

STAYMAN AND TRANSFERS OVER ONE NO TRUMP

INTRODUCTION

Because the 1NT bid is so narrowly defined, it is relatively easy to develop a good system of bidding around it. Most of the efficient systems of bidding after a 1NT opening incorporate the use of Stayman and Transfers.

Basic Stayman is one of the first conventions learnt by the beginner. A response of 2C to an opening bid of 1NT asks opener if he holds a 4-card major, if he has, he bids it, otherwise he bids 2D. It is generally considered much more useful to use the 2C bid for this purpose than to retain its natural meaning.

A Transfer bid is the bid of a suit below the one held and it normally asks partner to bid the suit that has been shown.

Transfer bidding represents one of the greatest developments in modern day bridge. The main way in which transfer bidding is used today is after 1NT and 2NT opening bids.

The use of Transfers is inextricably intertwined with the use of Stayman. The two cannot be separated. Some hands are best described using Stayman, others by Transfers.

STAYMAN

Whenever responder bids 2C over 1NT he guarantees at least one four card major. If opener hold both majors he should always bid 2H.

A - Weak Hands

Stayman can be used to try to improve the contract when responder has a weak hand. There are two advantages. Firstly, the contract is often improved and rarely worsened. Secondly, if responder has a very weak hand it is usually a good idea to bid over 1NT before it is doubled.

All simple changes of suit after the response to Stayman are weak.

If the response to Stayman is 2D, then 2H shows both majors and asks opener to pass with a trebleton or give preference to 2S with a doubleton heart and a trebleton spade.

Consider this very weak hand

S xxxx H Qxxx D xxx C xx

It is unlikely that any contract will stand much chance, but any contract doubled will certainly be worse and it is very likely that the next hand will double 1NT if you pass and now they may find it easier to double you in two of a major. If partner holds a 4

card-major, the hand will best be played in two of that major, and even if partner has no 4-card major it may still play as well in two of a major as it would in 1NT.

It would also be sound to bid 2C on a hand such as

S KJxx H QJxx D xx C xxx

With two relatively strong 4-card majors it is usually best to use Stayman this way. If partner does not hold a 4-card major the hand may play better in 1NT, but the odds favour investigating the major suit fit.

If the response to Stayman is 2D, then 2S shows a 4-card spade suit and good support for both minors. Opener should generally pass with a trebleton spade, or, with only two spades, either bid three of a minor or 2NT to ask responder to choose the minor. The following hand should be bid this way :-

S QJ10x H x D Jxx C xxxxx

If partner has a trebleton spade and passes 2S, the hand should play well in the 4-3 fit, if partner has only two spades, he will have a 5-card minor which he will bid or he will have two 4-card minors in which case he will bid 2NT and you will be delighted to choose to play in 3C.

If the response to Stayman is 2H, then a continuation of 2S is as above, showing four spades and good support for both minors.

If the response to Stayman is 2H or 2S, bids of 3C or 3D are weak and natural. The same applies to a bid of 3C if the response to 2C is 2D. However these weak hands will always contain a 4-card major, so opener may correct to what he knows will be a better contract. This usually only happens if the response to Stayman is 2H, since opener may well also hold four spades in which case he will correct three of a minor to 3S. The following hand is an example:-

S Qxxx H x D K10xxxx C xx

Over partner's 1NT opening, bid 2C. If partner responds 2D or 2S pass. If partner bids 2H, bid 3D. Partner knows that you hold four spades, so if he was dealt with both majors, he will correct the contract to 3S.

B - Medium Strength Hands

(ie. with possible game interest)

A 2NT rebid by responder after Stayman is a natural limit raise, asking opener to bid on with a maximum. Opener should bear in mind that at least one 4-card major will be held. Therefore the sequence 1NT - 2C - 2H - 2NT, promises a 4-card spade suit, so if opener is 4/4 in the majors, he should bid either 3S or 4S over 2NT. Responder's hand will be something like:-

S KJxx H Qx D AJx C 10xxx

If the response to Stayman is a major, a raise of that major is also a limit bid and asks opener to proceed to game if he is a maximum.

If the response to Stayman is 2D, a raise to 3D shows 5/5 in the majors, and in principle, a hand with the values to invite game. Opener should bid his better 3-card major and bid it at the three level if his hand is unsuitable or at the four level if suitable. After this 3D bid, responder's hand will be something like:-

S KJ10xx H AQxxx D x C xx

This 3D bid may be used on certain hands with game going strength. For example, by bidding in this way you can ensure that opener will play the hand.

