

The 30 Point Deck

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What do I mean by a thirty point deck? Everyone knows that at bridge, an Ace counts 4, a King 3, a Queen 2 and a Jack 1, so a deck has 40 High Card Points (HCP). The situation I refer to is where one of you has a singleton or void and your partner has no face cards in your short suit.

♠ ---

♠ 7 5 2

In this case, the opponents have 10 H.C.P. in spades and will take zero tricks (hopefully we are not in Notrump)! The points you care about are those in the other three suits ... It's a thirty point deck.

♠ 8

♠ 10 6 3

Here the opponents have 10 H.C.P. in spades and will take only one trick. Even though you have a spade loser the points you care about are still those in the other three suits ... It's still a thirty point deck.

This concept is very important. Good game and slam bidding depends on hand re-evaluation from information obtained in the auction. How well the hands fit is a key route to better bidding. If we have a good trump fit, usually nine cards or more (although sometimes eight is enough), hands that have no face cards opposite shortness fit well.

There is no doubt that this concept is more important and is in fact crucial to slam bidding. It therefore has more importance in team matches where one or two slam decisions swing many a match. In matchpoints missing a tight slam that most of the field also misses will likely only be a missed opportunity for picking up about 1/3 of a board.

The best holding opposite shortness is xxx, which we will call the Magic Holding. The second best holding is xxxx. The third best holding is Axx and the next best holding is Axxx. The more high card points you have opposite the short suit, the worse it is. Remember that AKQJ opposite shortness is still FOUR SURE TRICKS.

Why is xxx better than Axx? Consider the following two suits (with spades as trumps):

H 3
D KQ873

H A84
D 652

H 3
D KQ873

H 864
D A52

In the first case, you need the Ace of diamonds onside to avoid two diamond losers – a 50% proposition for one loser and 50% for two losers. In the second case you have a heart loser for sure, but no diamond loser – 100% for exactly one loser.

Why is xxx better than xxxx? The most common situation is where the hand with the short suit has four-card trump support. If you get a trump lead, you will now usually lead the singleton, and perhaps they will lead another trump. If you started with the Magic Holding of xxx, you still have two trumps to ruff your two losers. If you started with xxxx, those nasty trump leads by the opponents have meant that after you trump two losers you will be still be left with a loser.

The way we show shortness is usually via a splinter bid. A splinter bid (usually shortened to "splinter") is an unnecessary jump bid in a new suit. It shows good trump support and a singleton or void in the bid suit. We define a jump as unnecessary if it is one level higher than a natural bid that would have been game forcing. A double jump in a new suit is always unnecessary as a natural bid but sometimes even a single jump bid is not needed naturally and thus becomes a splinter. Dorothy Hayden Truscott popularized splinters in the 60's.

http://web2.acbl.org/documentLibrary/play/Commonly_Used_Conventions/splinters.pdf

Let's look at the common situations:

1H – 1S natural and forcing
 1H – 2S natural and game forcing (playing strong JS)
 1H – 3S SPLINTER

1D – 1H
 2C Natural and non-forcing

1H – 2C natural and forcing
 1H – 3C natural and game forcing (playing strong JS)
 1H – 4C SPLINTER

1D – 1H
 3C Natural and game forcing

1D – 1H
 4C SPLINTER

Any jump bid in a new suit that is higher than necessary to be forcing to game agrees partner's last suit as trumps and shows a splinter in the bid suit.

Let's look at a few examples:

Example #1

<p>♠ A K Q 8 ♥ A J 8 4 2 ♦ A 7 2 ♣ 4</p>	<p>♠ 9 7 5 3 ♥ — ♦ K 10 9 8 4 ♣ K 9 8 3</p>	<p>♠ J 10 2 ♥ K Q 9 7 5 ♦ 6 ♣ A J 7 2</p>
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<p><i>West</i> 1 ♥ 4NT 7 ♥</p>	<p><i>East</i> 4 ♦ (splinter) 5 ♠ (2KC + Q) All Pass</p>
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Responder showed his opening hand, four or more hearts and short diamonds. This is great news for opener and two keycards with the trump Queen makes for an easy grand slam bid on only 29 HCP, with two wasted Jacks.

