

The Bridge Booklet

(BB13)

Fine-Tuning Some Common Conventions



Checkback Stayman

Checkback Stayman vs New Minor Force

Tweaking Transfers

Checkback Stayman

Checkback Stayman is a nifty convention which is used most commonly after an opening bid of one of a minor and then a one of a major response with the opening bidder then jumping to 2 NT.

1♦ - 1♥

2NT - 3♣ by responder is now
Checkback Stayman

Why are we doing this??

The opening bidder may also have a four card other major suit OR may have 3 card support for the responder's 5 card major.

Let's have a look at above auction again:

1♦ - 1♥

2NT - 3♣

Responses to 3♣ are as follows:

- 3♦ says: I do not have 3 card support for your major suit (♥) nor do I have 4 cards in the other major (♠).
- 3♥ says: I have 3 card support for your heart suit but I do NOT have 4 spades.
- 3♠ says: I have a 4 card ♠ suit but do not have 3 card support for your ♥ suit.
- 3NT says: I have both 3 card support for ♥'s and also a four card ♠ suit.

Now let's check out the other major suit situation:

1♦ - 1♠
2NT - 3♣

Responses to 3♣ are as follows:

- 3♦ says: I do not have 3 card support for your major suit (♠) nor do I have 4 cards in the other major (♥).
- 3♠ says: I have 3 card support for your spade suit but I do NOT have 4 hearts.
- 3♥ says: I have a 4 card ♥ suit but do not have 3 card support for your ♠ suit.
- 3NT says: I have both 3 card support for ♠'s and also a four card ♥ suit.

The only time you would ever use this convention is if you have 4-4 in the majors or you have 4-5 in the majors or you have one five card major.

The responder now places the contract, equipped with more information about opener's hand.

Let's look at two situations in which it would be useful to be playing Checkback Stayman:

West	East (D)
♠ K543	♠ AQ76
♥ KQ87	♥ J106
♦ Q76	♦ AK83
♣ 42	♣ A5

North	East	South	West
(P)	1♦	(P)	1♥
(P)	2NT	(P)	3♣* (Checkback Stayman)
(P)	3♠	(P)	4♠

Note that if EW was not playing Checkback Stayman, West would have now bid 3NT after East's jump to 2 NT.

If the opening lead was a ♣, then East would never be able to make 3NT. He would have to drive out the ♥A and then NS would be able to cash 4 club tricks quickly. 4♠ is an easy contract.

Let's look at one more example:

West	East (D)
♠ AQ742	♠ K65
♥ 32	♥ AQ7
♦ 765	♦ Q32
♣ Q43	♣ AKJ2

North	East	South	West
(P)	1♣	(P)	1♠
(P)	2NT	(P)	3♣* (Checkback Stayman)
(P)	3♠	(P)	4♠

North can easily make 4♠ but 3NT by South is doomed on a ♦ opening lead by West.

Checkback Stayman is alertable as are all the responses. You need to have enough points to be in game in order to use this convention.

We never want to miss an 8 card major suit fit. Remember that it is always much safer to play the hand in a major suit contract than in No trumps.

(Information from the American Bridge Teachers Association Website: <http://www.abtahome.com>)

New Minor Force vs Checkback Stayman

Responder often has a rebid problem in this auction:

Opener	Responder
1 any	1 any
1NT	?

- How to sign-off, invite game, or force to game with support for opener's suit. A minimum raise is weak, a jump invitational, so how to force?
- How to sign off, invite game, or force to game with a long suit of his own. A minimum suit rebid is weak, a jump invitational, so how to force?
- How to sign off, invite game, or force to game with a two-suited hand. A non-reverse bid in a new suit is weak, a jump is forcing, so how to invite?
- How to find out if opener has three-card support for responder's major or four cards in an unbid major.

Two popular conventions address these problems: New Minor Forcing and Checkback Stayman. Let's look at each:

New Minor Forcing

New Minor Forcing is responder's bid of an unbid minor when opener rebids 1NT. It requires at least game-invitational strength, and (unless the hand is stronger) a five-card or longer major. In answer, opener shows 3-card support for responder, jumping with a good hand. Lacking support after a 2♣ New Minor Forcing bid, opener bids 2♦ with a minimum and something higher with a good hand. A 2♦ New Minor Forcing bid complicates things:

Opener	Responder
1♣	1♥
1NT	2♦

- 2♠ - no support, minimum hand
- 2NT - no support, good hand

Opener	Responder
1♣	1♠
1NT	2♦

- 2♥ - heart suit, may have spade support
- 2NT - no support, minimum hand
- 3♣/3♦/3NT - no support, good hand

Some play that 2♥ is artificial, showing no spade support and a minimum, while 2NT shows a good hand. This is crazy, possibly missing a 4-4 heart fit when responder can't afford to bid 3♥ (forcing).

Over 1NT, a jump rebid in the same suit is invitational, as is a jump raise of opener's suit (which denies a five-card major). To force, responder must either jump in a new suit or use New Minor Forcing and then rebid his suit or raise. But what if there is no "new minor"?

Opener	Responder
1♣	1♦
1NT	?

A jump rebid of 3♦ or 3♣ is only invitational, so responder must bid 3NT with many strong unbalanced hands that belong in five or six of a minor.

