responder ♠AK8 ♥J643 ♦K54 ♣963

| Opener | Responder |
|-------------|--|
| 1 ♥ | 3 ♥ limit raise |
| 3 ♠ cue bid | 3NT* Fairway splinter no singleton or void |
| 4 ♣ cue bid | 4 ♦ forcing bid |
| 6 ♥ | Pass |

Example 3 - Hearts

Opener ♠7♥AKJ85 ♦KQ7 ♣A743 Responder ♠KQ8 ♥Q643 ♦A52 ♣963

| Opener | Responder |
|-----------------------|----------------|
| 1♥ | 3♥ limit raise |
| 3NT* Fairway splinter | 4♥ no interest |
| Pass | Pass |

Example 4 - Spades

| Opener | Responder |
|-------------|-----------|
| 1♠ | 2♥ GF |
| 3♦ | 4♠ |
| 3NT to play | Pass |

Examples: anti-splinters

Example 5

Opener ♠K7 ♥AQJ2 ♦KQ10 ♣A843 Responder ♠AQ653 ♥K1087 ♦J85 ♣7

| Opener | Responder |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1♣ | 1♠ |
| 2NT 18-19 | 3♥ |
| 4♦ Anti-splinter strength | 4NT Blackwood no suit agreement |
| 2♥ two aces | 6♥ |
| Pass | Pass |

Example 6

Opener ♠K72 ♥7 ♦AK9642 ♣Q106 Responder ♠Q106 ♥A84 ♦Q53 ♣AK4

| Opener | Responder |
|--------|-----------|
|--------|-----------|

| | |
|-------------|--|
| 1♦ | 2NT |
| 3♦ | 3♠ anti-splinter forcing slam interest |
| 4♠ cue bid | 4NT ace ask |
| 5♥ two aces | 6♦ |
| Pass | Pass |

Example 7

Opener ♠A652 ♥Q7 ♦KQ10 ♣A106 5 Responder ♠K9843 ♥A86 ♦J842 ♣7

| Opener | Responder |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1NT | 2♥ Spades - Jacoby Transfer |
| 3♦ anti-splinter good suit | 4♠ |
| Pass | Pass |

Fragment bid is usually a double jump rebid by either the opener or responder showing a fit with partner's suit and shortage (singleton/void) in a fourth suit. For example:

1♠ - 2♦ - 4♥* = 2/3 hearts with shortage in clubs.

Although analogous to splinter bids, fragment bids differ in that they require the naming of a suit fragment held rather than the short suit itself and require partnership agreement.

Mini-Splinter is a variation of the Splinter Convention. The application of the Mini-Splinter shows, after a jump shift by either the opener or responder, a definite Suit Fit with a Singleton or Void in the suit bid. Mini-Splinters can be used to force game or invite game either by the responder supporting the opener or by the opener to support the last bid of the responder.

Splinters are important in bridge because of the Short Suit Total (SST) Rule.

SST Rule with Singleton or Void

When opening one of a major, a splinter bid shows 3/4 card support for the major suit bid and usually, 13+ Working HCP and a total SST=0-3 for both partners.

To apply the SST Rule, opener adds his HCP to 13.

With 19-21 total HCP the SST Rule is 13-SST = # of tricks possible.

If the SST in both hands = 2, then we have 11 tricks with a singleton in both hands, with a void and singleton $13 - (\text{SST}=1) = 12$ tricks. A SLAM

If the total HCP = 22-24 in both hands, you gain a trick. So, with singletons in both hands $13 - (\text{SST}=2) + 1 = 12$! And with 25-27 you gain 2 tricks.

NOTE: For that unusual hand with 2 voids, $13 - 0 = 13$, a grand Slam!

The SST Rule was developed by **Mike Lawrence and Anders Wirgen** in their book:

“I FOUGHT THE LAW of Total Tricks” (2004), Published by Mikeworks.

Rule of 26

The rule of 26 suggested by Harold Schogger, a bridge teacher from Hendon London, goes as follows.

If your partner opens a major and your partner makes a splinter bid, merely add your HCP outside the known splinter suit and if that value is 26 or more you should consider slam.

Slam success is often more than 65%. For more on this rule and splinters use the following link:

<https://www.bridgewebs.com/ipswich/Shortness.pdf>