

The original Stayman concept incorporated a 2NT response to show a maximum hand. Now this is acceptable if your style is to guarantee invitational values with your Stayman enquiry. These days, most people play garbage Stayman and so this response is unsound if partner has a weak hand and there is no major suit fit.

Another idea which has some followers is that 2NT shows both majors. Again, unsound because if opener is minimum then the 3 level may be too high, even with a fit. Let's hear the general expert view: -

Marty Bergen can be quoted as saying '*never, Never, NEVER respond 2NT to Stayman*'. Ron Klinger states '*the 2NT response doesn't exist. The idea that it should be to show both majors is totally unsound*'. Excellent advise, unless you and your partner **really** know what you are doing.

When we get onto transfers (Section 3) you will see that opener super-accepting when he likes responder's suit is widely accepted (even though responder's transfer bid promises zero points). This philosophy can be extended to the situation where responder has bid Stayman.

If you are maximum, and like the fact that responder probably has a major suit, then a super accept is in order. Let's start of with the basic idea: -

- 1) 1NT - 2♣ - 3♦ = maximum, both majors
- 2) 1NT - 2♣ - 3♥ = maximum, 5♥'s
- 3) 1NT - 2♣ - 3♠ = maximum, 5♠'s

Why are these responses sound? First consider 2 & 3, partner (responder) has either invitational values or both majors (or a better hand). If it is the weak hand with two 4 card majors then this 3 level bid is sound according to the law of total tricks. If responder's hand does not contain this major, then he must have invitational values and can bid 3NT (or 4 of the major to play in a 5-3 fit) as you are max. And how about sequence 1? No problem if partner has any invitational hand, he just chooses the correct game contract. If partner is very weak with both majors then you usually have a 9 card fit and always a double fit, so settling in 3 of a major is OK. But why do we use 3♦ for the 'both majors' bid when 2NT is available? We have 3 available bids (2NT, 3♣ or 3♦). We need the 2NT/3♣ bids as described later, so 3♦ shows this max with both majors hand.

So, after 1NT - 2♣ - 3♦ (max, both majors) we have: -

- 3♥ = sign off
- 3♠ = sign off
- 3NT = to play
- 4♣ = Gerber
- 4♦ = transfer to ♥'s
- 4♥ = transfer to ♠'s

Example 1

West	East	West	East
♠ AQ64	♠ K852	1NT	2♣
♥ AJ106	♥ Q9853	3♦ (1)	4♥ (2)
♦ Q53	♦ 2	4♠	pass (3)
♣ A8	♣ 972		

(1) Max, both majors

(2) Transfer, the double fit and a max partner make 4♠ a good bet.

An excellent contract. Very difficult to bid if West had simply replied 2♥ to the Stayman enquiry. Note that East elects to play in the 4-4 fit. The 4-4 fit will often provide an extra trick over the 5-4 fit. If you don't agree (I have a 'thing' about 4-4 fits), then transfer into the 5-4 fit at (2) by bidding 4♦. No problem. Either way you reach a very reasonable game.

Example 2

West	East	West	East
♠ AJ106	♠ 98532	1NT	2♣
♥ AQ64	♥ J852	3♦ (1)	3♠ (2)
♦ Q53	♦ 72	pass	
♣ A8	♣ 92		

(1) Max, both majors

(2) It is perhaps a matter of style if you want to play in the 4-4 or 5-4 fit in a partial.

Example 3

West	East	West	East
♠ AQ6	♠ K9852	1NT	2♣
♥ A9864	♥ K852	3♥ (1)	4♥
♦ Q53	♦ 7	pass	
♣ A8	♣ 932		

(1) Max, 5♥'s

An excellent game that would be difficult to bid if West had responded 2♥.

Example 4 Sometimes a 5-3 fit may be located and a thin but respectable game bid: -

West	East	West	East
♠ AQ754	♠ K86	1NT	2♣ (1) (1) Intending to pass 2♦/♠
♥ KQ4	♥ A852	3♠ (2)	4♠ (2) Max, 5 ♠'s
♦ A4	♦ 87632		
♣ J54	♣ 7		

4♠ is a very respectable contract, the bidding would normally go 1NT - 2♣ - 2♠ - pass.

Example 5 And it does not go wrong if East has a heap: -

West	East	West	East
♠ AQ754	♠ 9862	1NT	2♣ (1) Max, 5 ♠'s
♥ KQ4	♥ J852	3♠ (1)	pass
♦ A54	♦ 8762		
♣ J5	♣ Q		

The opponents would surely find 3♣ if West bid just 2♠.