Example #2

<p>♠ A K 8 ♥ A J 8 2 ♦ A Q J 7 4 ♣ 6</p>	<p>♠ Q 7 5 3 ♥ 6 ♦ 9 6 3 ♣ A J 9 8 2</p>	<p>♠ 10 2 ♥ K Q 10 9 7 5 ♦ K 2 ♣ 7 4 3</p>
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<p><i>West</i> 1 ♦ 4 ♣ (splinter) 5 ♣ (0/3 KC) All Pass</p>	<p><i>East</i> 1 ♥ 4 NT 6 ♥</p>
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Opener showed game values with four hearts and shortness in clubs. Responder starts thinking "30 point deck" when he has the Magic Holding in clubs: xxx. Since he plays opener for about 18 HCP and he has a GREAT 8 HCP with 2 doubletons, he knows slam should be at worst on a finesse and his two extra trumps encourages him higher. Opener's 3 keycards should be enough.

Example #3

♠ K J 7 5
 ♥ 6 5
 ♦ 10 6 3
 ♣ J 9 8 2

♠ 10 8 4
 ♥ A Q J 8 2
 ♦ K 7 4
 ♣ K 6

♠ 2
 ♥ K 10 9 7
 ♦ A 9 8 2
 ♣ A Q 4 3

♠ A Q 9 6 3
 ♥ 4 3
 ♦ Q J 5
 ♣ 10 7 5

West
 1 ♥
 4 NT
 6 ♥

East
 3 ♠ (splinter)
 5 ♣ (0/3 KC)
 All Pass

Responder shows an opening hand with four or more hearts and shortness in spades. Opener starts thinking “30 point deck” when he has the “Magic Holding” in spades: xxx. A count of combined HCP puts the number at about 25-27 in the “30 Point Deck” so we should be in the slam zone, missing 3-5 HCP in the 3 key suits. Slam should be at worst on a finesse. Responder’s 3 keycards should be enough with either minor suit queen.

Example #4

♠ K J 7 3
 ♥ 6 5
 ♦ J 10 6 3
 ♣ J 9 2

♠ A 8 4
 ♥ A Q J 8 2
 ♦ Q 7 4
 ♣ 7 6

♠ 2
 ♥ K 10 9 7
 ♦ A 9 8 2
 ♣ A Q 4 3

♠ Q 10 9 6 5
 ♥ 4 3
 ♦ K 5
 ♣ K 10 8 5

West
 1 ♥
 4 ♥

East
 3 ♠ (splinter)
 All Pass

This is almost the same as the previous hand, with 26 combined HCP. Again, responder shows an opening hand with hearts and a spade splinter. Opener has a good holding in spades, but not the magic holding. The combined HCP puts the number at about 21-23 in the “30 Point Deck”. Although we have no spade loser, now we are missing 7-9 HCP in the 3 key suits. That is much more likely to be two losers and here slam is not ridiculous, but it needs BOTH minor suit Kings onside, so it is only a 25% proposition. We needed a few extra high cards.

Some possible splinter auctions

Major suit openers – splinters by responder:

1H – 3S/4C/4D

1S – 4C/4D/4H (NB: Not everyone plays 1S – 4H is a splinter; after all it is game in a Major. Check with your partner even if you agree to play splinters)

Minor suit openers – splinters by responder:

1C/D – 3H/3S

Major suit openers – mini-splinters by responder:

1H – 2S/3C/3D

1S – 3C/3D/3H

Splinter rebids by opener:

