



Ask Jerry

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Hi, Jerry,

I really enjoy your columns. Keep up the good work! I was, however, puzzled by your December column, where you recommended the use of a “splinter raise.” None of the newer players I know use them, and quite frankly, I don’t really understand them. Any help would be appreciated.

Thanks, Woody

I apologize for suggesting the use of a convention that some of my readers are not be familiar with. It’s difficult sometimes to balance the depth of my column to appeal to the broad spectrum of readers as suggested by the nature of the many questions I receive.

Most sources acknowledge that modern splinter raises were first introduced by Dorothy Hayden Truscott in 1964. In her opinion, an *unusual jump in a new suit* could be used to identify game-forcing values with good support for partner’s suit and shortness (a singleton or a void) in the bid suit.

Let’s say that after a 1♠ opening, responder could say out loud: “I have at least four-card spade support, game-forcing values, and at most one club in my hand.” That’s what responder is saying here:

| Opener | Responder |
|-------------|------------|
| ♠ A J 9 4 3 | ♠ K Q 7 5 |
| ♥ K 5 | ♥ A 10 3 2 |
| ♦ 9 8 2 | ♦ A 7 6 4 |
| ♣ K Q J | ♣ 3 |

Opener
1♠

Responder
4♣

In a spade contract, you are a strong favorite to lose two diamonds and one club. Game is high enough. But note what happens when you invert opener’s minor-suit holdings:

| Opener | Responder |
|-------------|------------|
| ♠ A J 9 4 3 | ♠ K Q 7 5 |
| ♥ K 5 | ♥ A 10 3 2 |
| ♦ K Q J | ♦ A 7 6 4 |
| ♣ 9 8 2 | ♣ 3 |

Opener still has 5–3–3–2 distribution with exactly 14 high-card points and the same number of aces, kings and queens; responder’s hand is identical and the auction is the same. Despite this, a small slam is nearly cold. Why the big difference? On the first layout, responder holds the wrong, or non-working shortness, while on the second, he holds the right, or working shortness!

**Shortness facing weakness is an asset.
Shortness facing strength is a liability.**

When considering a small slam, you generally want to identify at least 32 points between the two hands – 80% of the 40 HCP available on each deal. On the second example above, where responder holds a singleton club opposite opener’s three low clubs, the defensive worth of the ♣K Q J has been negated, only the ace can take a trick.

In effect, you have created a situation where there are only 34 “working” HCP in the deck. 80% of 34 is approximately 27 – very close to the 26 total points held between these two hands.

The bidding on both hands should start the same: On the first, opener – holding club strength opposite club shortness – should sign off in game. On the second, opener should get excited with club weakness opposite club shortness and simply use some form of Blackwood to reach the good 6♠ contract.

Jerry-ism: When planning a raise to game, always do so in the most descriptive manner possible.

Here’s another example that shows that the use of splinter bids isn’t limited to responder. This time opener holds:

♠ A 10 8 5 4 ♥ 10 9 8 4 2 ♦ – ♣ A K 10

| Opener | Responder |
|--------|-----------|
| 1♠ | 2♥ |
| 4♦ | |

3♦ would be forcing and show diamonds, making 4♦ an unusual jump, or a splinter bid. To avoid the inevitable misunderstandings with any new convention, I suggest that any bid that sounds like it might be a splinter raise is a splinter raise. ■