

Newer Players

Ask Jerry



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Hi Jerry,
After North opens 1♥, is South too strong to splinter bid, especially since the shortness is the ace? Would 2♦ be preferable?

North

♠4 ♥K9752 ♦A53 ♣KQ74

South

♠J763 ♥A843 ♦KJ84 ♣A

Dave

Hi Dave,
Before I address your specific questions, let's make sure all of my readers understand the issue. Splinter raises were first introduced to the bridge world in the mid-1950s, by Dorothy Hayden (Truscott). She suggested defining unusual jumps after an opening bid to identify game-forcing values with good support for partner's suit, pinpointing shortness in the suit bid. As an example:

♠ K 7 6 3 2	♠ A Q 8 4
♥ A 6	♥ K 7 5 4
♥ A Q J	♦ K 9 4 2
♣ 8 7 3	♣ 5

Dorothy recommended that in reply to a 1♠ opener, responder should make a "splinter raise" of 4♣. Effectively, this would announce four-card or longer spade support, game-forcing values, along with, at most, one club – an action that truly resembles the cards held.

On this layout, 6♠ is virtually cold. The key is that all of the high cards in both hands are pulling full weight. Contrast that with:

♠ K 7 6 3 2	♠ A Q 8 4
♥ A 6	♥ K 7 5 4
♥ A Q J	♦ 5
♣ 8 7 3	♣ K 9 4 2

On this layout, after a splinter raise of 4♦, opener should settle for game, recognizing that his diamond honors are wasted opposite a singleton or void in diamonds.

On the first example, 12 tricks, a virtual certainty. On the second, the five level would be in jeopardy. One of the most important implications of a splinter raise is to alert partner that high cards in your short suit are overvalued while minimal or zero values opposite your shortness is a very good thing.

On your actual hands, I reject the choice of the splinter, not because of strength, but it is rarely correct to splinter with a singleton ace or king. Even singleton queens are not always the best choice for a splinter. On your layout, your splinter raise would cause opener to devalue his ♣KQ, and simply return to the heart suit. This is a reasonable slam, requiring only 2-2 trumps. The ♣KQ, which your partner correctly devalued after the splinter, actually is a very useful holding which allows the discard of the potential diamond losers from dummy.

Your next question: Would a 2♦ response be better? Shocking! But I have a very firm opinion on this issue. If your partner opens a major suit and you have game-forcing values with four-card or longer support, there are only two choices: either a splinter raise or a Jacoby 2NT bid.

A very good use of a jump to 2NT in this auction is to show game-forcing values, four-card or longer support and *typically* a balanced hand, because you

failed to splinter. In simple terms, this is the Jacoby 2NT major-suit raise.

I feel strongly that if responder does not utilize one of these two options, he denies four-card or longer trump support.

With your hands, I suggest:

1♥	2NT
3♠	4♣
4♦	4NT
5♥	6♥

Your hand is improved by the known spade shortness in opener's hand. Opener's hand is improved by your club control bid. Your hand continues to get better after opener's diamond control bid. Such a simple life!

Be wary of making splinter in the suit directly below opener's, which can jam your auction by using too much space. I call this a "one under" splinter.

Notice the difference between these two examples:

1♥	4♦
?	
1♠	4♣
?	

Notice on the first auction, if opener has any extra values, any move towards slam gets us to the five level.

On the second auction, opener, with extra values, has room to control bid with either diamonds or hearts as a slam try.

It doesn't mean don't make a splinter bid that's one under, just be aware that without specific agreements, perhaps a Jacoby 2NT would be a better choice. ☺