1C – 1H 3S	1C – 1H 4D	(Some play a jump reverse is a splinter: 1C-1H-3D)
1C – 1S 4D	1C – 1S 4H	(Some play a jump reverse is a splinter: 1C-1S-3D; 1C-1S-3H)
1D – 1H 3S	1D – 1H 4C	
1D – 1S 4C	1D – 1S 4H	(Some play a jump reverse is a splinter: 1D-1S-3H)
1H – 1S 4C	1H – 1S 4D	
1C – 1D 3M		Two of a Major would be natural and game forcing. (A jump shift rebid)

2nd round splinters by responder

1C – 1D 1H – 3S/4C	(Even the double jump in opener's minor is a splinter. There are other ways to show club support)
1C – 1D 1S – 4C/4H	(Even the double jump in opener's minor is a splinter. There are other ways to show club support)
1C – 1H 1S – 4C/4D	(Even the double jump in opener's minor is a splinter. There are other ways to show club support)
1D – 1H 1S – 4C/4D	(Even the double jump in opener's minor is a splinter. There are other ways to show diamond support)

Splinters after a raise

1C – 1H 2H – 3S/4C/4D	Splinter and in this case a slam try
1S – 2S 4C/4D/4H	Splinter and a slam try

Splinters after 2/1 responses

1H – 2C 2H – 3S	1H – 2C 2H – 4D	(splinter raises of hearts, with possibly only 3 trumps)
1H – 2D 2H – 3S	1H – 2D 2H – 4C	(splinter raises of hearts, with possibly only 3 trumps)
1S – 2C 2H – 4D	1S – 2D 2H – 4C	(splinter raises of hearts)

1S – 2C 2S – 4D	1S – 2D 2S – 4H	(splinter raises of spades, with possibly only 3 trumps)
1S – 2H 2S – 4C	1S – 2H 2S – 4D	(splinter raises of spades, with possibly only 3 trumps)
1D – 2C 3M		In S.A. 2M shows a good hand, so even in Standard 3M should be a splinter.
1S – 2H 4C/4D		
1H – 2C 3D/3S	1H – 2D 3S/4C	
1S – 2C 3D/3H	1S – 2D 3H/4C	Many players play the 3-level jumps are natural and showing two good suits. You have to decide which is more useful.

Splinters after a strong opening

2C – 2D 2H – 3S/4C/4D	Responder's simple bids are natural and game forcing, so the jumps are splinters
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Splinters after 1NT openers

1NT – 2D 2H – 3S/4C/4D	1NT – 2H 2S – 4C/4D/4H	Jacoby transfers This splinter shows 6+ in the Major and is at least a mild slam try. (Some play the 4C bid is Keycard Gerber or normal Gerber.)
1NT – 3H 1NT – 3S	Many players play this shows 3-1-5-4 or 3-1-4-5 Similarly this shows 1-3-5-4 or 1-3-4-5	
1NT – 2S 2NT – 3M	(Minor suit Stayman) (stiff M, 5-5 in minors)	
1NT – 2S 3C/3D – 3M	(Minor suit Stayman) (stiff M, 5-5 in minors)	
1NT – 2S 3C – 3M	(transfer to clubs, playing 4-suit transfers) (stiff in Major, game values or slam try with 6+ clubs)	
1NT – 2NT 3D – 3M	(transfer to diamonds, playing 4-suit transfers) (stiff in Major, game values or slam try with 6+ diamonds)	

Concealed Splinters

This is a term for splinter raises that do not specify the splinter suit. One example is in the system of BERGEN Major suit raises.

1H – 3S	1S – 3H	Playing BERGEN these bids show unspecified splinters. Opener bids the next higher bid to ask which is the splinter suit.
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1H – 3S
 3NT(?) – 4C Short clubs
 4D Short diamonds
 4H Short spades (OM)

Playing a group of conventions commonly referred to as BAZE after Stayman there are also concealed splinters.