S KQJ10x H KQJ10x D x C xx

The final contract is always going to be four of a major so all you have to do is raise partner's choice of major to game.

The only other sort of medium strength hand which responder may wish to describe is one that contains five hearts and four spades. For reasons which will be made clear in the section on Transfers, it is not possible to bid these hands via Transfers. The following sequence is non-forcing and shows five hearts and four spades, 1NT - 2C - 2D -3H. This may well be used on a hand such as:-

S AQxx H KJ10xx D Jxx C x

Opener with a minimum can now pass, and with a maximum bid either 3NT, 4H, or occasionally 4S. If the response to Stayman is two of a major, obviously responder should raise to game on this particular hand, whilst on other hands it would be sufficient to raise to the 3-level.

C - Strong Hands

(ie. strong enough to insist on game)

Most really strong hands are not bid via Stayman but via Transfers or immediate jump bids, so in this section we are concerned with hands which are good enough to insist on game but wish to offer some choice of denomination.

If after using Stayman, responder bids 3NT, this is to play and should always be passed except in one instance. This is when the response to Stayman was 2H. On this occasion when responder jumps to 3NT it is known he holds a 4-card spade suit, so opener should correct to 4S if he holds this suit.

If opener shows a 4-card major in response to Stayman, and it is the major in which responder is interested, he is likely to jump to game. However, if responder has some slight slam ambition, say an attractive looking 16-count, he may well make a jump cue-bid. For example, with:-

S KJxx H Kx D KQxxx C Ax

after the sequence:- 1NT - 2C - 2S, the hand is worth 4C. If opener holds a red suit Ace, he will now bid it. If opener bids 4D, responder should continue with 4H, but if opener signs off in 4S he should pass. If opener bids 4H, responder should bid 4S, which is not a complete sign-off, since he has already shown slam interest.

We have seen how to bid a hand with five hearts and four spades with the values to invite game. If we have the same distribution but a hand that wishes to insist on game we bid it in a parallel fashion. We start with Stayman and, over the 2D response, bid 3S. This shows five hearts, four spades and is forcing. The following hand is a typical example:-

S AQJx H KJ10xx D AQx C x

Over this 3S bid, opener can bid 3NT with a doubleton heart, or bid 4H or occasionally 4S. If opener has a suitable maximum, he can cue-bid a minor suit control over 3S, which would normally be expected to agree hearts.

If opener's response to Stayman is two of a major, some hands will still only be worth bidding game, in which case responder should just do so. However, certain hands, such as the one previous, would be worth a slam try. It is now in order to bid three of the major that opener has not bid. This shows a hand with five hearts, four spades and slam interest and invites partner to co-operate. With the previous hand, facing a normal weak no-trump opening, the sequence may well go:

		WEST	EAST
xx	AQJx	1NT	2C
Axxx	KJ10xx	2H	3S
Kxx	AQx	4C	4D
AJxx	x	4H	4S
		5D	6H

When opener bids 5D over 4S, responder knows that he must have one useful card in the majors since he has co-operated with two slam tries. Responder knows that whether this card is the Ace of hearts or the King of spades the slam will be a reasonable contract.

The only other strong sequence is the use of Stayman followed by a game bid in a major (other than a major bid in response to Stayman). This shows a strong hand with a poor suit. Opener is invited to proceed only holding two honours in the trump suit. An example of a hand which should use Stayman and then jump to game is:-

S AK H Jxxxxx D AKx C Kx

If the response to Stayman is 2H, it would be reasonable to bid 6H direct. However, if the response to Stayman is 2D or 2S, then 4H describes this hand well.

TRANSFERS

We have seen how to bid balanced hands over an opening 1NT, now we need to be able to bid unbalanced hands. The main advantage of using a transfer system is that it effectively creates a whole extra round of bidding. For example, without Transfers, the bid of 2H over 1NT shows hearts, but how strong is it? Does it show a weak hand and tell partner to pass? Does it invite him to bid on? Does it force him to bid? Generally it is played as showing a weak hand and the other types of hand have to be bid by other routes. However, by using Transfers the bid of 2D can cover all of these hands and the only thing that you give up is the ability to play in a contract of 2D after an opening of 1NT.

A-Simple Transfer into the Majors

A bid of 2D or 2H after an opening of 1NT asks partner to bid 2H or 2S. Responder can now pass with a weak hand, ie. on a hand where obviously he would have bid a simple 2H/2S over 1NT. Perhaps:-

S Kxxxx H xx D xxx C xxx

Note there is further advantage in using Transfers since the 1NT opener will play the hand.

