

2.6 Responder has 5-4, 4-5, 6-4 or 4-6 in the Majors.

And now for something completely different. Partner opens 1NT and we have 9 cards in the majors (5-4 or 4-5) or 10 cards (6-4 or 4-6).

Hand A We have covered the weak 5-4 (or 4-5) hands already, just to recap: -
 With this 'garbage' hand you just want to play in a better spot than 1NT. So transfer and get partner playing in 2♠? That would often be fine, but it may just be that partner has 4 (or even 5) ♥'s and you miss a 4-4 ♥ fit. So best to bid 2♣ and then pass a 2♥ or 2♠ bid but convert 2♦ to 2♠. Thus the Stayman sequence: -

♠ Q9652
 ♥ Q854
 ♦ 93
 ♣ 76

1NT - 2♣ - 2♦ - 2♥ shows a weak hand with 5 ♥'s & 4 ♠'s and is drop dead.
 1NT - 2♣ - 2♦ - 2♠ shows a weak hand with 5 ♠'s & 4 ♥'s and is drop dead.

And how about if you are 6-4 or 4-6 in the majors and weak? There are two options here; you can bid Stayman and then the 6-carder if opener replies 2♦. The other, perhaps preferable, option is to simply transfer into the 6 card suit.

Hand B	Hand C	Partner opens 1NT.
♠ K842 ♥ Q98542 ♦ T5 ♣ 2	♠ KJ8542 ♥ J982 ♦ T5 ♣ 2	Some would bid 2♣ with both of these hands. Others would transfer into the 6 card suit. Yet others would bid Stayman with Hand B and transfer with Hand C because of the weaker ♥'s. And me? I would always look for the 4-4 fit, but that is my 'thing'. However, transferring may well work out best as the strong NT hand will always be declarer. It's up to you and does not really matter too much.

Example

Dealer:	♠ K842	West	North	East	South
South	♥ Q98542				
Both vul	♦ T5	-	-	-	1NT
	♣ 2	pass	2♣	pass	2♠
		pass	pass	pass	
♠ J73	N	♠ 96			
♥ K3	W E	♥ AJT			
♦ K98	S	♦ Q763			
♣ QT543		♣ K876			
	♠ AQT5				
	♥ 76				
	♦ AJ42				
	♣ AJ9				

2♠ probably plays better than 2♥, but then I guess that it's just as easy to construct hands where 2♥ plays better.

Hand D Take this example, with very weak ♥'s and a robust ♠ suit it is surely best to transfer into ♠'s and pass. We cover transfers later.

♠ QJT852
♥ J872
♦ 74
♣ 9

Hand E It's similar with an invitational hand. Here the ♠'s are far better than the ♥'s and so it will normally work out best to transfer into ♠'s and then invite with 3♠.

♠ KQT852
♥ J872
♦ J4
♣ 9

Hand F And the same with a game going hand. This hand should simply transfer into ♠'s. We can transfer into 4♠ directly with a Texas transfer when we have no slam interest and we'll cover it later.

♠ KQT852
♥ J872
♦ K4
♣ 9

Hand G OK, but what about hands with a decent 4 card major? You could transfer into the 5/6 card major and then bid the 4 carder (so 1NT - 2♥ - 2♠ - 3♥ here).

♠ QJ852 This sequence is normally considered as game forcing. However, the recommended modern practice is to reserve the transfer sequences for 5-5 hands and to bid Stayman on *all* major suit 5-4's and 6-4's (no matter what strength).
♥ AJ87 and to bid Stayman on *all* major suit 5-4's and 6-4's (no matter what strength).
♦ K4 With this example bid Stayman and raise any major suit response to game. If
♣ 74 opener responds 2♦ then jump to 3♠, game forcing, offering partner the choice
of 4♠ or 3NT. A possible slight improvement on this scheme is to jump in the 4 card major,
thus ensuring that the NT opener is declarer (the Smolen Convention – we'll cover it in detail
later). So that's fine with Hand G, but what about invitational hands? ...

Smolen at the two level

I'll mention this but it's perhaps a somewhat unwieldy convention that I don't really like. When opener replies 2♦ to our Stayman enquiry we use both 2♥ and 2♠ as artificial bids: -

- 2♥ is a puppet to 2♠ which may be a weak hand (5-4, responder passes the 2♠ bid) or any number of other meanings (responder bids on).
- 2♠ asks opener to define his hand.

Amongst all of these complex sequences it is possible for responder to hit upon the correct contract when he is 5-4 or 4-5 in the majors but there are drawbacks: -

- 1) We lose our fundamental 'Garbage Stayman' possibility of playing in 2♥ with a weak 4-5 hand.
- 2) It is rather complex.
- 3) It goes against the general Smolen philosophy in that responder is usually declarer in an eventual 3♠ or 4♠ contract.
- 4) Nobody (or very few) plays it.

So you don't like 'Smolen at the two level'? Then there is no established method to handle invitational 5-4's & 4-5's – tough luck?! The scheme I outlined for game forcing hands (Smolen 3♥/♠ or natural 3♥/♠ over partner's 2♦ response to Stayman) is pretty well universally used but there is no simple invitational bid if opener responds 2♦ to your Stayman enquiry! Your options are a game force (Smolen 3♥/♠ or natural 3♥/♠), an offbeat 2NT or pass. This is, however, what the majority of experienced players play and so I'll cover it in detail in the next section.

But don't despair! There is a simple solution to the invitational 5-4 / 4-5 (and 6-4 / 4-6) problem (Quest transfers) and we will meet them later and they have the advantages that: -

- 1) We retain our fundamental 'Garbage Stayman' possibilities with all weak hands.
- 2) They are simple.
- 3) Opener becomes declarer in virtually all ♥, ♠ or NT contracts
- 4) 'Everybody' will be playing them in the future!?

But first, let's look at what people do at present: -