

# Stayman with Smolen, Crawling and Extended Stayman

By Neil H. Timm

Playing the 2/1 Game Force System, when you open 1NT or overcall 1NT, one usually has 15-17 starting points (announced when making the opening notrump bid, but not when making the overcall bid). Recall that to reach game in a major or notrump usually requires between 24 and 26 points.

Use the following bidding conventions when playing strong notump openings ONLY. Responses to the overcall bid of 1NT are usually more involved because of interference by the opponents; however with no interference, the bidding responses apply.

## Starting Points

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| 0-7   | Play in 2 of a major suit when both hands have a total of 7-8 cards. |
| 8-9   | Invite game in notrump or in a major with a fit.                     |
| 10-15 | Bid game in notrump or a major with a fit.                           |
| 16-17 | Invitational to slam in a suit or notrump.                           |
| 18-21 | Bid slam in notrump or a suit with a fit.                            |
| 22+   | Bid a Grand Slam   |

## Standard Stayman Convention

This is one of the most used conventions in bridge today. It is so well accepted that it need not be alerted. It is used to find a 4-4 or 5-3 major card fit after the bid of 1NT when responder has at least 8+ points; however, NEVER use Stayman if you have 4333 or 3433 distribution, it better to play in notrump.

The original Stayman Convention was published by Samuel M. Stayman in "Bridge World" 1945 but was actually invented by J.C.H. Marx, a British bridge player in 1939. The original version incorporated the 2NT response by opener to indicate a maximum strong 17 HCP notrump hand, to show both majors. While this is fine if your partnership guarantees invitational values when using Stayman, it is ill advised if you play Garbage or Crawling Stayman. Quoting Marty Bergen 'Never, Never, NEVER respond 2NT to Stayman'. Ron Klinger states 'the 2NT response doesn't exit. The idea that it should be to show both majors is totally unsound'.

## Garbage and Crawling Stayman

Used to find a major fit with a weak hand (0-7 points). One plays in no more than a 2-level major suit contract since the fit may be on 4-3, but better than notrump.

## Smolen

Used when responder is 5-4 in the majors and have 10-15 points, game-going values.

With 8-9 points, one usually uses a transfer into the 5-card major by bidding 2 (transfer to hearts - announced) or 2 (transfer to spades - announced). If you are 5-4, you can transfer to hearts and bid spades; this allows you to play at the two level in spades. You should not do this with spades, since you will be at the three level; however, if you are not vulnerable, it is also a safe practice. Note when transferring to a major and bidding the other major, some partnerships require that you are 5-5 in the majors. Always discuss transfers and conventional practices with your partner.

### **Extended Stayman**

There are many versions of Extended Stayman; I recommend that it be used if you are 5-5 in the majors with game-going values. Some even use 2♣ as Extended Stayman and NOT standard Stayman (Ron Klinger uses it in the following bidding sequence: 1♣-1♦-1NT-2♣\*, a variation of Extended Stayman). Some use 3♣, after Standard Stayman, as Extended Stayman bid while others use the 3♦ bid as Extended Stayman, since the 3♣ bid is used as a Shape Asking Bid (SARS). To keep it simple we will use the 3♣\* (alert) bid as Extended Stayman and assume that your major suit distribution is 5-5 or 6-4.

I will now review-bidding sequences for each of the above-mentioned conventions.

### **The Stayman Convention with Smolen**

The convention used for locating a 4-4 major suit fit after partner opens 1NT. The artificial bid of 2♣ initiates the convention and is used when responder has 8+ points and one or both majors.

Some examples of game-invitational (or stronger) hands opposite a 15-17 NT:

|                         |                       |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| ♠A1032 ♥A1074 ♦789 ♣Q10 | ♠KQJ52 ♥Q432 ♦976 ♣J  |
| ♠QJ32 ♥AJ98 ♦57 ♣1082   | ♠AKQ10 ♥AQ57 ♦A2 ♣J10 |

The conventional responses assume NO INTERFERENCE.

Opener's Bids after 2♣

- 2♦ Denies a four-card major.
- 2♥ Shows four hearts may have four spades.
- 2♠ Shows four spades, denies four hearts.

Responder's rebids after 2♦ by opener

- 2♥ Shows four spades and five hearts, invitational. Non-forcing. (Responder bids the 5-card suit and not the 4-card suit.)