Example 6 And nothing is lost when there is no fit: -

West	East	West	East
♠ AQ75	♠ K8	1NT	2♣ (1)
♥ KQ94	♥ J8	3♦ (2)	3NT (3)
♦ Q53	♦ J764		
♣ A8	♣ KJ842		

(1) intending to invite with 2NT next.
 (2) Max, both majors.
 (3) Max is good enough, let's try 3NT

This concept of showing your maximum hand (when 4-4 or with a 5 card major) is also used if there is intervention: -

Example 7

West	East	West	North	East	South
♠ AQ754	♠ K862	1NT	pass	2♣	3♣
♥ KQ4	♥ J852	3♠	pass	4♠	
♦ Q53	♦ K762				
♣ A8	♣ 2				

Example 8

Usually after intervention there is still room to show both majors (using 3♦): -

West	East	West	North	East	South
♠ AQ75	♠ K862	1NT	pass	2♣	3♣
♥ KQ43	♥ J852	3♦ (1)	pass	4♠	
♦ Q53	♦ K762				

♣ A8 ♣ 2 (1) Max, both majors

Example 9 And how about after a 3♦ intervention? :-

West	East	West	North	East	South
♠ AQ75	♠ K862	1NT	pass	2♣	3♦
♥ KQ43	♥ J852	? (1)			
♦ A8	♦ 2				
♣ Q53	♣ K762				

(1) What would a double show here? Standard would be penalties. Showing a ♦ holding such as ♦ AJ1085. But realistically, very unlikely. You could well apply the 'stolen bid' principle here and use the double to show a 3♦ bid – i.e. max with both majors.

So far we have only considered situations where responder is weak. When responder is strong the knowledge that opener is maximum with both majors does no harm at all: -

Example 10

West	East	West	East	
♠ AQ75	♠ KJ102	1NT	2♣	(1) Max, both majors
♥ KQ43	♥ AJ982	3♦ (1)	4♥ (2)	(2) transfer
♦ A83	♦ K62	4♠	4NT (3)	(3) RKCB
♣ Q5	♣ 8	etc to 6♠		

Note that without this convention, the poorer 6♥ contract may be reached (but East should use SARS to find the 4-4 ♠ fit).

So, an old concept (the 2NT response) rejuvenated (except that we use 3♦). Something to think about? And the down side? Defenders know more about declarer's shape.

If responder has a 4 card major, he normally bids 3♦ to establish the possible fit. With a weak hand he passes the 3♥/♠ reply; with a game going or slam hand he bids on.

Example 1

West	East	West	East	
♠ QJ54	♠ K973	1NT	2♣	(1) 5♦'s and a 4 card major
♥ K4	♥ Q1052	2NT (1)	3♦ (2)	(2) which major?
♦ AQ953	♦ J842	3♠ (3)	4♠	(3) ♠'s
♣ A8	♣ 6	pass		

A reasonable game that would normally be missed.

Example 2

West	East	West	East	
♠ Q542	♠ 1093	1NT	2♣	(1) 5♦'s and a 4 card major
♥ AJ	♥ Q1052	2NT (1)	3♣ (2)	(2) transfer to ♦'s
♦ AK953	♦ J10764	3♦	pass	
♣ K8	♣ 6			

Under normal methods, this hand would be played in the inferior 2♠ (1NT - 2♣ - 2♠ - pass).

But responder may be interested in the minor suit slam. It is probably best to agree that 4♦ after the transfer to 3♦ is RKCB for ♦'s. When East has a 4 card major it is normally best to look for the major suit fit, but if slamming it may be best to go for the minor suit slam if the major suit is weak: -

Example 3

West	East	West	East	
♠ AQ84	♠ 10973	1NT	2♣	(1) 5♦'s and a 4 card major
♥ A9	♥ K2	2NT (1)	3♣ (2)	(2) transfer to ♦'s
♦ K9863	♦ AQ102	3♦	4♦ (3)	(3) RKCB for ♦'s
♣ K8	♣ A94	4♥ (4)	6♦	(4) 3 key cards
		pass		

6♠ is a reasonable contract but 6♦ is virtually 100%.

If East looks for a major suit fit but none materialises, he can fall back on the minor suit:-

Example 4

West	East	West	East	
♠ AQ	♠ K1093	1NT	2♣	(1) 5 ♦'s and a 4 card major
♥ A1054	♥ J2	2NT (1)	3♦ (2)	(2) which major?
♦ K9863	♦ AQ102	3♥ (3)	?	(3) ♥'s
♣ K8	♣ A94			

East is in a spot now. It was pairs scoring and so he hoped for a ♠ slam. Now he wants to check on key cards with ♦'s as trumps, but a RKCB bid would be for ♥'s as trumps.

