Advanced Bridge Lesson 1

**Puppet Stayman**

1. Background: Use of the standard Stayman Convention results in the No Trump bidder disclosing his/her Major suit holdings when partner responds “2C”. The majority of times, however, in excess of 55% of the instances when the Stayman Convention is invoked, the opener has the opposite Major suit from that sought by the Responder, or no 4-card Major at all. Thus, the partnership returns to a No Trump contract with declarer having disclosed a 4-card Major suit or lack thereof. The result is that the defense now has insight into declarer’s distribution with specific reference to the Major suits, and, by deductive reasoning, the Minors as well. This information can be of great value in their defense of the hand.

The Puppet Stayman Convention , used in conjunction with Jacoby Transfer Bids, is a modification of the regular Stayman Convention, and is designed specifically to allow the same requisite disclosures while seeking a Major suit fit, but without the accompanying above-mentioned negative aspect afforded the defense. With this Convention it is the responder, not the opener, who evidences his/her Major suit holding. Remember, statistically speaking, it is responder’s hand which is likely to be tabled as the eventual Dummy. With this Convention the opener never discloses his/her Major suit holdings unless a fit is found, and even under a favorable fit circumstance, no disclosure is made by opener regarding the alternate Major suit about which responder has no central interest.

A secondary advantage of Puppet Stayman is to allow an opening bid of 1NT with a 15 HCP count (even 2NT with commensurate values) either scenario with an otherwise balanced hand, without giving up the possibility of eventually finding a potential 5-3 Major suit fit, especially under circumstances where there be invitational values by responder to the NT opener. Under circumstances where Puppet Stayman is not played by the partnership, such hands, oft times, offer opener a lack of an adequate rebid following a one Heart or a one Spade opening call. Note that if opener were to have opened 1 Spade as in Example (a), or 1 Heart as in Example (b), and assuming a possible 2 Club or 2 Diamond response by partner, any potential rebid by opener would be, to a greater or lesser degree, either inadequate, misleading and distorted, or both.

Example: (a) AQXXX AQX KXX XX (or) (b) XX AJXXX KQX AJX

1. The Convention: Puppet Stayman uses the “2C” response to a 1NT or a “3C” response to an opening 2NT to initiate a series of subsequent bids en route for a possible search for an 8-card Major suit fit. However, rather than asking opener to bid a 4-card Major, opener is asked to bid a Major suit only if it contains five pieces. If opener responds either 2H or 2S, responder can then proceed as if opener had opened 1H or 1S but with the additional knowledge that opener has just 5 pieces of the Major suit and 15-17 HCP’s. A response of “2D” by opener signifies the absence of any 5-card Major, but offers no information on opener’s possibly having none, one or two 4-card Majors. Note that almost all bids in the Puppet Stayman Convention need be alerted, for almost all are artificial. (All bids that are artificial, and thus alertable, are shown, hereafter, in quotes.)
2. “2D”/ = Transfer to Hearts (“3D” over an Opening 2NT)
3. “2H”/ = Transfer to Spades (“3H” over an Opening 2NT)
4. “2S”/ = Minor Suit Inquiry (“3S” over an Opening 2NT) - Seeking a Minor suit

preference from opener. (Opener responds “3C” (“4C”)to show equal or longer Clubs or “2NT” )”3NT”) to show longer Diamonds). (Note 3C (4C) level is never by-passed by opener’s responses in case a final 3C (4C) destination be desired by responder. This Minor suit inquiry serves two purposes: (1) To find a 5-3 or better Minor suit fit in hands where responder, holding a 5-5 or better Minor suit holding, wishes to escape from a perceived doomed 1NT or 2NT contract, or (2) To explore a Slam interest in one of the Minors evidenced by an artificial “3H” further bid by responder subsequent to opener’s first answer to the Minor suit inquiry. Such a furtherance requests additional information about opener’s Minors in step fashion. Example: After 1NT/”2S”/”2NT”/”3H”/ “3S”= 3 Diamonds, “3NT”= 4 Pieces. After 1NT/”2S”/”3C”/”3H” “3S”=3 Clubs, “3NT” = 4 Pieces, “4C” =

1. Pieces.

Direct Puppet Stayman Bids By Responder After 1 NT By Opener

(By Groupings)

The following three groups of bids are used where Responder is not interested in opener’s Major suit holdings. In these series of bids, the Responder is the undisputed Captain of the bidding process and opener responds only to that which is asked by Responder.

1. Game Level Bids By Responder

All bids in this category are utilized when responder makes the unilateral decision that game is suitable and that it is presumed best if he/she be declarer; i.e., that the opening lead were to come towards, rather than through, responder; not-withstanding the stronger hand being revealed as the Dummy hand. (Opener passes all of the bids in this category)

1. 3NT = To Play (Responder has no interest in either Major suit even if a 5-card Major held by

Opener)

1. 4H = To Play (Used when responder opts to become declarer rather than to transfer.)
2. 4S = To Play (Used when responder opts to become declarer rather than to transfer.)
3. 5C = To Play
4. 5D = To Play

2. Game-Forcing Texas Transfers Bids By Responder

All bids in this category are utilized when responder makes the unilateral decision that game is suitable and that it is presumed best if the strong hand be concealed, that opener become the declarer, and that the opening lead come towards the strong hand.