- 2♠ Shows five spades and four hearts, invitational. Non-forcing. (Responder bids the 5-card suit and not the 4-card suit.)
- 2NT Invitational (9 points)
- 2♣ Game forcing with at least five clubs (usually 6), denies a 4-card major.
- 3♦ Game forcing with at least five diamonds (usually 6), denies a 4-card major.
  
- 3♥\* Shows five spades and four hearts, game forcing (Smolen - Responder bids his short suit at the 3-level, the reverse of the non-forcing 2-level bid). Opener is asked to bid 3♠ with a 3-card spade suit, or 3NT with 2 spades (\*=alert).
  
- 3♠\* Shows five hearts and four spades, game forcing (Smolen- Responder bids his short suit at the 3-level, the reverse of the non-forcing 2-level bid). Opener is asked to bid 3NT if he only holds 2 hearts, or 4 if he has 3 hearts. (\*=Alert).
  
- 3NT Signoff.
  
- 4♥ Shows four spades and six hearts, signoff.
- 4♠ Shows six spades and four hearts, signoff.
- 4NT Quantitative, invites 6NT if partner has 17 HCP.

Responder's rebids after 2♥ by opener

- 2♠ Shows five spades and four hearts, invitational. Non-forcing. (Responder bids the 5-card suit and not the 4-card suit.)
- 2NT Shows four spades, less than four hearts, invitational. Opener can pass, sign-off in 3 with four spades, or bid 3NT.
  
- 3♣ Game forcing with at least five clubs (usually 6), denies a 4-card major.
- 3♦ Game forcing with at least five diamonds (usually 6), denies a 4-card major.
  
- 3♥ Shows four hearts invitational.
- 3♠ Shows four spades, game forcing showing 5 spades and 4 hearts.
  
- 3NT Signoff.
- 4♥ Signoff.
  
- 4NT Quantitative, invites 6NT if partner has 17 HCP.

Responder's rebids after 2♠ by opener

- 2NT Invitational

- 3♣ Game forcing with at least five clubs (usually 6), denies a 4-card major.
- 3♦ Game forcing with at least five diamonds (usually 6), denies a 4-card major.
  
- 3♥ Shows four spades and five hearts, game forcing.
- 3♠ Shows four spades, invitational.
  
- 3NT Signoff, shows four hearts.
- 4♠ Signoff.
  
- 4NT Quantitative, invites 6NT if partner has 17 HCP

**What do you do when the opponents interfere? Here are a few suggestions. It gets complicated fast and requires an extended discussion with your partner.**

(1) If opener's bid of 1NT is doubled for penalty, Stayman is OFF; the bid of 2♣ is natural. The natural bids of 2♦/2♥ over the opponent's double are announced as transfer bids asking - opener is asked to bid 2♥/2♠. The bid of 2♠\* (over the double) is played in many ways and must be ALERTED – NOT ANNOUNCED. Some play 2♠\* to show both minors; opener bids 2NT to prefer diamonds to clubs or passes; some play 2♠\* as a transfer to clubs which may or may not be correct to diamonds; and others play 2♠\* as a transfer to diamonds. Please discuss the 2♠\* bid. Finally, the bid of 2NT is invitational, usually showing 9 points.

(2) If the opponent's make a **natural 2♣** bid, a double\* of the bid is Stayman and must be alerted. Again as above, the natural bids of 2♦/2♥ are announced as transfer bids asking opener to bid 2♥/2♠. The bid of 2♠\* is played as discussed in (1) above. On the Convention Card, using (1) and (2), write that "Systems on over" - Double or 2♣.

(3) If the opponent's double the Stayman bid of 2♣ (showing clubs), opener can pass with four clubs and no four-card major. A redouble shows five (or four good) clubs and no four-card major; and 2♦/2♥/ 2♠ is natural.

(4) If the opponent's make a natural bid of 2♦ over 1NT, one may make a negative double to show BOTH majors (no alert needed); however, some play the double\* as penalty (e.g. Lebensohl and must be alerted) and others play it as a stolen bid (alert and a transfer to hearts---- DO NOT SAY TRANSFER). If you use the negative double with only one major, you better have game-going values since if partner now bids the major you do not have since you usually now bid 2NT without a stopper in diamonds and 3NT with a stopper. Remember to mark the "Neg. Double" on your Convention Card. Alternatively, some make the cue bid of 3♦\* (alert) over 2♦. It is a Stayman without a stopper (called cue-bid Stayman) and shows at least ONE 4-card major.

