

Garbage Stayman

How many points for a Stayman?

There are numerous examples in the news-sheets where I recommend bidding Stayman with few points. One pair asked me about this as they had always thought that you need invitational values or more to bid Stayman. In principle, that is correct, and there are just two exceptions where you can bid Stayman with a very weak hand: -

Hand A	Hand B	Hand C	With Hand A you can bid 2♣. You pass a 2♥/♠ response and convert 2♦ to 2♠. It's the same when you have 5 ♥'s and 4 ♠'s (convert 2♦ to 2♥).
♠ K9864	♠ K984	♠ K984	With Hand B you can bid 2♣ and pass any response.
♥ J762	♥ J762	♥ J762	But with Hand C you will be fixed over a 2♦ reply and so it is best to pass 1NT. You do not want to
♦ 76	♦ 87642	♦ -	play in a possible 4-2 fit.
♣ Q5	♣ -	♣ 87642	

Stayman or Transfer when 5-4 (or 4-5) in the majors and weak?

With hands like Hand A you should try Stayman rather than transferring. Let's have some examples from the news-sheets: -

West	East	West	North	East	South
♠ Q983	♠ KJ1072	-	-	1NT	pass
♥ Q10764	♥ A3	2♣	pass	2♠	pass
♦ 85	♦ AK3	pass	pass		
♣ 63	♣ J95				

If you open 1♠ with the East Hand then you will probably end up in 2♠ or 3♠ (perhaps 1♠ - 2♠ - 3♠ - pass), which is fine. A strong 1NT is perhaps a better opening and this was the auction at our table. I note that at one table a contract of 2♥ by East was reached, obviously via a transfer. With these weak 5-4 or 4-5 major hands, do not transfer but look for a fit via Stayman. Nine tricks were there in ♠'s and 2♥ went one down.

And a similar hand: -

This is a hand from the news-sheets.

West	East	West	North	East	South
♠ Q964	♠ KJ109	-	-	1NT	pass
♥ Q9853	♥ 72	2♣	pass	2♠	pass
♦ 7	♦ AK92	pass	pass		
♣ 862	♣ AQ7				

This was the bidding at our table. Jeff opened a strong NT and his partner (Jim) correctly bid Stayman rather than transferring. Two pairs played in 2♥ after transferring. The 4-4 fit usually produces an extra trick, 2♥ made exactly and 2♠ scored plus one.

Note that if responder does not have a 4 or 5 card major then he will reply 2♦ to Stayman. In that case, responder must then bid his 5 card suit. Thus the sequences: -

- (a) 1NT - 2♣ - 2♦ - 2♥
and (b) 1NT - 2♣ - 2♦ - 2♠ are weak and opener must pass.

The disadvantage of using Stayman rather than transferring is that in these latter two sequences when opener has no 4 card major then the contract is played by the weaker hand. A small price to pay for not missing the 4-4 or better fit. And another disadvantage if you transfer, partner may super-accept which may be sad if you have a weaker hand.

The bottom lines: -

- Don't listen to people who tell you to transfer with these hand types.
- Locating a possible 4-4 or better fit is all important.
- Playing in a 5-2 or 5-3 fit when there is a 4-4 or 5-4 fit is just silly.

So that's all quite straightforward, Responder is in charge and is the captain. But like most convention, Garbage Stayman is sometimes abused. Let's have an example from news-sheet 158 which caused some disagreement between two of the club's top players: -

Open 1NT and you've said it all

Board 7 from Wednesday 9th

Dealer: ♠ AK10
South ♥ A105
Both vul ♦ 982
♣ AQ97

♠ Q94	N	♠ 853
♥ Q8	W E	♥ 9763
♦ J1064	S	♦ AKQ75
♣ KJ84		♣ 3

♠ J762
♥ KJ42
♦ 3
♣ 10652

West	North(D)	East	South
-	-	-	pass
pass	1NT	pass	2♣ (1)
pass	2♦	pass	2♥ (2)
pass	3♥ (3)	all pass	

- (1) South took a view here. With a singleton ♦ 1NT did not look attractive, and if partner has a 4 card major (or even a 5-card major) then 1NT would be a very silly contract indeed. Now for this 'Garbage' Stayman bid you really should be 54xx, 45xx or 4441 (short ♣'s) but South took a reasonable (some may say wild) gamble – if partner did not have a 4-card major then he would bid 2♥ (although it's promising 5 ♥'s) and hope that that was a decent spot. Mind you, if partner has decent ♦'s and a doubleton ♥ then this gamble would be a disaster.
- (2) And South did have to bid his 4 card ♥ suit; but 2♥ with the 4-3 fit is a good spot!
- (3) Now South has shown 4 ♠'s, 5 ♥'s and a weak hand. His range is around 0-7 so the average is about 4 points. North decided that his flat hand was worth a try for game. My opinion is that this is not a 'view' but simply a very poor bid. Opposite partner's advertised weak hand you will go off in 3♥ most of the time and partner will need a super maximum to make game. The problem is that this North hand has only 3 trumps and is also totally flat – it is way against the odds to bid on and risk going down.

And what happened? 3♥ went minus one for a poor score. 2♥ making would have been a good score. At other tables there were the usual spurious results but 1NT made exactly and 2NT was 3 down. Looks like 2♥ would have been a great spot.

The bottom lines: -

- Deduct a point for the totally flat 4333 type shape – it does not generate tricks!!
- Take note of the above sentence – I've written it in just about every news-sheet that I've ever written but even one of the 'best' players in the club seems to fail to comprehend it.
- When you open 1NT you have said it all – partner is the captain.
- The sequence 1NT - 2♣ - 2♦ - 2♥/♠ is weak and opener should pass.
- The above sequence shows 5 cards in the major bid – it is taking a view (gamble) if you have only 4.
- Obey The LAW. $5 + 3 = 8$, so the two level. North bidding 3♥ here is asking for a minus.
- Gambling with Garbage Stayman with the incorrect shape is just that – gambling.

And a little more about 5-4 major suit hands opposite 1NT. With a weak hand, bid as above (Stayman and then the 5 card suit). With a strong hand you can bid Stayman and then jump or else you can use a transfer and then bid the 4 card major. Both of these are generally considered to be game forcing but I guess that you could use one of them as invitational if you have another way to show 5-5 in the majors. All of the options are discussed in detail in the NT bidding book. The 'best' solution is to play Quest transfers.

Hand D

♠ AK10
♥ A105
♦ 982
♣ AQ97

Hand E

♠ AK10
♥ A105
♦ 98
♣ AQ972

Now I have made my views pretty clear. Sequences (a) and (b) are weak and opener is expected to pass. This is also the generally accepted view.

So with Hand D pass is automatic.

But what about Hand E? Now this is a far better hand, especially in support of ♥'s. So would 3♥ be acceptable with Hand E?

I still don't like it but concede that there is a case for it.