If you hold a hand that includes a 5-card major after your partner has opened a 12-14 NT you will find that it is winning policy in the long run to ALWAYS transfer to your major.

If responder does not pass the transfer to 2H/2S, he will be showing a stronger hand and will make the most descriptive bid possible on the next round. He may bid 2NT which means exactly what it sounds like. It says "I have that 5-card major I told you about, my hand is balanced otherwise and I am not sure whether we have the values for game. What do you think?"

Perhaps he holds a hand such as:-

S KJxxx H Qxx D Kx C Kxx

If opener has three cards (or more) in responder's major, he can bid 3H/3S or 4H/4S, and if he has only doubleton support he should either pass with a minimum or bid 3NT with a maximum.

Responder may raise the transfers to 3H/3S. If he does this he is saying, "I have a larger suit than I told you about in the first place but am not sure whether I have enough values for us to make game. What do you think?" He may have a hand like:-

S Ax H K10xxxx D Kxx C xx

Opener now knows that responder has at least a 6-card suit so it is likely that the hand will play better in responder's major. He should not worry unduly if he has only doubleton support.

Over the initial transfer to 2H/2S, responder may bid 3NT or 4H/4S. These bids mean exactly what you would expect. They show hands that are certain of sufficient values for game. 3NT showing a balanced hand with a 5-card major and 4H/4S showing an unbalanced hand with at least a 6-card major.

After the transfers to 2H/2S, responder may not be in a position to make a limit bid as above. He may feel that his hand is better described by bidding another suit. (For the time being we should ignore the sequence 1NT - 2D - 2H - 2S which has a completely artificial meaning and will be dealt with later). A new suit bid by responder is forcing, at least back to his first suit. For example, the sequence 1NT - 2H - 2S - 3D is forcing as far as 3H. When responder may have:-

S KJ10xx H x D AQJx C xxx

and wished to invite game.

Secondly, he may have a hand with sufficient values for game but he may not be sure which game will play better. To use the sequence 1NT - 2H - 2S - 3H he may have:-

S AQJxx H QJxx D Ax C xx

If opener bids game in any denomination over 3H, responder will be content. If opener bids 3S over 3H, responder will bid 3NT to show his distribution and leave the final decision to opener.

Lastly, to transfer and bid a new suit, responder may have hand with sufficient values to hope a slam may be on. The best way to bid a hand as:-

S KQJ10x H x D AKJx C Axx

is to start with a simple transfer and follow by describing the shape of the hand. The sequence will probably start 1NT - 2H - 2S - 3D -3NT -4C, and by this time responder will have described his distribution and shown his slam interest.

If responder transfers into 2H/2S and then bids a new suit, opener should always assume at first that responder has the weakest hand type. If opener is minimum he should always return to responder's first suit, otherwise, bid game in responder's suit with trebleton support, bid 3NT with the other suits well guarded or bid a guard below 3NT if he is not sure where the hand should be played.

If responder has a hand with two good suits and mild slam interest he should transfer into the first suit then jump into the second. For example, holding:-

S x H AKJ10x D xx C AK10xx

the auction should proceed 1NT - 2D - 2H - 4C

Breaking the Transfer

Occasionally the 1NT opener has such a maximum hand with such a good fit for responder's suit, that he feels it is a little tame to just bid his partner's suit. Within this method of transfers there are problems in this area since, as you will discover later, when partner bids 2D over 1NT it is just possible that the hand may not contain hearts at all. Within the confines of the system it is recommended that, if partner responds 2D to an opening 1NT, and if you wish to break the transfer, you should do so by bidding 2S whatever your hand, but if responder bids 2H to 1NT and you wish to break the transfer, you should do so by bidding your doubleton.

For example, if you open 1NT on:-

S KJxx H xx D AQxx C Axx

and partner bids 2H, break the transfer by bidding 3H. But if you open 1NT on:-

S xx H KJxx D AQxx C Axx

and partner bids 2D, break the transfer by bidding 2S.

B - Transfers into the Minors

This system of transfers incorporates transfers into all four suits. The bids of 2S and 2NT over 1NT show clubs and diamonds respectively.

Opener is first expected to show whether or not he has support for responder's minor. If he has 4-card support or Kxx or better he is expected to bid the minor which opener has shown. If his support is less good he bids the next suit up - 2NT over 2S and 3C over 2NT.