1NT – 2C	1NT – 2C	
2H – 3S	2S – 3H	Playing BAZE these bids show unspecified splinters. Opener bids the next higher bid to ask which is the splinter suit. In these sequences responder is making a slam try.

Some would play that jumps after 1NT – 2C – 2M are splinters, but the BAZE system is better since you can play 4C is Keycard Gerber and 4D is a balanced slam try with a fit for opener's Major. 4NT is quantitative with no fit.

Some people play variations of the Jacoby 2NT convention. One example is to play 1M – 2NT – 3C shows a minimum with an unspecified singleton. Responder only asks what is the short suit if slam is possible opposite a minimum, so the short suit might remain concealed from the opponents.

Splinters in competition

1H – (1S) – 3S/4C/4D All three of these are splinters, as if the opponents had not bid
 1H – (2C) – 3S/4C/4D All three of these are splinters, as if the opponents had not bid
 1H – (2D) – 3S/4C/4D All three of these are splinters, as if the opponents had not bid
 1S – (2m) – 4C/4D/4H All three of these are splinters, as if the opponents had not bid; notice as we mentioned earlier the 4H bid is controversial.

Other Shortness showing bids

I play weak-two-bid – 2NT response asks for shortness (most players show a feature or give Ogust responses). In combination with this, I play 3C is artificial, asking for a feature.

1M – 2NT (Jacoby forcing Major raise; opening hand, 4+ trump support)
 3C/3D/3OM (most people play this as showing shortness in the bid suit, but there are dozens of variations)

1m – 2NT (invitational; almost always no four card Major)
 3M (I play this bid of 3 of Major shows shortness looking for the best game; Useful since responder has denied a four card Major in most methods)

1m – 2m (inverted 11+ HCP forcing 1 round; no four card Major)
 2NT – 3M (I play this bid of 3 of Major shows shortness looking for the best game)

These last few auctions allow you to sometimes pick the best game. It is horrible to play 3NT with Jxx opposite a singleton and often not much fun to play with Q10x opposite stiff. Often these types of hands might produce six of a minor and go down in 3NT!

1H – 2H
 2S/3C/3D I play these as short suit game tries, so we may have game on less than normal values if we fit well.

1S – 2S
 3C/3D/3H Short Suit Game Try (Part of Kokish 2-way Game tries & ideas developed by Marshall Miles)

How do I show a void?

Usually if the splinter is a void, the only way to show the void is to cue bid the suit later, or make a void showing response to Blackwood. If you play opener's jump reverse is a splinter, you might play the double jump reverse is a splinter showing a void.

Splinters with singleton honours

As a quick answer, don't do it. A singleton Ace might be OK, **IF** you are in the slam zone and are going to bid again. The problem with splinter on stiff King or stiff Queen is that partner's evaluation will be bad. If you have stiff Queen, how will partner ever know that KJ1065 is worth four tricks without ruffing anything!

ALERTS

As a general rule all splinters are alerts. The only exceptions are when they occur after the 1st round of bidding and the splinter bid is above 3NT. In that case no bids above 3NT are alerts, but they are "post-alerts", when the auction is complete.

NOTE: 1S – 4C is an alert since it is the 1st round of bidding.

1D – 1S – 4C is a post-alert because it is the 2nd round of bidding and above 3NT

1C – 1D – 1H – 3S is an alert even though it is the 2nd round of bidding because it is below 3NT

Partnership Agreements

If I agreed to play splinters with a new partner, without any further discussion, I would assume we play Double Jump Shifts over a Major opening are splinters. I would also assume we play Double Jump Shifts by opener after responder's 1-level Major suit response are splinters. Anything else would require further discussions.

Sometimes I tell a new partner "If something might be a splinter – It probably is". In that case, I would play most of the above discussed bids as splinters.

Our least favourite verbal response

"But partner I only had ..."

When you have the "Magic Holding" we don't want to hear excuses. SHOW SOME SIGNS OF LIFE even when holding a minimum for your previous bidding.

