

**Intermediate Bridge Lesson**  
**Palo Alto Bridge Club, April 17, 2018**

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Splinter Bids

Imagine that your partner opens 1S and you have this hand:

KQ84  
A75  
3  
KJ1075

You have an opening hand with four cards in partner's major suit and a singleton. What do you bid? This is a perfect hand for a Splinter Bid. Since you have a good trump fit and shortness, you are in the slam zone. You tell partner this by bidding 4D.

When partner opens the bidding, responder's Splinter Bid is a very specific bid. It tells partner three things all in one bid: responder has a full opening hand, four or more trumps, and a singleton or void in the suit bid. The Splinter is a very useful bid for hand evaluation; it will get you to slams that other pairs will not find, and will keep you out of slams when your hand does not fit well with your partner's. Once responder makes a Splinter, opener can evaluate whether the two partners' hands are working together.

To show a Splinter over opener's major suit opening,<sup>1</sup> responder makes a double jump in the suit in which he or she has shortness.<sup>2</sup> Over 1S, responder would bid 4C, 4D, or 4H, to show a singleton club, diamond, or heart respectively. Over 1H, responder would bid 3S, 4C, or 4D. NOTE: over 1H, the Splinter Bid in spades is made by bidding THREE SPADES, not four spades, which would take the opener past the safe 4H level.

What does it take to make a small slam? Tricks and controls. The partnership has to have enough trick-taking ability to take 12 tricks and has to have control of all four suits. The partnership needs first round control (an ace or a void) in three of the four suits, and needs first or second round control in the fourth suit (an ace, king, singleton, or void). Declarer can tolerate second round control in one suit since the pair is willing to lose one trick. For a grand slam? It takes 13 tricks and first round control (ace or void) in all suits.

When a partnership has a big trump fit and shortness in a side suit, the pair often will not need close to 33 points to bid a slam. Slams can be bid on 28 points or less if the hands fit well. What constitutes hands that fit well? The opener and responder want to have fitting honors in the same suit, and want to have small cards ("rags") opposite shortness so these cards can be ruffed. If one partner has values

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<sup>1</sup> Splinters can be made over minor suit bids as well, but that is more rare and not the topic of today's lesson.

<sup>2</sup> The opener can make a Splinter Bid in support of responder's suit as well. However, to make this kind of Splinter, the opener has to have a very strong hand since the responder could have as few as six points and four trumps.

(kings, queens, and jacks) opposite the other partner's shortness, there are wasted values. It is much better for the partners to have values opposite values, and small cards opposite shortness.

One key to slam bidding is counting tricks during the bidding. This can be done when there is a known trump fit, and shortness which will allow the declarer to ruff small cards with dummy's trumps. Try to count tricks during the bidding if you are considering bidding a slam. If you cannot count 13 tricks during the bidding, you should not bid a grand slam.

I hope that most if not all of you are using Roman Key Card Blackwood. This is a system that allows a player to find out not only if the partnership has all four aces, but also whether the partnership has the King and Queen of the trump suit, which are essential to slam bidding. However, you should not use Key Card or any kind of Blackwood when you have a side suit with two quick losers; instead you should use control-showing bids to determine if your partner can control the suit in which you have two or more quick losers – before you bid Key Card.<sup>3</sup>

Let's look at a couple of hands to show how Splinter Bids work:

Example 1

7  
KJ53  
AQ84  
A1075

(Dealer)  
96  
AQ1084  
K5  
KQ83

Example 2

KQ82  
KJ53  
AQ84  
7

(Dealer)  
96  
AQ1084  
K5  
KQ83

In Example 1, the dealer has a 14 point hand with five hearts. Responder has 14 points, four trumps, and a singleton spade. When responder splinters in spades, opener can see that the hands fit well. Responder's shortness in spades is opposite opener's weak suit. Knowing that partner has shortness in spades, opener has no side suit with two quick losers and bids 4NT, Roman Key Card Blackwood. Responder shows three key cards (two aces and the king of trumps) by bidding 5D, and opener bids the heart slam. The auction is: 1H – 3S – 4NT – 5D – 6H. The pair loses only one spade trick. The other spade will be ruffed and, if clubs don't break, declarer's fourth club goes away on a diamond. Declarer is making slam on 28 high card points, whether the club suit is breaking or not.

In Example 2, the dealer has the same 14 point hand as in Example 1. Responder has a 15 count with four trumps and a singleton, arguably a slightly better hand than responder's hand in Example 1. Over opener's 1S, responder bids 4C. However, here the responder's shortness in clubs is opposite opener's KQxx. There are wasted values in clubs and opener can see that the hands do not fit well. Opener should stay out of slam and sign off in 4H. The auction is: 1H – 4C – 4H. The pair will lose the ace of spades and the ace of clubs.

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<sup>3</sup> Many people show aces and voids up the line. The current trend is to use "Italian Cue Bids" where the partners show aces, kings, singletons, and voids up the line, without preference.

