

MINI SPLINTERS by Maritha Pottenger

Mini Splinters mean different things to different people. I am playing them the way that Paul Darin does. In that version, they can only be bid by Responder when Opener bids a major. In that case, a jump shift by Responder shows 8-10 HCP, 4 trumps, and a singleton (or void) in the suit bid. This would be 2S or 3C or 3D over a 1H opening. Or, 3C or 3D or 3H over a 1S opening.

Paul Darin also plays that an immediate jump (e.g., 1S-P-3S) shows 9-11 HCP with EITHER 4 trumps or a singleton and 3 trumps. (Mostly, I do not play that.) Of course, the balanced 3-card limit raise (excellent 10-12 HCP with only 3 trumps) goes through 1NT Forcing first.

The majority of the greater bridge community generally defines Mini Splinters as coming up in two situations—one by Responder and one by Opener. These people use Mini-Splinters ONLY by passed hand Responders (because they are using Bergen Raises, or weak jump shifts or other bids by unpassed Responders). Thus, P-P-1S-P-3C would be a mini splinter in support of spades, showing shortness in clubs. One would expect a hand something like Qxxx K10x Axxxx x—now that spades are trump, this is a 7-loser hand and enough to force to game.

Since I am NOT a fan of Bergen Raises, nor of Weak Jump Shifts over majors, I find the Mini Splinter by passed OR unpassed Responder much more useful.

Mini Splinters by Opener are defined as “jump reverses” and show hands that have increased in value with a fit. (Since a regular reverse is one-round forcing, there is no need to use the jump reverse as a natural bid.) So, 1D-P-1S-P-3H by Opener shows 4-card spade support and a hand that got much better after the spade fit was found. We would expect a hand similar to: Kxxx x AQJxx Axx—a hand that is now a 5 or 6 loser hand with the fit established. This is a perfectly logical (and useful) bid in my mind.

Slams (and, to a lesser extent, games) are based on controls and tricks. That is why I am insistent upon partner showing source-of-tricks suits as soon as possible. If partner has a good 5-card suit and I have a good 5-card suit, all we need is two more Aces and we have slam. Splinter bids—of any kind—DENY the possession of a good, 5-card or longer suit.

Controls by shortness are also incredibly valuable. When the 40 point deck becomes a 30 point deck because neither partner has anything wasted in that one suit, you can make games with 21-22 HCP (or even less) and slams with 25+ HCP. That is why I like regular splinters and Mini Splinters on my convention card. Some of my partners also play shortness-asking and showing bids over Weak Two openings for similar reasons.