1. “4D”/ = Transfer to 4H
2. “2C”/”2D”/ “4H” = Transfer to 4S (“New Mexico Transfer”)
3. “2C”/ = Willingness to accept any response from opener; i.e., “2D”, 2H or 2S. (Ideally

done with Responder having a 3-3-5-2, 3-3-7-0, or 3-3-6-1 distribution. Is invoked when Responder wishes to exit from a NT contract holding as few as 0-8 HCP’s) Could even be utilized with a weak 6-card Diamond suit wherein, absent a “2D” response, and subsequent to a 2H or 2S response from opener, responder will run to 3D.

1. “2NT”/ = Forces “3C” (Responder is either desirous of playing in a “drop dead” 3C

contract or else has a likely Slam 4-4-4-1 distribution. Subsequent to the “3C” response from opener, responder will bid his/her singleton seeking support for one of the other three suits.

4. Puppet Stayman Bid To Investigate for a 5-Card Major Before Settling on 3 NT

If Responder has game-going values; i.e., at least 10 HCP’s, knowing that the final destination is to be no less than a 3 NT contract, but yet having an unbalanced hand with a 3-card Heart suit and/or a 3- card Spade suit, Responder may well investigate for a possible hidden, as-yet-undisclosed, 5-card Major held by opener before settling on an alternate 3 NT contract.

1. “2C’T”2D’73NT = To Play (Responder first investigates the possible presence of a 5-card

Major. If opener responds 2H or 2S evidencing a 5-card Major suit, responder can accept the Major suit if having 3 matching pieces, or, if opener responds “2D”, responder can return to 3NT .)

Puppet Stayman Bids After “2D” Response By Opener

(By Groupings)

The following four groups of bids are used when Responder is interested in opener’s Major suit holdings. In these series of bids, the opener and the Responder work together as a team with one, or the other, acting as the ultimate Captain of the team in so far as the final contract dependent upon the series of questions and answers by the individual partners.

5. Invitational Bids With Responder Holding 6-4 or 4-6 in the Majors

The only means to accomplish this goal would be to handle the scenario as if there were a 5-4 invitational scenario and if opener does not evidence a fit for the 4-card suit, responder may then exit into his/her 6-card suit confident of no fewer than two cards from opener.

6. Game-Forcing Bids With Responder Holding 6-4 or 4-6 in the Majors

1. “2C’7”2D’T”4C” = 6 Hearts and 4 Spades, Game Force (Opener bids 4S with 4 Spades or

4H absent the latter)

1. “2C’7”2D’7”4D” = 6 Spades and 4 Hearts, Game Force (Opener bids 4H with 4 Hearts or

4S absent the latter)

1. “2D”/2H/2S = 5 Hearts and 4 Spades, Invitational Values (With 15 HCP’s, opener will pass

with a Spade preference, bid 3-Hearts with a Heart preference, else 2NT.

With 16-17 HCP’s, opener will bid either 4H, 4S, or 3NT.)

1. “2C”/”2D”/”3D” = 5 Spades and 4 Hearts, Invitational Values (With 15 HCP’s opener will

bid either 3H or 3S. With 16-17 HCP’s opener bids 4H, 4S, else 3NT.)

1. “2C”/”2D”/”3H” = 5 Spades and 4 Hearts, Game-Force (Opener bids 4H holding 4 Hearts,

4S holding 3 or 4 Spades, else 3NT with \*(See # 10. Below for 2-way alternate meaning) specifically 3 Hearts and 2 Spades.)

1. “2C”/”2D”/”3S” = 5 Hearts and 4 Spades, Game-Force (Opener bids 4S holding 4 Spades,

4H holding 3 or 4 Hearts, else 3NT with specifically 3 Spades and 2 Hearts.)

1. Bids With Responder Holding One 4-Card Major
2. “2C”/”2D”/”2H” = 4 Spades and Fewer than 4 Hearts (Opener responds 2S holding

4 Spades and a Minimum 15 HCP’s, 3S holding 4 \* (See # 10. Below for 2-way Spades and a Maximum of 16-17 HCP’s, 2NT holding

alternate meaning) fewer than 4 Spades and a Minimum of 15 HCP’s,

or 3NT with fewer than 4 Spades and 16-17 HCP’s)

(Responder may pass, continue to 4S, or correct to 3NT when holding game values.)

1. “2C”/”2D”/”2S” = 4 Hearts and Fewer than 4 Spades (Opener responds 3H holding

4 Hearts and a Minimum 15 HCP’s, 4H holding 4 Hearts and a Maximum of 16-17 HCP’s, 2NT holding fewer than 4 Hearts and a Minimum of 15 HCP’s, or3NT with fewer than 4 Hearts and 16-17 HCP’s.)