1

♠ K7  
 ♥ A107532  
 ♦ J52  
 ♣ A4  
 ♠ J954  
 ♥ Q6  
 ♦ AQ643  
 ♣ 73  
 ♠ Q102  
 ♥ 8  
 ♦ K1097  
 ♣ J10962  
 ♠ A863  
 ♥ KJ94  
 ♦ 8  
 ♣ KQ85

Dealer: North  
 Neither Vulnerable  

West	North	East	South
	1 ♥	Pass	4 ♦
Pass	4 NT	Pass	5 ♥
Pass	6 ♥	Pass	Pass
Pass			

 Opening Lead: ♣ J

2

♠ J864  
 ♥ AJ872  
 ♦ 2  
 ♣ Q104  
 ♠ A1072  
 ♥ 6  
 ♦ AJ863  
 ♣ KJ6  
 ♠ KQ953  
 ♥ 953  
 ♦ KQ5  
 ♣ A3  
 ♠ KQ104  
 ♥ 10974  
 ♣ 98752

Dealer: East  
 N-S Vulnerable  

West	North	East	South
		1 ♠	Pass
4 ♥	Pass	4 NT	Pass
5 ♥	Pass	6 ♠	Pass
Pass	Pass		

 Opening Lead: ♥ K

3

♠ J7  
 ♥ AQ8642  
 ♦ 4  
 ♣ AQ108  
 ♠ 109842  
 ♥  
 ♦ AJ72  
 ♣ J963  
 ♠ A653  
 ♥ 93  
 ♦ 98653  
 ♣ K4  
 ♠ KQ  
 ♥ KJ1075  
 ♦ KQ10  
 ♣ 752

Dealer: South  
 E-W Vulnerable  

West	North	East	South
			1 ♥
Pass	4 ♦	Pass	4 ♥
Pass	Pass	Pass	

 Opening Lead: ♠ 10

4

♠ KQ954  
 ♥ J9  
 ♦  
 ♣ Q98532  
 ♠ 8  
 ♥ KQ754  
 ♦ AQJ54  
 ♣ A4  
 ♠ AJ2  
 ♥ A8632  
 ♦ K632  
 ♣ 7  
 ♠ 10763  
 ♥ 10  
 ♦ 10987  
 ♣ KJ106

Dealer: West  
 Both Vulnerable  

West	North	East	South
1 ♥	Pass	4 ♣	Pass
4 NT	Pass	5 ♥	Pass
5 NT	Pass	6 ♦	Pass
7 ♥	Pass	Pass	Pass

 Opening Lead: ♠ K

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**Splinter Bids – Hand Analysis**

1. Dealer opens 1H. Responder splinters to 4D, showing an opening hand with a singleton or void in diamonds. Although opener has only 12 hcp, he has six hearts and prime cards in the two significant side suits, spades and clubs. Opener has no side suit with two quick losers and bids 4NT, Roman Key Card. Responder shows two key cards with 5H and opener bids 6H. The play is simple. LHO leads the CJ and declarer pulls trump. Declarer can ruff one diamond and discards the other one on the CQ. The hand makes six hearts easily on only 25 hcp, including the worthless DJ.
2. Dealer opens 1S and responder, with an opening hand, a four card fit, and a singleton, bids 4H, a Splinter bid. This gets the opener interested in slam since there are no wasted values in hearts. Opener bids 4NT, RKC, and the responder shows two key cards. Opener bids the spade slam. LHO leads the HK, and then may switch to a club. There are three heart losers but two of them can be discarded on the long diamonds. The key to the hand is not losing a trump trick. Missing the Jxxx, declarer can pick up the Jack on either side. However, declarer must play one of the top trumps from hand, and not dummy's Ace, on the first round of the suit to protect for a bad trump break. When LHO shows out, declarer finesses through RHO's Jack. Declarer picks up the four trumps, plays on diamonds, pitching the two losing hearts, and takes 12 tricks.
3. Dealer, with an aceless hand, opens 1H. Responder has an opening hand, only five losers, six trumps, and a singleton diamond, so makes a splinter bid of 4D. Opener has values in diamonds so the hands fit poorly. Opener signs off in 4H and hopes that partner will not bid on. The lead is the S10 to the Ace and, when RHO sees the SQ fall, she will likely switch to a diamond. Declarer pulls trumps and can only afford one club loser. Declarer should use his trump suit for entries to hand to take the double finesse in clubs. It is a 75 percent play to lose only one trick in clubs, so long as declarer leads twice towards the AQ10 and plays the 10 on the first round.
4. Dealer has a big two-suiter with 16 hcp's and only four losers. When dealer opens 1H, responder jumps to 4C, a splinter. Opener has no suit with two quick losers and bids 4NT, Key Card. Responder shows two key cards and opener bids 5NT, asking for kings. When responder shows the fitting King of Diamonds with 6D, opener can count 13 tricks: five hearts, five diamonds, two black aces, and a club ruff. Opener should bid 7H. There is nothing to the play. LHO leads the SK which declarer wins with the ace. Declarer pulls trumps in two rounds, ruffs a club in the dummy, and claims.