

Stayman and Transfers



In the last issue of BRIDGE I showed how red-suit transfers work in response to 1NT. Now I will try to complete an outline of this method by discussing ‘Stayman’ and then looking at ways to bid hands with length in both majors. Finally, we will take a look at the 2♠ response to 1NT, and also discuss the responses to other no-trump bids.

Let us start with Stayman.

What Is Stayman?

Stayman is a conventional response of 2♣ to a 1NT opening bid; it asks the opening bidder whether he holds a four-card major.

The responses to 2♣ are:

- 2♦ No four-card major
- 2♥ Four hearts (does not deny four spades).
- 2♠ Four spades but *not* four hearts.

These are the only three responses.

Why Use Stayman?

To locate a 4-4 fit in a major suit. Acol’s structure is based around the idea that whenever we have an eight-card fit in a major we would like to play in it, thus it is important to try to find a fit even after a 1NT opening.

When to Use Stayman

After a 1NT opening bid, when you have at least one four-card major and:

- A. You have 11 or more points;
- or:
- B. You are weak but can cope with any response.

Stayman was designed with option A in mind and this is the aspect we will focus on to begin with; however, we will look

at its secondary use later. Remember, as with any convention, you must always make a plan before you use it. There are two basic types of hands in category A:

- (i) **Invitational Hands**
(11-12 points) – game might, or might not, be on.
- (ii) **Strong Hands**
(13+ points) – game should be on.

So let us make a plan with these two types of hand in mind.

- (i) **Invitational Hands**
(11-12 points)

Our plan is to try to find a fit in a major suit and then invite our partner to game, so we bid Stayman, and over the response we bid half-way to game either in an agreed major or in no-trumps:

- e.g. 1NT – 2♣ – 2♦ – 2NT
- or: 1NT – 2♣ – 2♥ – 3♥

Both these sequences invite the opener to bid game.

- (ii) **Strong Hands (13+ points)**

Our plan is to try to find a fit in a major suit and then jump to game, so we bid Stayman and over the response we bid game, either in an agreed major or no-trumps.

- e.g. 1NT – 2♣ – 2♦ – 3NT
- or: 1NT – 2♣ – 2♥ – 4♥

Examples

Hand A
 ♠ 10 6
 ♥ K Q 8 2
 ♦ K Q 9 6
 ♣ J 10 4

With Hand A, in response to 1NT you have four hearts and 11 points, so you can use Stayman (2♣). Let us see what happens over each response from opener.

1NT – 2♣ – ?

- (a) 2♦: we have not found a fit, so we rebid 2NT in order to suggest the chance of game in no-trumps; it is the same as responding 2NT directly.
- (b) 2♥: we have found a fit, so we rebid 3♥, suggesting the possibility of game in hearts.
- (c) 2♠: we have not found a fit, so we rebid 2NT – just as in case (a) above.

Hand B
 ♠ K Q 8 2
 ♥ A 3
 ♦ K Q 9 6
 ♣ J 10 4

Responding to 1NT, you have plenty of points and so can be sure of game, but with a four-card major, perhaps 4♠ might be better than 3NT, so you should start by using Stayman. Once again we will see how we might bid over each response from our partner, the opener.

1NT – 2♣ – ?

- (d) 2♦: we have not found a fit, so we rebid 3NT, the best game.
- (e) 2♥: we might have a fit (partner has not denied four spades), but we should rebid 3NT. Our partner will know that we have four spades because we used Stayman and then denied four hearts by not supporting them (see later).
- (f) 2♠: we have found a fit, so we rebid 4♠, the best game.

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Opener's Second Bid after the 2♣ Enquiry

The responses to 2♣ are straightforward, as shown above; there are only three possible responses, and when you have both majors you should respond 2♥. However, when it comes to your rebid there are two things to bear in mind:

- (a) Partner's rebid of 2NT or raise to three-of-a-major invite game, so you must decide whether to go for game; 12 points: no; 14 points: yes.
- (b) If you have both majors, then the final contract should be in either spades or hearts.

Let us see the hands above in complete auctions.

Deal 1

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

West	East
1NT	2♣
2♥	3♥
4♥	End

You open 1NT and then respond 2♥ to East's Stayman enquiry. Then, over 3♥, you accept the invitation (as you are maximum, with your 14 points) by bidding game.

Deal 2

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

West	East
1NT	2♣
2♥	3NT
4♠	End

The West hand in Deal 2 is the tricky one to get right.

You open 1NT and when your partner bids Stayman you respond with 2♥, but you should remember that when you hold both majors in response to Stayman you should always end the auction in either hearts or spades.

So when your partner rebids 3NT (implying that he does not have a fit for hearts), you must convert this to 4♠. You should ask yourself: "Why has my partner used Stayman?" The answer, of course, is because he has at least one four-card major; if it is not hearts then it must be spades.

Deal 3

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

West	East
1NT	2♣
2♠	3♠
4♠	End

Deal 4

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

West	East
1NT	2♣
2♠	3♠
End	

Deals 3 and 4 show opening hands with 13 points, so judging whether to bid game is not so easy; however, the Losing Trick Count (see BRIDGE issues 50 and 51) will help you. An opening 1NT will generally have 7 or 8 losers. With 8 losers you should pass 3♥ and with 7 losers raise to game.

