

# Five-Card Major Suit STAYMAN

By Neil H. Timm

Many 2/1 players will open one notrump (14-17 in seats 1/2 and 15-17 in seats 3/4 ) with a five card major and at least three cards in the other major where the pattern is 5-3-3-3. Or, some will open with a weak NT (12-14 HCP) in all seats. The NT bid is best since it shows points immediately and if one transfers into the other major it guarantees a 5-3 fit.

How do you discover whether or not your partner has a five card major? One may play 5-card Major Suit Stayman! The bidding goes: 1NT pass 2♣? The opener's responses are:

2♥/2♠ = minimum hand (12/14/15) with a 5-card suit.

3♥/3♠ = maximum hand (14/16/17) with a 5-card suit.

To deny a 5-card major, the opener responds:

2♦ = minimum hand with no 5-card suit.

2NT = maximum hand no 5-card suit.

With enough for game interest, to find a 4-4 major suit fit, responder just repeats the inquiry by bidding 3♣. Note that responder may also bid 3♥/3♠ which is Smolen showing **four** cards in the bid major suit and **five** cards in the other suit, then alert. Smolen does not interfere with the 5-card Major Stayman bids.

After the three club responder bid, opener can show a 4-card major by bidding 3♥, the cheapest major suit, identical to the 2♣ non-forcing Stayman bid.

Without game interest and hearing opener's two diamond minimum response, responder does not bid three clubs, but 2♥ = four hearts, 2♠ = four spades, or 2NT = no 4-card major.

Using Puppet Stayman you only respond by bidding two diamonds (no five-card major). Then responder bids the major suit at the **two** level that he DOES NOT HAVE. This allows the opener to become declarer if there is a 4-4 fit. If the responder is 4-4 in the majors, he bids 2NT (in 5-card Major Stayman this signifies no 4-card major). If the responder has shown one four-card major, the opener bids 2NT to deny holding four cards in the responder's major. Both methods allow you to find 5-3 and 4-4 fits in the major suits. If the responder bids at the three level and not the two level, this is again Smolen. An alternative to Puppet Stayman with the one notrump bid is to use the same structure when using Puppet Stayman after opening 2NT. Then, three clubs becomes Puppet Stayman. With this approach, 3NT by opener denies a 4-card or 5-card major and three diamonds denies a 5-card major; promises one or two 4-card majors. Responder then bids at the three level the major he does not have (this is not Smolen). If instead, responder bids four clubs after a three diamond bid by opener this shows both majors and

slam interest. A bid of four diamonds by responder is a transfer to hearts and a bid of four hearts is a transfer to spades.

## When is NT better than playing in a Major?

When playing duplicate match point bridge, making four notrump is better than making four of a major since 430/630 is better than 420/620. In team games using Imps there is no difference.

In general, you will usually score better by playing a 4-3-3-3 opposite a 4-3-3-3 in notrump than in a 4-4 major suit fit. And, a 3-3-3-4 pattern opposite a 5-3-3-2 pattern is also better in notrump and not the 5-3 major suit fit!

Thus, bidding systems must be designed to find these patterns so that the “best” contract is reached.

To illustrate, suppose we have the following two hands with a 5-3 fit in spades.

West	East
♠ Q 6 5	♠ K J 8 7 3
♥ K 6 5	♥ A 8 7
♦ K Q 7	♦ A 5
♣ A J 9 5	♣ 8 7 4

West would open this one notrump and east will bid two hearts as a transfer to spades. After a transfer bid of spades, east would bid 3NT, opener is expected to revert to the major with three or four trumps or to pass 3NT with a doubleton in responder’s major suit. When opener has three-card support, the major suit game may be safer but is usually outscored by 3NT. For our example, you can expect to make ten tricks whether you play 3NT or 4♠. The better spot is notrump.

To address this problem, opener should ALWAYS pass 3NT if his pattern is 4-3-3-3 and only support spades with 3-4 trump support and an outside doubleton.

This approach may lead to more tops by bidding notrump over major suit bids when both contracts make 10 tricks in competitive duplicate match point games.

When playing Transfers, many ask when you should “super accept” the transfer in the major. This should only be done if you (a) have four card supports for the major, (b) have game values, and (c) have ruffing values via an outside doubleton. If any one these criteria is not met, simply make the requested two level bid, DO NOT SUPER ACCEPT.

## Major 5-3 fits may not always be best!

We saw above that even with a 5-3 major suit fit, 3NT may sometimes be the best contract. This is also very often the case when you are very strong in your partner's short suits and do not have notrump distribution. To illustrate, consider the following complete deal where south is the dealer with the pattern for south is 2-5-5-1 and north is 4-3-2-4, clear patterns for a suit contract, right?

North	
♠ K Q 10 6	
♥ 10 7 4	
♦ Q 4	
♣ A K 10 6	
West	East
♠ 9 8 7	♠ A J 5 2
♥ 6 5	♥ J 9 8
♦ K 9 8 6	♦ A 3
♣ Q J 8 5 2	♣ 9 7 4 2
South	
♠ 4 3	
♥ A K Q 3 2	
♦ J 10 7 5 2	
♣ 3	

Playing hearts, with a diamond lead by west or a spade lead followed by a diamond switch will beat four hearts if the defense finds the diamond ruff. With any other lead declarer can succeed in four hearts, but the winning sequence is not straightforward, try it.

A three notrump contract is cold and made easily. With better than two stoppers in the black suits by north, 3NT is the best contract even though you have the 5-3 major suit fit and not the best distribution for notrump!

### Guidelines for Deciding Between Premium Suit and Notrump Contracts

Favor Notrump When you have:	Favor Major Suit when you have:
Minor-suit fits	Good fits
Misfit hands	Slow tricks
Fast trick, solid suits	Good 5-2/-3 fits, if a side suit is too weak
Overpowered balanced hand (29-31HPC)	for NT

Weak major-suit fits 5-2/-3 major-suit fits, if other suits stopped Flat (4-3-3-3) distribution	4-3 fits: -Your short trump side can stop the force - You have minor-suit fit on the side
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This article is based upon Ron Klinger (2003), 100 Winning Duplicate Tips. Orion Publishing Group.