

# English Bridge

## Useful Conventions

by David Bakhshi



# The Stayman response



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THIS month we turn our attention to methods which are commonly employed when responding to an opening bid of 1NT. We will begin by exploring one of the best known conventions played around the world: Stayman. For the purpose of this article I shall assume that other responses to 1NT are natural.

## Why is Stayman useful?

When seeking to bid towards game, it is important to explore fully the possibility of playing in 3NT or 4♥/4♠. When partner opens 1NT, it is therefore useful to maximise our chances of finding eight-card major-suit fits. When the responder has at least five cards in his major, he can freely introduce his own suit. However, finding a fit when both players have four cards in the same suit is less straightforward.

## How does it work?

The solution is to sacrifice a natural bid, and replace it with a conventional asking bid. Following an opening of 1NT, the most efficient call to replace is 2♣. Thus a 2♣ response becomes an enquiry, asking the opener if he holds a four-card major. The opener then has three possible replies:

- 2♦ = no four card major.
- 2♥ = four hearts (and maybe four spades).
- 2♠ = four spades (and not four hearts).

## How does the responder continue?

With weak hands (no interest in game), the responder takes the bidding no higher than 2♠ (unless he has long clubs, see below). When holding a hand that is invitational or better, he bids at least 2NT.

### Opener bids 2♥/2♠:

- With no interest in game, responder passes (4-4-5-0 type hand), bids two of his longer major (5/4+ in the majors), or rebids 3♣ (weak hand

with long clubs).

- With an invitational hand he bids 2NT.
- With a game-going hand, he bids three of his longer major (5/4 in the majors), or 3NT.

### Opener bids 2♥/2♠:

- Responder either passes or bids 3♣ with a weak hand.
- With a fit for opener's major, he raises to 3M (invitational), or 4M (game values).
- With no fit for opener's major, he rebids 2NT (invitational) or 3NT (game values).

Once the opener bids 2M, it is worth noting that the responder's *no-trump* rebid denies a fit for opener's major, and thus implies a four-card holding in the unbid major. So if opener had bid 2♥, he will bid 3♠/4♠ over 2NT/3NT if he has four spades.

## What happens next?

Once a fit has been found, the opener will only bid again if accepting an invitational raise to 3M. With no explicit fit, the opener can accept an invitational raise (either in no-trump or spades), or he can convert a raise to 3NT to four of the other major.

Here is an example of Stayman in action:

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

West	East
1NT	2♣ <sup>1</sup>
2♥ <sup>2</sup>	2NT <sup>3</sup>
4♠ <sup>4</sup>	Pass

<sup>1</sup> Stayman

<sup>2</sup> Four hearts and maybe four spades

<sup>3</sup> Invitational (not four hearts, so has spades)

<sup>4</sup> Maximum with four spades

## Can Stayman be used after intervention?

Once an opponent overcalls partner's 1NT opening, Stayman no longer applies. However, it can still be important to locate a 4-4 fit in an unbid major. The most common way to achieve this is to play that a cue-bid of the opponents' suit acts as Stayman (this is especially true if the partnership play that responder's double is for penalties).

## Is Stayman only useful after an opening bid of 1NT?

Stayman can also be used after an opening bid of 2NT, or a rebid of 2NT after a 2♣ opening. Two further sequences when Stayman is helpful are after we make an overcall of 1NT over an opponent's one-level opening bid, or 2NT over an opponent's Weak Two bid.

## In summary:

- Following an opening bid or overcall of 1NT (or 2NT), a 2♣ (or 3♣) response asks opener whether he holds a four-card major.
- The opener has three possible rebids: 2♦ with no four-card major, 2♥ with four hearts, or 2♠ with four spades (and not four hearts).
- After a 2♦ rebid, the responder bids 2M/3♣/Pass with weak hands, 2NT with an invitational hand or 3M/3NT with the values for game.
- After a 2M rebid, the responder passes or bids 3♣ with a weak hand. With invitational/game values, he raises with a fit, or returns to no-trump (with four cards in the unbid major). □