Example #7

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

<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
1 NT (15-17)	2 ♦ (transfer)
2 ♥	3 ♠ (splinter)
4 ♣ or 4 ♦ or 4NT	

Responder shows at least a mild slam try with 6+ hearts and say 11+ HCP and short spades. Opener again starts thinking "30 point deck" when he has the Magic Holding in spades: xxx. The fact that they are minimum is irrelevant. A count of combined HCP puts the number at 26+ in the "30 Point Deck", even if responder is rock bottom minimum. Here when responder has 13 HCP, we have 28 out of 30 HCP and a cold slam.

The Jacoby 2NT flaw and normal splinters

Most modern partners play a splinter raise of opener's Major shows about 12-14 HCP, 4⁺ trumps and shortness. In concert with this, they play a Jacoby 2NT forcing raise. Because of their splinter agreement, they play that with 15⁺ HCP and a splinter raise, they bid 2NT and hope it works out.

This causes a problem, as these two examples will illustrate.

Example #5

<p>♠ 10 8 4 ♥ A Q 10 8 2 ♦ K 7 4 ♣ K 6</p>	<p>♠ K J 5 3 ♥ 6 5 ♦ 10 6 3 ♣ J 9 8 2</p>	<p>♠ 2 ♥ K J 9 7 ♦ A Q 8 2 ♣ A Q 4 3</p>
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<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
1 ♥	2NT (Jacoby)
4 ♥ (minimum)	???

Responder shows an opening hand with four or more hearts. In most versions of Jacoby 2NT, opener rebids 4H showing a minimum with no shortness. Now, responder has to guess whether to carry on. For those who say that responder should just Blackwood and then bid 6H, look at the next example.

Example #6

<p>♠ K Q 4 ♥ A Q 10 8 2 ♦ 7 6 4 ♣ J 6</p>	<p>♠ A 10 6 5 3 ♥ 6 5 ♦ 9 3 ♣ 10 9 8 2</p>	<p>♠ 2 ♥ K J 9 7 ♦ A Q 8 2 ♣ A Q 4 3</p>
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<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
1 ♥	2NT (Jacoby)
4 ♥ (minimum)	???

Again, responder shows an opening hand with four or more hearts. Opener rebids 4H on the flat minimum. Responder has to guess whether to carry on. On this particular hand even 4H might be in jeopardy, certainly the five-level is perilous and a contract of 6H is heavily anti-percentage.

My solution to the problem & mini-splinters:

First of all, play mini-splinters. This is helpful in bidding tight games. We have had many examples of bidding perfect fit slams that needed no finesses, when our opponents did not bid game! If you play the range for the "BIG" splinters is 15⁺ HCP, then the mini-splinters are 7-14 HCP.

Some fine-tuning: If the mini-splinter is seven HCP it guarantees an Ace and a King. If the responder holds 11⁺-14 HCP and makes a mini-splinter, and opener signs off in 3M, responder will always carry on to game; JICIM (Just in Case it Makes). With 14 really good HCP, for example two Ace-King combinations (King fourth of trumps and Ace-King, Ace on the side), treat the hand as 15 HCP and make a "BIG" splinter. Another example of a 14 HCP hand I would upgrade to a "BIG" splinter would be: S Q1097 H AK109 D KQT8 C 6, when partner opens 1S.

Some players address this problem by revising opener's rebid over Jacoby 2NT and not allowing opener to jump rebid to 4M.

So in both of our examples, responder bids 3S over 1H – a "BIG" splinter showing 15+ HCP and has gotten their entire hand "off their chest" and can respect opener's decision; Opener uses Blackwood in Example #5 and signs off in 4H in Example #6.

Playing this method of mini & maxi splinters let's revisit Example #3.

