

A Modern Splinter Bidding Convention When Opening One of a Major

By Neil H. Timm

Playing 2/1 or Precision most pairs today use the Jacoby 2NT* bid to show opening strength or better, normally 13+ dummy points with 4-card support when opening a major suit with 5 cards.

The 2NT* bid is forcing to at least game in opener's major suit. If the partnership also plays splinter bids, Jacoby 2NT* response tends to deny the shape for a splinter (i.e., no singleton or void).

The opener next tends to show shortness with a 3-level bid, common sequences follows:

Bid	Suit Length	Points
3 (new suit)*	Singleton/Void	12+
3 (major suit opened)	5/6+ in major bid	18+
3NT*	(5332)	15-17
4 (new suit)	4+ card suit	12-17
4 (major suit opened)	5+card major	12-14

*= Alert

The primary “advantage” of the Jacoby convention is that the responder is provided the information to take control of the bidding to stop at game or to investigate slam based upon fit and shortness. The disadvantage of the sequence of bids is that it gives away information about hand shape to the opponents because the opener does not have extra values and the auction stops at game.

To eliminate this problem, bridge experts have proposed a variation:

Opener's Rebids

1M – 2NT* –

- 3♣* All Minimum Hands – no slam interest
- 3♦* Extra Values (15-17)
- 3♥* Extra Values, Extra Trump, No Shortness (6322, 7222)
- 3♠* Extra Values, Extra Shape, 5422
- 3NT* Balanced 18-19 points
- 4X 5+card side suit with a control A/K
- 4M To Play (5332)

*= Alert

While this variation conceals more in about hand shape it still puts the responder in control and the tail is again wagging the dog! So, why not use 2NT* as Roman keycard 1430; because more often than not, the responder does not have 16+ points, but 12-15

points with a fit and shortness. With shortness and a fit, one does not use a Jacoby bid but shows shortness using a splinter bid.

Why Splinters work!

Short Suit Total (SST) Rule

When opening one of a major, a splinter bid shows 3/4 card support for the major suit bid and usually 13+ Working HCP and a SST=0-3 for both partners. One applies the SST Rule.

Opener adds his HCP to 13.

With 19-21 HCP then 13-SST = # of tricks possible.

If the SST in both hands = 2, then we have 11 tricks with a singleton in both hands, with a **void and singleton** $13-(SST=1) = 12$. **A SLAM**

If the total HCP= 22-24 in both hands, you gain a trick. So, with singletons in both hands $13-(SST=2)+1=12!$ And with 25-27 you gain 2 tricks.

NOTE: For that unusual hand with 2 voids, $13-0=13$, a grand Slam!

Mike Lawrence and Anders Wirgen developed the SST Rule in their book: "I FOUGHT THE LAW of Total Tricks" (2004)- Published by Mikeworks.

The Modern Splinter Bidding Convention

Singletons

1♠ - pass - 3♥* (singleton somewhere) – to ask where, bid next step (3♠)
Then 4♥ - 4♣ - 4♦ show singletons (direct bids) – or some may prefer use submarine-like bids 3NT*=♣, 4♣*=♦, and 4♦*=♥ to avoid a double.

1♥ - pass - 3♠* (singleton somewhere) – to ask where, bid next step (3NT)
Then 4♣ - 4♦ show singletons and 4♥= spades (singleton) – or again you may use submarine- like bids 4♥=♠, 4♣*=♦, and 4♦*=♥ to avoid a double.

If you do not need to know where the singleton is located, since it may help the opponents, bid 4NT as 1430 Roman Keycard Blackwood (RKCB) with spades agreed --- Or you may use 3NT as 1430 Baby Blackwood RKCB to keep the responses at a lower level.

When hearts are the agreed suit use 4♠ as kickback for hearts to keep the responses at a lower level. **NEVER** use 4NT since with the AQ you are always too high, committed to 6! Or, you may use cue bids.

Voids

1♠ - pass - 4♣*/4♦*(void in suit bid) and 3NT* = heart void.

1♥ - pass - 4♣*/4♦* (voids in suit bid) and 3NT* = spade void.

However, if you play some version of Bergen/Reverse/Combined Bergen Raises then 3NT* cannot be used to show 3-card support with 13-15 Dummy points over a major suit bid. And, you must give up the 4♣* and 4♦* Swiss bids. Not a big Deal!

The Void bids initiate the Exclusion Roman Keycard (RKCB) Convention --- which assumes the agreed upon Major and EXCLUDES the void suit.

The responses are NOT 1430/3014 RKCB, but works using steps:

First Step = 0 Keycards

2nd step = 1 Keycard without the Queen

3rd step = 1 Keycard with the Queen

4th step = 2 Keycards without the Queen

5th step = 2 Keycards with the Queen

6th step = 3 Keycards without the Queen

7th step = 3 Keycards with the Queen

For example Over the 5♣ the steps are:

5♦ = 0

5♥ = 1 without Queen

5♠ = 1 with Queen

5NT = 2 without Queen

6♣ = 2 with Queen

6♦ = 3 without Queen

6♥ = 3 with Queen

Over 3NT*/4♣*/4♦*/5♦/5♥/5♠ --- the responses are again steps and NOT 1430/3014.

What about the Queen ask? Over the first step = zero, the next step is the Queen ask.

Over 3NT or 5♦ --- the responses are again steps and NOT 1430/3014.

What about the Queen ask? Over the first step = zero, the next step is the Queen ask.

The first step denies and next step says yes with the Queen. And two steps say yes and an outside king in the bid suit.

Eddie Kantar (2008) "Roman Keycard Blackwood, 5th Edition, published by Master Point Press, only uses 3 Keycard steps: 0, 1, 2, 3 (rare) and again it is not 1430/3014.

What happens when you open one of a minor?

Now you employ Mini-Splinters: A jump shift or jump reverse (by opener) to show a 4 card fit, a singleton or void in the named suit, and *invitational* values:

1♣ - 1♥ - 3♦ = 4 hearts and a singleton/void in diamonds

1♣ - 1♠ - 3♦ = 4 spades and a singleton/void in diamonds

1♦ - 1♥ - 3♣ = 4 hearts and a singleton/void in clubs

1♦ - 1♠ - 3♣ = 4 spades and a singleton/void in clubs

Responder next bids the major at the 3-level with minimal values to sign-off and game with more. To initiate slam interest responder employs a cue bid. Or uses RKCB.

Would partner have recognized 3♣/3♦ as a mini-splinter? It's a jump where the non-jump would have been forcing (in this case a reverse), so it must be a splinter. However, we'd never discussed what ranges the two splinters might show. But I think it makes total sense for the mini-splinter to be forcing only to the three-level, since we also have available the full splinter, i.e. a double-jump for a game force.

Note: partnership agreements for Mini Splinters vary - some play that opener's jump forces game.

Opposite a NON-PASSED hand, one might consider the following four sequences as mini-splinters (for the minors), as opposed to jump shifts (according to partnership style and after discussion):

1♣ - 1♦ - 2♥

1♣ - 1♦ - 2♠

1♣ - 1♥ - 2♠

1♦ - 1♥ - 2♠.