When judging whether to bid game in no-trumps, you should look for tens and nines to bolster your evaluation.

Stayman on Weak Hands

With 11 or more points you can use Stayman because you will always have a place to go when you do not find a fit: 2NT or 3NT. However, on weaker hands you do not have this luxury. For example, consider:

Hand C

- ♠ K Q 8 2
- ♥ Q 9 6 3
- ♦ 9 6
- ♣ 8 7 4

It is tempting to use Stayman on Hand C, but what would you do over a 2♦ response? You would be stuck and thus you should pass a 1NT opening. Remember, you must be able to cope with all three possible responses from partner.

However, there are two types of weak hand on which you can use Stayman:

- (a) Hands with two four-card majors and at least four diamonds.
- (b) Hands with a four-card and a five-card major.

(a) Weak Hands with Two Four-Card Majors

Hand D

- ♠ Q 7 8 2
- ♥ Q 9 6 3
- ♦ J 9 6 5 3
- ♣ Void

If your diamond suit is long enough to allow you reasonably to pass the 2♦ response, then you can use Stayman. On

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Hand D, 2♣ is a good response to 1NT: you will pass whatever your partner bids.

(b) Hands with a four-card and a five-card major.

Hand E

♠ K 9 8 7 2
♥ Q 9 6 3
♦ 9
♣ 8 7 4

On Hand E you can also use Stayman. You can pass a major-suit response and over 2♦ you can rebid 2♠. This gives you the chance to find the best fit.

It is worth noting that after Stayman, a rebid below 2NT by the 2♣ bidder shows a weak hand, and should be passed.

Hands with Both Majors

You might remember the very useful ditty quoted in BRIDGE 52:

*Stayman is used for four,
Transfers for five or more.*

But what do we do when you have length in both majors?

With weak hands, as we saw above, you can use Stayman – provided you are not embarrassed by a 2♦ response. With invitational hands there are ways to show two majors, but this is more complicated and a matter for partnership agreement. I would recommend leaving these ideas aside, but one method is to use Stayman and with no fit found, jump in your longer major:

Hand F

♠ K Q 8 7 2
♥ A Q 6 3
♦ 9
♣ 8 7 4

Opener (Partner)	Responder (You)
1NT	2♣
2♦	3♠

However, with strong hands it is easy: transfer, and then show your second suit. Note that if you have two five-card majors, it is best to transfer to spades and then rebid in hearts, twice if necessary.

Deal 5

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

	West	East
	1NT	2♥
	2♠	3♥
	3NT	4♥
	End	

West opens 1NT and East wants to bid game and wants to play in one of his majors (partner is sure to have three-card support for at least one of them).

East starts by showing the higher suit with a transfer bid of 2♥, and then rebids the hearts, bidding them a second time over 3NT – sure that his partner will choose the better major-suit game.

The 2♠ Response

As mentioned in the last issue of BRIDGE, playing Transfers the 2♠ response to 1NT is redundant (we now use 2♥ to show spades). There is an enormous variety of uses for this bid, the choice of definition being very much up to individual partnerships. Perhaps when you are used to the system of transfers, you will play a more complicated variety, or when you are just starting you need not use it at all, but I prefer to use a relatively simple method. The way I look at it is: what have we lost by playing Stayman and Transfers?

The weak take-outs in clubs and diamonds – that is pretty much it. Hence I use the 2♠ response to 1NT to show the equivalent of a hand that would have made a weak take-out in a minor, that is, a weak hand with a long minor.

There is one difference, though: I only make a weak take-out into a minor on a six-card suit. The reason for this is that you will be playing at the three level, and if you are weak, then a five-card suit is not enough. Also, take into

account that no-trumps scores more than the minors and thus, given that you will be two levels higher, it is often worth leaving the contract in 1NT.

How does this bid work?

Very similarly to the other transfers. Over the 2♠ response the 1NT opener simply closes his eyes and bids the next step up: 2NT. Now the responder can bid his minor. It is as simple as that:

Deal 6

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

	West	East
	1NT	2♠
	2NT	3♦
	End	

On Deal 6, East can see that his hand is likely to be worthless in 1NT but in diamonds he might even make five tricks, so he wants to make a weak take-out to diamonds. Remember, though, that 2♦ would show hearts, so that bid is no good. Use the 2♠ response: this forces your partner to rebid 2NT and allows you to bid your minor – 3♦. In 1NT you might only make three tricks, whereas in 3♦ you might well make nine.

The most important thing about responding to 1NT is to understand your system; it is going to come up so often that you will need to know it well. Having said that, it is worth putting a little work in to learn the system I have outlined, because the flexibility it gives you will reward you in the long run.

And Finally . . .

A few extra little pointers to finish:

- (1) When RHO overcalls (or doubles) your side's 1NT, then your systems are 'switched off', that is all your bids are *natural* again.
- (2) I advise using red suit transfers and Stayman over 1NT and 2NT openings (including strong balanced hands that are opened with 2♣, e.g. 2♣ – 2♦ – 2NT).
- (3) You can also use the same system in response to a 1NT overcall.