There is no way for an New Minor Forcing bidder to describe an invitational hand with good support for opener's minor. After responding 1♥ to 1♣ with:

♠4 ♥K7432 ♦Q65 ♣AQ32 and getting a disappointing answer to New Minor Forcing, how can responder stop in 3♣? He can't, because 3♣ is forcing, so he must stay in

notrump. Play 3♣ as invitational? But what if the clubs were AKJ3? There's a problem either way.

Another New Minor Forcing drawback is the strength requirement, because many weak hands need conventional help. New Minor Forcing bidders cannot describe a weak 5-5 hand, except for two majors. They must just rebid the higher ranking suit and hope for the best. A weak hand with good support for opener's minor is also a problem, whether or not responder's suit is five long. When responder supports the minor, should opener show three-card support for responder? It's a complete guess.

The main drawback of New Minor Forcing, however, is the bidding space wasted by a New Minor Forcing 2♦ bid. Imagine the difficulties if 2♦ had to be used as Stayman opposite a 1NT opening, with 2♣ a natural sign-off.

Checkback Stayman

With one version of Checkback Stayman (there are several), a 2♣ rebid by responder asks opener to show three-card support for responder's major, or an unbid four-card major, or extra-good hearts (if he opened with 1♥), giving priority to the first. Lacking any of these, opener bids 2♦. Other two-level rebids by responder (except reverses) are sign-offs. All jumps are forcing. To invite game in a suit, responder bids 2♣, then makes his invitation. To sign off in clubs, responder bids 2♣, then 3♣. To invite game with a club bid, responder bids 2♣, then 2NT (artificially). To invite game in notrump, he bids 2NT over 1NT, even with a five-card major

if his distribution is 5-3-3-2. A third round 2NT bid is also natural.

Checkback Stayman has no strength or length requirements. If he is prepared for what might ensue,

responder can bid 2♣ with any strength whatsoever. This is possible because opener (like a notrump opener) does not show strength; he must bid 2♦, 2♥, or 2♠. After responding 1♠ to 1♦ with ♠K6543 ♥A52 ♦10876 ♣6 and hearing a 1NT rebid, responder can use Checkback Stayman and pass any response.

After Checkback Stayman, responder's new suit bid at the two level is forcing for one round only. He can show a second suit and follow with an invitational raise of opener's suit. A two-level suit rebid shows a five-card suit and a weak hand, with trump support for opener's minor or a minor suit on the side. Opener can pass with a very strong doubleton. Otherwise he bids minimally to let responder continue his hand description.

Checkback Stayman has the drawback that responder can't stop in two of a major with an invitational hand, possibly resulting in a risky three-level contract.

New Minor Forcing and Checkback Stayman both have the drawback that you can't stop at the two level in the minor that is bid artificially. With New Minor Forcing, responder can't show a weak major-diamond 5-5 opposite a 1♣ opener's 1NT rebid, but can sign off in 2♣. With Checkback Stayman, responder can show that weak 5-5, but can't sign off in 2♣. If you think the two drawbacks cancel, tell me the last time you had a weak responding hand and the opponents let you play in 2♣ after a 1♣ opening and 1NT rebid. It never happens.

So which is superior, New Minor Forcing or Checkback Stayman?

Here's Marty Bergen's opinion: "Every time I hear the opponents bid:

1♣ - 1♥/1♠

1NT - 2♦ (New Minor Forcing)

2NT

I have to laugh at the 'nature' of bridge players. How can it be correct to use 2♦ as 'Stayman' (forcing opener to bid 2NT when he has no major (suit bid) when 2♣ is available? This potential loss of bidding space makes no sense at all. Whereas after 2♣ checkback, opener's 'negative' is an economical 2♦, as in Stayman, preserving the opportunity for responder to rebid two-of-a-major."

(Information from <http://www.bridgeguys.com> in an article contributed by Mr. Marvin French)

Tweaking Transfers

After a 1NT (15-17) opening Responder will transfer with a 5-card major.

- 1NT - 2♦ transfers asking opener to bid hearts
- 1NT - 2♥ transfers asking opener to bid spades

Responder can then set the contract by bidding:

- 2NT to show an invitational hand with a 5-card ♥/♠ suit
- 3♥/♠'s to show an invitational hand with a 6-card ♥/♠ suit
- 3NT to show a game going hand with a 5-card ♥/♠ suit
- 4♥/♠'s to show a game going hand with a 6-card ♥/♠ suit

When Responder is 5-5 in the majors, things change slightly.

- a. Responder holds a game going hand of:

♠KQ10xx ♥A10xxx ♦x ♣xx

With game going values (9 HCP + 2 Length = 11) and 5-5 in the majors, Responder should transfer to Spades (the HIGHER ranking major) FIRST. After Opener accepts the transfer Responder will next rebid 3♥. This is a forcing bid asking Opener to bid his preferred Major Suit Game.

- b. Responder holds invitational values of:

♠QJ10xx ♥A10xxx ♦xx ♣x

With Invitational Values (8 or 9 total points) and 5-5 in the majors, Responder should transfer to Hearts (the LOWER ranking major) FIRST. After Opener accepts the

transfer Responder will next rebid 2♠. The Opener can now choose to Pass 2♠ or correct to 3♥ with a hand that is too weak for game, or with a maximum 1NT hand he can bid game in his preferred major.

c. Responder holds a weak hand of:

♠QJ10xx ♥xxxxx ♦x ♣xx

This hand is too weak to search for best fit. Responder should just transfer to the stronger 5-card suit (in this case spades) and then pass.

(Information from a Brenda Geden lesson)