(5) Over 2♥/2♠, a double may again be negative to show 4+ in the un-bid major (mark this on your Convention card, since some partnerships play the double as penalty and not

negative). Again some play the double of the major others to show the other major and other use it as penalty.

(6) Over any 2-level bid, you may use the bid of 2NT\*(alert) as a relay to 3♣, and then bid the opponent's bid suit to show a stopper. 2NT\* followed by 3NT shows a stopper and a direct bid on 3NT denies a stopper.

When the bid of 2♣ by the opponents show a long unknown suit, and it is not natural, or a known and unknown suit or two unknown suits, the responses to the 1NT bid become more complicated. The convention to address these bids is called Lebensohl After Artificial Overcalls. See the book by Ron Anderson (1987) "The Lebensohl Convention Complete in Contract Bridge".

### Garbage and Crawling Stayman Bids

After a 1NT opening by partner, the bid of 2♣'s is employed to show a weak 3-suited hand, with 0-7 points. It is referred to Garbage Stayman with 4-4-4-1 distribution and Crawling Stayman with 4-4-x-y or 3-4-x-y or 4-3-x-y distribution.

With Garbage Stayman you pass the bids of 2♦/2♥/2♠.

With Crawling Stayman you pass only the major suit bid and over 2♦ you bid 2♥. This asks partner to pass or correct to 2♠. Hence you may be playing at the 2-level in a major with either a 4-4 or 4-3 fit. However, it is usually better than notrump.

Some examples weak hands where u may use Garbage /Crawling Stayman

(4-4-4-1) ♠10345 ♥A1084 ♦7892 ♣7

(4-3-4-2) ♠Q652 ♥Q43 ♦9762 ♣J5

(3-4-3-3) ♠QJ3 ♥AJ98 ♦978 ♣982

### Extended Stayman

This convention is used when you are 5-5 (may be 6-4) in the majors. The bid of 3♣\* (alert) is a check back asking bid, do you have a 3-card major?

1NT-2♣-2♦-3♣\*

|     |   |   |
|-----|---|---|
| 3♦  | = | no 3-card major (2 card major and 4/5 card minor) |
| 3♥  | = | 3 hearts (2-3-4-4)                                |
| 3♠  | = | 3 spades (3-2-4-4)                                |
| 3NT | = | both majors (3-3-4-3/3-3-3-4)                     |

1NT-2♣-2♥-3♣\*

3♦ = 4 card minor and 2-card major  
3♥ = 5 hearts  
3♠ = 3 spades (3-4-3-3)  
3NT = to play

1NT-2♣-2♠-3♣\*

3♦ = 4 card minor and 2-card major  
3♥ = 3 hearts (4-3-3-3)  
3♠ = 5 spades  
3NT = to play

Responder now knows partner's hand and is the captain of the partnership.

He may pass, bid game in the major or bid 4NT asking for information about aces.

Another convention that is used when you are either 5-5 in the major or the minors is Mini-Maxi Convention. The Conventional bids follow.

3♣\* = 5-5 in the Minors with less than 10 point

3♦\* = 5-5 in the Minor 10+ points

3♥\* = 5-5 in the Majors with less than 10 points

3♠\* = 5-5 in the Majors with 10+ points

Because are denoted with red lines on the Convention Card, they must be alerted. Many use this convention instead of Extended Stayman. Because Extended Stayman requires game-going values, the Mini-Maxi may be used if you only have 8-9 points.

## Showing 6-4 in the Majors after 1NT

Your partner opens the bidding 1NT (15-17 HCP) and you are 6-4 in the majors, how do you show your distribution with game going values?

This was a question a club member asked me in a recent club game. To answer this question, one first has to know whether or not the partnership plays Smolen or Stayman since each agreement is addressed in a different manner. I will address each in turn.

### Playing Stayman

After the bid of 1NT, one bids 2♣ and having failed to find a 4-4 fit or better with Stayman, there is still a chance of finding a fit if partner has three of our longer major.

One next bids 4♦/4♥ as an “extended Texas” Transfer into the 6-card suit.

### **Playing Smolen**

After the bid of 1NT, one bids 2♣ and having failed to find a 4-4 fit or better with Stayman, there is still a chance of finding a fit if partner has three of our longer major.

You jump into the suit at the three level to show at least 5-4 distribution and if partner next bids 3NT, you re-transfer into your 6-card major.