(Responder may pass, continue to 4H, or correct to 3NT when holding game values.)

1. Bids With Responder Holding Two 4-Card Majors
2. “2C”/”2D”/”2NT” = Holding Both 4 Hearts and 4 Spades, and Invitational Values. (Opener

corrects to 3H or 3S with 4 of either and a minimum 15 HCP’s,

4H or 4S with 4 of either and a maximum 16-17 HCP’s, Passes 2NT with a minimum and neither 4-card Major, or responds 3NT with a. maximum 16-17 HCP’s and neither 4-card Major.

1. Holding Both 4 Hearts and 4 Spades, with Game Values. (See # 10 (2) below)

There is one further nuance in order to evidence the missing possibilities not yet included. All Heart responses by the Invokee evidence a Two-Way possibility and not the single manner already shown.

1. “2C”/”2D”/”2H” = Either: (a) Four Spades and Fewer than Four Hearts (Opener responds

2S with 4 Spades and a minimum of 15 HCP’s, 3S with 4 Spades and a maximum of 16-17 HCP’s, 2NT with fewer than 4 Spades and a minimum of 15 HCP’s, or else 3NT with fewer than 4 Spades and a maximum of 16-17 HCP’s.)

(With greater than 9 HCP’s, responder can either continue to 4S if opener bids 2S or 3S evidencing a holding of 4 Spades, or continue to 3NT if opener denies a 4 Spade holding and having evidenced 15 HCP’s by bidding 2NT.)

or: (b) An invitational 2NT scenario (Responder, not having been

interested in Spades at all, will correct to 2NT with 9-10 HCP’s if opener bids 2S, or will continue to 3NT if opener responds 3S evidencing 16-17 HCP’s.)

1. “2C”/”2D”/”3H” = Either (1) Five Spades and Four Hearts, Game Forcing,

or (2) Four Spades and Four Hearts, Game Forcing

Opener will respond: (a) 4H with 4 Hearts

1. 3S with 3 Spades (In case responder has 5 Spades)
2. 4S with 4 Spades

(d) 3NT with specifically 2 Spades and 3 Hearts (No Major interest)

1. Puppet Stayman Over a 2NT Opening Bid
2. 3-way Jacoby transfers as before. (D = Hearts, H = Spades, and S = Minor Suit Inquiry)
3. “3C” asks for a 5-card Major, “3D” reply by opener denies a 5-card Major.
4. “3NT” shows 4-4 in the Majors with game values, opener passes or corrects to 4H or 4S.
5. “3C”/”3D”/”3H” = 4 Spades and fewer than 4 Hearts, or 5 Spades and 4 Hearts.
6. Opener will then bid 3NT if no interest in either scenario; (i.e., having 2Spades and 3 Hearts),
7. Or “3S” if having some interest in either or both scenarios.

Responder will pass 3 NT in instance 1. or if 2. will bid:

a) 3NT if holding 4S and fewer than 4 Hearts (Opener can correct to 4S if so desires). b) or 4H if holding 5 Spades and 4 Hearts (Opener can then choose).

1. “3D”/”3H”/”3S” = 5 Hearts and 4 Spades. Opener bids 4H, 4S, or 3NT.
2. “3C”/”3D’7”3S” = 4 Hearts and fewer than 4 Spades.
3. “3C”/”3D”/3NT = To play, Must be alerted as being necessary even if Responder has no

interest in a 5-card Major because of (C) above. or having an interest in one of the Majors holding three pieces looking for five pieces from opener.

1. Quantitative Invitational NT Bids Over a 1NT Opening Bid
2. 4NT = Demands a pass with a minimum (15 HCP’s) and 6NT with a maximum (16-17 HCP’s)
3. 5NT = Demands 6NT with a minimum (15 HCP’s) and 7NT with a maximum (16-17 HCP’s)

13. Odd-Ball Holdings Utilizing Puppet Stayman

(A) “2C’7”2D’T”3C” = A long unspecified Minor Suit with Slam Possibility. Opener will

take a relay to “3D” after which responder, with Slam inquiry and 6- losers in a pre-supposed 6-card or better Minor suit of choice, bids “3H” with a semi-solid Club suit, “3S” with a semi-solid Diamond suit, and 3NT with a totally solid Minor (easily discernible by opener). Opener will then apply the losing trick count, and with 6 losers and support for the semi-solid Minor, or 6 losers opposite the solid Minor will proceed to 6 of the Minor.

1. Summation: The Puppet Stayman Convention is admittedly more intricate and involved than regular Stayman. In some of its fancy sequences, declarer’s hand is sometimes revealed, but in the “bread and butter” sequences, it usually is not. In the final analysis, it is usually more fun to play, more exacting and diverse in its capacity for Responder to show his/her holdings, yet devoid of mechanisms which inadvertently impart information useable by the defense should No Trump become the final contract. It is a valuable and useful bidding tool.