

## When NOT to Use a Splinter Bid By Maritha Pottenger

Splinter bids (showing a singleton or void in the suit bid, 4-card trump support for partner and an opening hand) are very descriptive. Used well, they will allow you to find good small slams with considerably less than 33 HCP. There are, however, some hands for which a splinter bid is NOT the best bid to make.

**Examples would be hands in which all you need to know is partner's key cards.** There is no point in giving the opponents extra information by showing your splinter. Simply launch into Roman Key Card Blackwood and find out whether your partner has the cards you need or not.

*Sample hands:* KQxx x Ax AKQJ10x and partner opens one spade.

All you care about is whether partner has 0, 1, or 2 Aces. If partner shows you two Aces, you will make the matchpoint bid of 7NT (not 7 spades). You expect to take 6 club tricks, 1 diamond, 1 heart, and 5 spade tricks.

AKxx AKQxxxx x x and partner opens one spade. All you care about are the two outstanding Aces and the queen of trump. Don't waste time showing one of your singletons or bothering to bid your wonderful heart suit. (How would you feel if you bid your heart suit and LHO was void in hearts and was able to double the final contract for a heart lead, collect a ruff and maybe an outside Ace?)

Just as the Jacoby No Trump (forcing raise) allows your partner to show a side 5-card suit rather than a singleton, so **sometimes it is better for you to show a long side suit** (particularly if it is very good) **rather than a singleton.**

*Sample hand:* KQJx AKQJx x xx and partner opens one spade.

A splinter bid may work out fine, but it is often better (and saves room) if you bid your wonderful heart suit before showing spade support. When you later force to game in spades, partner will know you probably have a worthless doubleton in one of the other two suits and may be able to cue-bid to alleviate your concerns.

If you just splinter into 4D, partner will not realize that the Ace of spades and AK of clubs are key cards and will probably sign off at 4S, and you won't know if you ask for Aces if you are off the top two club tricks.

AQxx Qxx VOID AKQxxx and partner opens one spade.

With a void, you would really like to get a cue-bidding sequence started. Two clubs conserves bidding room and might allow you and your partner to cue-bid your way to 7S. (Suppose partner has KJxxx AKx Qx Jxx and raises your clubs. Now, you and your partner can cue-bid controls all the way up to the 7 level. Partner may be a bit surprised when you show your spade support at the 7 level—as s/he is expecting to play in clubs—but all will be well.)

Sometimes it would be right to jump shift with the hand above (3C). You'll just have to make your best guess. Usually, 2C is OK. It preserves more bidding room and, as responder, you can almost always find a bid to force your partner to bid again.