The solution? Double RKCB is of no use (East may well be only interested in one of West's suits). We need to have two RKCB bids, one for the major and one for the minor. You cannot play Kickback for ♦'s as 4♥ would be a sign off. Best is to play 4 of the minor as RKCB for the minor and play Kickback (or 4NT if you prefer) for the major.

West	East	So our bidding sequence continues: -
1NT	2♣	(4) RKCB for ♦'s
2NT	3♦	(5) 3 key cards
3♥	4♦ (4)	
4♥ (5)	6♦	
pass		

Note that under traditional methods East would probably not discover the superb ♦ fit. A likely auction is 1NT - 2♣ - 2♥ - 3NT - pass. East does not have the values to press on over 3NT (unless he knows about the superb ♦ fit)

Example 5

West	East	West	East	
♠ AQ54	♠ K1093	1NT	2♣	(1) 5 ♦'s and a 4 card major
♥ A10	♥ J2	2NT (1)	3♦ (2)	(2) which major?
♦ K9863	♦ AQ102	3♠ (3)	4NT (4)	(3) ♠'s
♣ K8	♣ A94	5♠ (5)	5NT (6)	(4) RKCB for ♠'s
		6♣ (7)	6♦ (8)	(5) 2 key cards + ♠Q
		7♠ (9)	pass	(6) king ask
				(7) ♣K
				(8) ♦K?
				(9) yes

Of course it may not be so easy if you don't play this variation of RKCB. But even then 6♠ will probably get a good score as most of the field will not know about the ♦ fit and be in 4♠ (1NT - 2♣ - 2♥ - 3NT - 4♠).

So, little doubt that these super-accepts enable thin games to be reached when responder has a very poor hand. And when responder has an invitational or better hand? Super, these bids are very explicit and should enable the correct game/slam to be reached with ease.

Let's just summarize the bids after responder has established opener's two suits via a 3♦ 'which major' enquiry: -

Opener has ♣'s and ♥'s

After 1NT - 2♣ - 3♣ - 3♦ - 3♥:-

- 3♠ =
- 3NT = to play
- 4♣ = RKCB for ♣'s
- 4♦ =
- 4♥ = to play
- 4♠ = RKCB for ♥'s

Opener has ♣'s and ♠'s

After 1NT - 2♣ - 3♣ - 3♦ - 3♠ :-

- 3NT = to play
- 4♣ = RKCB for ♣'s
- 4♦ =
- 4♥ =
- 4♠ = to play
- 4NT = RKCB for ♠'s

Opener has ♦'s and ♥'s

After 1NT - 2♣ - 2NT - 3♦ - 3♥:-

- 3♠ =
- 3NT = to play
- 4♣ =
- 4♦ = RKCB for ♦'s
- 4♥ = to play
- 4♠ = RKCB for ♥'s

Opener has ♦'s and ♠'s

After 1NT - 2♣ - 2NT - 3♦ - 3♠ :-

- 3NT = to play
- 4♣ =
- 4♦ = RKCB for ♦'s
- 4♥ =
- 4♠ = to play
- 4NT = RKCB for ♠'s

And what about these spare bids of the other major and the other minor?

They may be used for whatever you wish, maybe cue bids, but be wary of the auction going past the RKCB bid.

4NT in the ♥ sequences and 4♥ in the ♠ sequences could be used as quantitative NT bids, but there's not much point as opener has already shown a maximum hand.

Summary of Stayman Super Accepts

1NT - 2♣ - 2NT	=	maximum, 5 ♦'s and a 4 card major
1NT - 2♣ - 3♣	=	maximum, 5 ♣'s and a 4 card major
1NT - 2♣ - 3♦	=	maximum, both majors
1NT - 2♣ - 3♥	=	maximum, 5 ♥'s
1NT - 2♣ - 3♠	=	maximum, 5 ♠'s

The Downside

And what are the drawbacks of these super-accepts?

- 1) we may occasionally get too high (3♥/♠)
- 2) these 3♥ and 3♠ contracts will sometimes be played from the wrong hand
- 3) the defence know opener's shape

Not really problems, if 3♥/♠ fails then the opponents can surely make something. Anyway, this really is a small price to pay for all the games (and slams) that will otherwise be missed. So the defence know opener's shape, but you will not reach the right contract unless his shape is determined.