

Partner opens 1♥, what is a 3♠, 4♣, 4♦ response?

Partner opens 1♠, what is a 3♥ (or 4♥), 4♣, 4♦ response?

Without any agreement to the contrary many would play these as splinters. But I think that it is far better to use 4♣ and 4♦ as (Key Card) Swiss. So that just leaves the three-level bid of the other major for splinters. That is no problem, however; I believe that it was Marty Bergen who first published the idea of ambiguous splinters (he calls them splinters with relay).

You may think that it would be better to splinter directly in the short suit but, actually, having an ambiguous splinter does have an advantage apart from saving bidding space. If opener is not interested in slam opposite any singleton, he can simply sign off and the opponents are none the wiser as to where responder's shortage is. Now the Bergen Raise structure for relay splinters is fine but I prefer to make these ambiguous splinters more user-friendly. It seems logical that, after the enquirey, 4♣ and 4♦ should always mean ♣ and ♦ splinters – a sleepy opener is less likely to forget. Also, we can actually distinguish between singletons and voids. It's easy when ♠'s are trumps and I will go into how to do it with ♥'s in much more detail when I put up something on major suit raises when playing 2/1 (we will go through the forcing NT to show a void opposite a 1♥ opening).

Anyway, the revised ambiguous splinter system as follows:-

After 1♥ - 3♠

3NT asks      4♣ = ♣ singleton  
                   4♦ = ♦ singleton  
                   4♥ = ♠ singleton

After 1♠ - 3♥

3♠ asks      3NT = ambiguous void  
                   4♣ = ♣ singleton  
                   4♦ = ♦ singleton  
                   4♥ = ♥ singleton

Thereafter opener may sign off, cue bid, or use key card with the agreed suit. Note that we do not splinter with singleton aces, but treat the hand as a balanced raise. Balanced raises are shown by Key card Swiss (12-15 points) or by Jacoby 2NT (16+ points).

In the ♠ sequence, we have a couple of spare bids (3NT and 4♠). We will use 3NT to show an ambiguous void, with 4♣ as a relay to find out where.

After 1♠ - 3♥ - 3♠ - 3NT,

4♣ asks      4♦ = ♦ void  
                   4♥ = ♥ void  
                   4♠ = ♣ void

There is no room in the ♥ sequence for something similar and so for now you simply show shortage and later maybe cue bid to show a void. I will explain how to do it when playing a forcing NoTrump at a later date.