

Stayman

(The Beginner's Pages – 9&10)

I have covered responder's bids when partner opens one of a suit in the past few articles. Time now to consider what to do when partner opens 1NT.

Up to now, we have only dealt with natural bids, it's time to discover our first conventional bid. There are thousands of conventional bids around, and the most common are undoubtedly Blackwood (asking for aces) and Stayman and Jacoby transfers (the latter two used when partner opens 1NT). This week we'll deal with Stayman

The first thing to remember when partner opens 1NT is that he has a balanced hand. Balanced hands usually play well in NT and NT scores more than a minor suit. In all of our examples, partner had opened 1NT (15-17).

Now when partner opens 1NT we know how many points he has (15-17) and it is up to us to stop now, invite game or bid game. We need 8-9 points to invite game and a good 9+ points is usually enough to bid game without inviting.

Hand 1	Hand 2	Hand 3	
♠ 1095	♠ 1095	♠ K105	All of these hands are fairly balanced and we have no reason to think of anything other than NT as a final strain. So with hand 1 we pass; with Hand 2 we invite with 2NT and with Hand 3 we bid 3NT. Note that even a 5 card ♣ or ♦ suit is not worth mentioning, NT scores more.
♥ 976	♥ Q76	♥ QJ8	
♦ J9	♦ KJ942	♦ KJ942	
♣ KJ942	♣ Q9	♣ KJ	

Stayman

Fine, a minor suit is usually not even worth mentioning; but major suit(s) are different! There is only 10 points difference between the scores for a NT contract and a ♥/♠ contract and if there is a major suit fit (4-4, 5-3 or better) then you usually get more tricks by playing in the major.

Hand 4	Hand 5	
♠ J87	♠ Q76	Partner has again opened 1NT. Hand 4 is worth a game invitation and Hand 5 is worth game. But in NT or is there a 4-4 ♥ fit? If we respond 2♥, how does opener know if that is a 4 or 5 card suit? Now I said above that we don't bother to mention a ♣ or ♦ suit, so the 2♣/♦ bids are spare. We use the 2♣ bid for the Stayman Convention. It says 'I have a 4 card major (possibly two 4 card majors) and I want to find out if we have a fit. It is totally artificial and says nothing about the ♣ suit
♥ Q1095	♥ A1095	
♦ KJ92	♦ KJ92	
♣ Q9	♣ J9	

With both Hand 4 and 5 we bid Stayman 2♣. The responses to Stayman by opener are: -

- 2♦ = I have no 4 card major
- 2♥ = I have 4 ♥'s (and also possibly 4 ♠'s)
- 2♠ = I have 4 ♠'s but do not have 4 ♥'s.

So with Hand 4 we bid 2♣ Stayman. If partner replies 2♦ (no major) or 2♠ (4 ♠'s but not 4 ♥'s) then we bid 2NT – showing our 8-9 points and invitational to 3NT. If partner bids 2♥ then we invite the 4 ♥ game by bidding 3♥. Hand 5 is worth game but we still start with Stayman. Over 2♦/♠ we bid 3NT and over 2♥ we bid 4♥. One final point; since partner must respond to 2♣ we may have to play in 2NT and so 2♣ guarantees invitational values +. There are exceptions, but for now let's say Stayman guarantees 8 or more points.

Stayman when you have both majors

Now let's consider the situation when responder has two 4 card majors: -

Hand 6	Hand 7	Partner has again opened 1NT. Hand 6 is worth a game invitation and Hand 7 is worth game. But in NT or is there a 4-4 major suit fit? So we know now to bid 2♣, Stayman.
♠ KJ92	♠ KJ92	It's easy then. If partner responds 2♥ or 2♠ we invite with 3 of the major with hand 6 and bid 4 of the major with Hand 7.
♥ Q1095	♥ A1095	
♦ J87	♦ Q76	If partner responds 2♦ then we bid an invitational 2NT with hand 6 and bid 3NT with Hand 7.
♣ Q9	♣ J9	

So, both majors is simple. But what if opener has both majors and partner bids Stayman?

Hand 8	Hand 9	You open 1NT with both of these hands and partner bids 2♣. With both majors you always respond 2♥, regardless of which suit is 'better'. So you bid 2♥ and partner bids 2NT, invitational. What do you do now? Hand 8 is minimal and you do not want to be in game, so pass? No! Partner's 2♣ Stayman bid promises a 4 card major, he did not like ♥'s and so he must have 4 ♠'s, so bid 3♠. With Hand 9 the same logic applies, since you want to accept the game invitation, bid 4♠ (not 3NT).
♠ AQ92	♠ AQ92	
♥ Q1095	♥ A1095	
♦ KJ7	♦ KJ7	
♣ K9	♣ K9	

Let's consider these same hands 8 & 9 some more. we opened 1NT, partner bid Stayman, we bid 2♥ but this time partner jumps to 3NT. What do you do? Partner has said that we have sufficient values for game, so pass? No! If partner simply wanted to play in 3NT he would not have bid Stayman. Since he started with 2♣ and then bid 3NT over our 2♥ response he has game going values with a 4 card ♠ suit. We must convert to 4♠ with both of these hands.

One more twist. It starts off the same but this time partner bids 4NT after our 2♥ response. What is this? We will cover Blackwood later, but this bid is not Blackwood, it is natural (quantitative). It is a slam invitation and we should bid slam with Hand 9 but not with Hand 8. So what do we do with Hand 8? Pass or 5♠ would both be reasonable and I'm sure that either would get lots of votes; but what do you bid with Hand 9? 6♠! This is not a 'new suit at the 6 level'! partner had promised a 4 card ♠ suit and 6♠ is usually better than 6NT when you have a good 4-4 fit and no points to spare.

Remember, the 2♣ Stayman bid *promises* at least one 4 card major.