



# Play & Learn

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## Transfer or Stayman?

When responding to partner's 1NT opening bid, your first job is to decide whether you want to pass, sign off in a partscore (0 to about 7 high-card points), invite game (8–9 HCP), bid game (10 to about 15 HCP) or consider slam. Your second job is to determine the denomination.

As a rule, prefer playing game in a major when you have an eight-card or better fit. Two notrump-specific conventions can help you locate that major-suit fit: Stayman and Jacoby transfers. Here are some guidelines about which to use:

- 1 When you have one or two five-card majors and no four-card major, transfer with any strength hand.
- 2 When your longer major is only four cards, use Stayman with invitational or better strength. You usually pass with a partscore hand.
- 3 With a five-card major and a four-card major, use Stayman with invitational or better strength. Sign off in your five-card suit with 0 to 7 HCP.

Suppose you hear partner open 1NT and you have:

♠K J 10 5 4 ♥Q J 9 7 3 ♦K 8 ♣6.

You have a game-going hand and are almost certain of having a major-suit fit. Using Jacoby transfers, you can show both majors and force to game. Bid 2♥ to transfer to spades. After opener bids 2♠, rebid 3♥, a game-forcing bid showing five hearts. Note: This does not mean you forgot you

were playing transfers. If you're in the habit of doing that, you might not be ready to use transfers.

Opener will choose the best game, and you will end up in your major-suit fit whenever you have one. The only time you won't have a fit is if opener chose a 1NT opening as the best way to describe a semi-balanced hand with weak minors, perhaps:

♠A Q ♥A K ♦Q 7 5 4 ♣J 9 8 5 3.

Even then, partner might opt for a major-suit game. Yes, here and in some of the later examples, the weaker hand for the partnership could become declarer, but *it's more important to reach the right contract than it is to make the stronger hand declarer.*

If we lower your hand to invitational strength, perhaps:

♠K J 8 5 4 ♥Q 10 7 3 2 ♦J 8 ♣6,

you'll keep the bidding lower. Bid 2♦ to transfer into hearts. Over opener's 2♥ rebid, bid 2♠. This sequence shows an invitational hand with 5–5 in the majors. Opener will decide how high to go and in which suit.

Take the same distribution down to signoff strength:

♠Q J 8 5 4 ♥10 7 5 3 2 ♦8 2 ♣6.

Now you can't afford to show both majors. Pick the suit you want as trump (the stronger suit should be preferred) and go quietly. With this one, bid 2♥ as a transfer and pass opener's 2♠.

Holding:

♠K 9 7 6 ♥A J 8 5 4 ♦6 ♣Q 9 8,

you will use Stayman to retain the

chance to find a 4–4 spade fit. When you respond 2♣, you're delighted if opener shows either major. You will raise to game. If opener bids 2♦ (no four-card major), you will jump to 3♥. After a notrump opening bid, responder never bids in a way that makes him declarer in a four-card major, so bidding hearts shows a five-card suit. Your jump forces opener to bid again. With only two hearts, opener rebids 3NT. With three hearts, he bids 4♥.

How will you respond to 1NT with an invitational hand? Consider this one:

♠K 9 7 6 ♥A 10 8 5 4 ♦6 4 ♣J 8.

Use Stayman. If opener bids a major, raise to the three level to invite game. If opener denies a major by bidding 2♦, you will rebid 2♥. Introducing your own heart suit promises a five-card suit. After using Stayman or a transfer, responder's two-level new suit bids are invitational.

There are alternatives to the standard use of Stayman as described in this article that could affect your bidding on some of these hands, but I recommend the method suggested in the ACBL's "Commonly Used Conventions" text. I urge you to discuss the follow-up bids with partner to make sure you use the convention in the same way.

For those who want to know how to keep the 1NT opener as declarer when responder has a strong hand and 5–4 in the majors, the Smolen convention (beyond the scope of this article) is worth a look. Google it and check out Larry Cohen's article on the topic. ■