<p>Example #3</p> <p>♠ K J 7 5 ♥ 6 5 ♦ 10 6 3 ♣ J 9 8 2</p> <p>♠ 10 8 4 ♥ A Q J 8 2 ♦ K 7 4 ♣ K 6</p> <p>♠ 2 ♥ K 10 9 7 ♦ A 9 8 2 ♣ A Q 4 3</p> <p>♠ A Q 9 6 3 ♥ 4 3 ♦ Q J 5 ♣ 10 7 5</p>	<p><i>West</i></p> <p>1 ♥ 2 NT (game try) 3 ♦ 5 ♦ (1/4 KC) All Pass</p>	<p><i>East</i></p> <p>2 ♠ (mini-splinter) 3 ♣ 4 NT 6 ♥</p>
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Responder shows 7-14 HCP with four or more hearts and shortness in spades. Opener starts thinking "30 point deck" when he has the "Magic Holding" in spades: xxx. A count of combined HCP puts the number at 20-27 in the "30 Point Deck". If we hold even 20 of the 30 HCP we should make a very slim game, so from one point of view opener should jump to 4H. The problem is that if responder has the 12-14 HCP hand, our "30 Point Deck" calculation tells us we are close to slam. Knowing this opener bids 2NT – initially as a game try. Responder cooperates with 3C, showing good club values and more than 7-10 HCP. Opener shows some values in diamonds and responder bids Blackwood.

What is a Fragment bid?

This is not in common usage anymore, but some play that the jump reverse is not a splinter, but shows three cards in the bid suit (a fragment), three cards in partner's Major and therefore a singleton in the unbid suit. A normal agreement is to have the bid show about 15+–18 HCP.

1C – 1H	1C – 1S	1C – 1S	1D – 1S
3D	3D	3H	3H

Special Fragments

A funny name for a useful bid. 1X – 1M – 4X shows a six or seven card suit, four card support for responder's Major and a good hand. Your values should be concentrated in your suit and the Major.

1C – 1H	1C – 1S	1D – 1H	1D-1S
4C	4C	4D	4D

Concealed Forcing Raises

These are cousins to concealed splinters. After 1m – 1M, this convention defines all the bids above the jump raise (excluding 3NT) as specific game raises in responder’s Major. It allows you to show the two possible splinters with one bid and add the distributional raise to game.

1C – 1H		1C – 1S	
3S	Unspecified splinter – spades or diamonds	4C	Unspecified splinter –diamonds or hearts
4C	Special Fragment 6-4 good hand	4D	Special Fragment 6-4 good hand
4D	balanced game raise with 18½ - 19 HCP	4H	balanced game raise with 18½ - 19 HCP
4H	Minimum Special Fragment with 6-4 or 6-5	4S	Minimum Special Fragment with 6-4 or 6-5

Responder can bid the next higher bid over the concealed splinter to ask which it is and still remain below game. Some play the same system after 1H – 1S, but most play a 4H rebid is just hearts.

The 20 Point Deck and the 10 point Deck

What I have said so far is equally applicable when our partnership has voids in two different suits. If you ever enter the twilight zone of the triple void, grand slams can be made on almost no high cards.

Here are two examples of how distribution can be more powerful than honours, especially with a big trump fit:

Example #7

	♠ K10 8 7 5 3	
	♥ ---	
	♦ 10 6 3	
	♣ J 9 8 2	
♠ Q		♠ J
♥ A Q 10 8 2		♥ K J 9 7 6
♦ A K J 7 4		♦ Q 9 8 5 2
♣ K 6		♣ Q 3
	♠ A 9 6 4 2	
	♥ 5 4 3	
	♦ ---	
	♣ A 10 7 5 4	

East-West appear to be able to make a five level contract, but adverse ruffs might hold them to eight tricks in diamonds or nine tricks in hearts.

Meanwhile, North-South are cold for twelve tricks in spades with 12 H.C.P.

Example #8

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

Even more dramatic is this hand where East-West can make all the tricks in hearts; a Grand Slam with only five H.C.P.!