

Splinter by Roger Lord

Dealer: South
Vul: North-South

	North		
	♠ Q853		
	♥ A82		
	♦ Q9542		
	♣ A		
West		East	
♠ 1042		♠ 76	
♥ J974		♥ 1053	
♦ A8		♦ J1063	
♣ 10643		♣ KQJ9	
	South		
	♠ AKJ9		
	♥ KQ6		
	♦ K7		
	♣ 8752		

South	West	North	East
1 Notrump	Pass	2 Clubs	Pass
2 Spades	Pass	4 Clubs*	Double
4 Diamonds	Pass	4 Notrump	Pass
5 Hearts	Pass	6 Spades	All Pass
*Splinter Raise			

Opening Lead: Club Six

The bidding uncovered a perfect fit, which was needed to make a slam with a combined 28 HCP. A splinter did it.

After South's two spades answer to Stayman, North raised spades not merely to game, but by describing his hand via four clubs. Fortunately, years of discussion had sunk in, and South took the bid as it was intended, not as (ugh!) Gerber, but as a splinter raise, four-card spade support, a slam try with a singleton or void of clubs.

East's double of four clubs was nonsensical, inasmuch as he was aware of the promised club shortness, and he should have figured that a club opening lead would not be effective.

South viewed his four small clubs as multiple tricks that could be won by ruffing them in the North hand. None of his high cards was wasted—in other words, all of his honor cards were “working”, and East's club honors were going nowhere. Thus, South accepted the slam try by making a control-showing bid of four diamonds. North inquired about key cards, to which South answered five hearts (two key cards, the spade ace and king, without the queen of trumps). North, who had the queen of trumps and two aces, placed the contract in six spades.

Following orders, West led a club, unblocking dummy's stiff ace conveniently for declarer. Planning to ruff clubs, declarer first played a diamond to his king, overtaken by the ace. Back came a trump, a good idea but too late. South won, ruffed a club, cashed the diamond queen, returned to hand with a heart, ruffed another club, returned to hand again with a heart, and ruffed his last club with dummy's last trump, the queen. As long as trumps broke 3-2, he was home. He ruffed a diamond high, played his two remaining high trumps, and claimed dummy's heart ace for 12 tricks.

Although it may seem so sometimes, a lead-directing double or bid is not a gun pointed to partner's head. West should not have obliged his partner, nor should he instead have banged down his diamond ace. As the cards lie, only a trump opening lead could have set six spades. It wasn't a great slam, but it worked.