In order to introduce the minor suit transfer, responder is likely to have one of three different hand types.

Firstly, he may have a weak hand with a long minor such as:-

S xxx H xx D x C Q109xxxx

On this hand the bidding will be either 1NT - 2S - 3C - Pass, or 1NT - 2S - 2NT - 3C - Pass.

Secondly, responder may have a hand of intermediate strength with a 6-card minor suit. Possibly the knowledge that partner has a fit for his minor suit is all that he needs to know before expecting 3NT to be a fair gamble. Such as:-

S Ax H Jx D KQxxxx C xxx

If opener bids 3D after 1NT - 2NT, responder can take a chance on playing in 3NT, but if opener only bids 3C denying a fit, responder will sign off in 3D.

The other hand type is strong with slam interest. He may have a balanced hand such as:

S AJx H QJx D KQ10xx C AQ

The bidding will proceed 1NT - 2NT - 3C/3D - 4NT. Responder has thus shown a raise to 4NT with a 5-card diamond suit and opener can take it from there.

Alternatively he may have a 2-suited hand where the minor shown is his strongest suit. If responder bids a new suit, this is natural and shows a hand with mild slam interest eg:-

S AKJx H x D AQJ10xx C xx

The sequence would be 1NT - 2NT - 3C/3D - 3S.

C - Transfers to Show Balanced Hands

It has been mentioned previously that any transfer method is inextricably intertwined with the Stayman method played. Over 1NT you can either use Stayman or begin a transfer sequence and the idea is that, by using one or the other, you should be able to describe as many hands as possible. In this particular system, by using Stayman one always guarantees a 4- card major and as 2NT over 1NT shows a diamond suit, there are two types of hand which we cannot show yet. One is a balanced hand with no 4-card major but is worth a raise to 2NT and the other is a strong balanced hand with slam interest.

To deal with both these hand types we have a completely artificial sequence. Over 1NT bid 2D, ostensibly a transfer to hearts, then over 2H bid 2S. This tells partner to forget about the heart suit - it may not exist - and shows a balanced hand, either with values for a natural raise to 2NT or a hand with slam interest. Remember we don't need this sequence to show five hearts and four spades because we show these hands via an initial Stayman bid followed by a jump to three of a major.

If after the sequence 1NT - 2D - 2H - 2S, opener is minimum and would have passed a natural raise of 1NT to 2NT, he should bid 2NT. Now if responder has the weaker hand he passes.

However, if responder has the stronger hand type, he continues by bidding his lowest 4-card suit and opener should do likewise if it can be shown at the three level. For example:-

		WEST	EAST
KJxx	A10xx	1NT	2D
AQx	Kx	2H	2S
Jxx	KQxx	2NT	3D
Jxx	AKx	3S	4C
		4H	4S

4C was a cue-bid agreeing spades. The 4H bid was almost forced.

If responder's hand were a little weaker so that 2NT finished all slam hopes, he need not mention any minor suit.

If, after the sequence 1NT - 2D - 2H -2S, opener would have raised a natural 2NT to game, he bids his lowest 4-card suit over 2S. If responder has the weak hand type he signs off in 3NT. For example:-

		WEST	EAST
KJx	Qxx	1NT	2D
AQx	Kxx	2H	2S
Jxx	KQxx	3C	3NT
Kxxx	Qxx		

If responder has the stronger hand type, he can bid his lowest suit below 3NT, cue-bid above 3NT to agree opener's suit, or bid 4NT, which is natural, to show that there is no fit but that a no-trump slam is possible.

So in the following hands:-

		WEST	EAST
KQxx	A10xx	1NT	2D
AQx	Kx	2H	2S
xx	KQxx	3C	3D
Kxxx	AQx	3S	4C
		4H	4S
		5C	5D
			6S

The three bids which were made at the 3-level were all natural and so the spade fit was found. Responder signed off in 4S over 4H because he had a minimum hand but opener's hand was still suitable.

If opener should happen to break the transfer of 2D by bidding 2S, the situation alters slightly. If responder has the weak hand type he should bid 3NT since opener has shown a maximum. If responder has the strong hand type he should bid 2NT. Now opener should bid his lowest 4-card suit and the sequence would proceed as normal. Any other

action by responder would show a hand with hearts. Thus the following two hands would be bid thus:-

		WEST	EAST
xx	AKxx	1NT	2D
KJxx	Qx	2S	2NT
AQxx	KJx	3D	3S
Axx	KQJx	3NT	6NT