

2.2 Stayman When Using 4-way Transfers

We have seen that when playing 'standard' Stayman then the 2♣ bid always promises at least one 4 card major. Later on we will be discussing 4-way Jacoby transfers and for the transfers to the minors we need, directly over a 1NT opening:-

2♠ (transfer to ♣'s) 2NT (transfer to ♦'s)

No problem with the 2♠ bid (it is redundant) but using 2NT as a transfer means that it is no longer available as the limit raise (8-9 pts) (without a 4 card major). This means that *all* limit raises have to go via Stayman, regardless of whether they contain a 4 card major or not.

So we have to clear up how 2NT can be used as a transfer as it is normally used as an invitational (8-9 pts) raise in NT. Simple, we simply bid 2♣ and then bid 2NT after partner's response to 'Stayman'. Thus, when playing these 4-way transfers, a 2♣ 'Stayman' bid no longer guarantees a 4 card major. Does this lead to difficulties and a 4-4 major suit ever being missed? No, let's have some examples -

Example 1	West	East	West	East
(1) Stayman, may have no 4 card major	♠ J863	♠ A97	1NT	2♣ (1)
(2) invitational, 3 or less ♠'s	♥ K64 ♦ AK63 ♣ AJ	♥ Q93 ♦ Q2 ♣ 109764	2♠ pass	2NT (2)

Example 2	West	East	West	East
(1) Stayman, may have no 4 card major	♠ J86	♠ A97	1NT	2♣ (1)
(2) invitational, may have any major suit holding	♥ K64 ♦ AK63 ♣ AJ3	♥ Q93 ♦ Q2 ♣ 109764	2♦ pass	2NT (2)

So that all works fine, with no problems. The only area which needs some thought is when opener has both majors. In that case he obviously responds 2♥, but a responder with 4 ♠'s cannot now simply bid 2NT as opener will not know if he has 4 ♠'s or not. A problem?

No. Holding an invitational hand responder should bid 2NT if he does not have 4 ♠'s but bid 2♠ if he does. Thus,

In the sequence, 1NT - 2♣ - 2♥ - 2♠, 2♠ promises a 4 card ♠ suit and invitational values.
In the sequence, 1NT - 2♣ - 2♥ - 2NT, 2NT is invitational with no 4 card ♠ suit.

Note These invitational sequences are just one reason why opener should always respond 2♥ to Stayman when holding both majors. If he responds 2♠ and the bidding is 1NT - 2♣ - 2♠ - 2NT then opener has no idea if responder has 4 ♥'s or not.

Example 3

West	East	West	East
♠ AJ106	♠ K94	1NT	2♣
♥ AK64	♥ J97	2♥	2NT (1)
♦ Q63	♦ J975	pass	
♣ J3	♣ A105		

(1) In 'standard', this bid promises an invitational hand with 4 ♠'s and so opener may wish to retreat into 3♠. Playing 4-way transfers, this bid shows an invitational hand without a 4 card major. Opener passes the 2NT bid with this minimum. He would bid 3NT with a max whereas it would be 4♠ if not playing 4-way transfers.

Example 4

West	East	West	East
♠ AJ106	♠ K954	1NT	2♣
♥ AK64	♥ J97	2♥	2♠ (1)
♦ Q63	♦ J75	pass (2)	
♣ J3	♣ A105		

(1) In 'standard' this particular sequence is up to partnership understanding. When not using transfers, the bid is often used to show an invitational (or slightly less, say 7-8 pts) hand with 5 ♠'s. Since we can show that hand type using transfers we define a different meaning when using 4-way transfers: - Playing 4-way transfers this shows an invitational hand with 4 ♠'s. Opener will pass with a minimum and 4 ♠'s, correct to 2NT with a minimum without 4 ♠'s and bid the relevant game if holding a maximum.

(2) West has a minimum, so passes the invitational 2♠.

Being at the low level of 2♠ has other advantages. Sometimes a 4-3 fit may be preferable: -

Example 5

West	East	West	East
♠ AK6	♠ Q754	1NT	2♣
♥ Q9432	♥ 7	2♥	2♠
♦ Q63	♦ K75	pass	
♣ A3	♣ K9642		

In this example, 2♠ is better than 2NT

Example 6

West	East	West	East
♠ AJ86	♠ KQ54	1NT	2♣
♥ AK64	♥ J97	2♥	3NT (1)
♦ Q63	♦ A7	4♠	pass
♣ J3	♣ Q1092		

(1) This is the same if playing 4-way transfers or standard. The jump to 3NT shows game values with 4 ♠'s. If East did not have 4 ♠'s then he would have bid a direct 3NT.

Recap

Sequence A 1NT - 2♣ - 2♦ - 2♠

Sequence B 1NT - 2♣ - 2♥ - 2♠

Although seemingly similar, these sequences are totally different: -

With sequence A, 2♠ is to play. Responder has a weak hand containing 4 ♥'s and 5 ♠'s.

With sequence B, 2♠ is invitational. Responder has an invitational hand containing 4 ♠'s.

So the invitational sequences are: -

Sequence B 1NT - 2♣ - 2♥ - 2♠ is invitational, with a four card ♠ suit

Sequence C 1NT - 2♣ - 2♦ - 2NT is invitational, may have 0,1 or 2 four card majors

Sequence D 1NT - 2♣ - 2♥ - 2NT is invitational, no four card major

Sequence E 1NT - 2♣ - 2♠ - 2NT is invitational, may have a four card ♥ suit

And obviously the following sequences are weak: -

Sequence F 1NT - 2♣ - 2♦ - 2♥ is weak, with 5 ♥'s and 4 ♠'s

Sequence A 1NT - 2♣ - 2♦ - 2♠ is weak, with 4 ♥'s and 5 ♠'s

When we get on to discuss 5-5 major suited hands, we see that it is best to also use either sequence A or F with a very weak 5-5 hand. Basically, try Stayman and then bid the best 5 card major if there is no 5-4 fit.

Note Playing traditional methods Sequence B, 1NT - 2♣ - 2♥ - 2♠, is redundant. It is sometimes used to show a hand with 5 ♠'s and 7-8 points which is not quite good enough to transfer and then invite. I guess that it's reasonable, but with no equivalent with a ♥ suit it really is a luxury that we cannot afford as we need the bid to show our invitational hand with 4 ♠'s.