

# Should one Play Puppet Stayman over 2NT and 1NT?

By Neil H. Timm

While extremely popular perhaps 5 to 10 years ago, partnerships used the bid of 3♣ (no alert) known as Puppet Stayman over 2NT=20-21HCP (Very Strong Hand) to locate a 5-3 major suit or 4-4 major suit fit; however, it is becoming less used/popular among experts in the field of bridge. Why? Using the convention does not allow one to employ the smolen convention used to show a game-forcing (GF) hand with 5-spades and 4-hearts.

Of course, one may show 5-hearts and 4-spades using the Jacoby transfer but not 5-spades and 4-hearts. Another problem is that Smolen is a GF convention (requires Average Strength or 10+HCP), and this is not the case with Jacoby transfers.

<https://www.bridgewebs.com/ocala/Rev%20of%20transfers%20.pdf>

To remedy this problem when responding to 2NT, one may use a Modified Puppet Stayman convention called Muppet Stayman. How does this work? Simple! One merely interchanges the Puppet Stayman responses of 3NT\* and 3♥\*. If you are not familiar with Puppet this may have no meaning so I will define the “standard responses” of both Puppet and Muppet Stayman. A review of the approach with responses follows but have excluded added slam bidding sequences.

## Responses to 2NT Using **Puppet** Stayman:

Opener	Responder
2NT	3♣ - asks do you have a 4 or 5-card Major
3♦*	No 5-card Major, but one or two 4-card majors
3♥*	5-hearts
3♠*	5-spades
3NT*	No 4 or 5-card Major

## Responses to 2NT Using **Muppet** Stayman:

Opener	Responder
2NT	3♣ - asks do you have a 4 or 5-card Major
3NT*	5-hearts. Responder may pass having spades, or if responder wants to play in hearts, bids 4♦* as a transfer to hearts.
3♠*	5-spades. Responder may bid 3NT, was looking for hearts or bids 4♠ to play.
3♦*	One or two 4-card majors. Responder next bids the major he does not have 3♥*=spades and 3♠*=hearts (like Smolen) or 4♣*=4-4 in the majors which asks opener to pick a major.

3♥\* No 4 or 5-card Major. Responder will now normally bid 3♠\* as a relay to 3NT; but if responder has 5-spades and 4/3-hearts, he may now bid 3NT\* to show 5-spades so opener can bid 4♠.

Instead of Puppet, is there a simpler direct SOLUTION? Do not use Puppet and instead agree that the bid of 3NT\*=5♠ and 4♥.

Some may choose to use Modified Smolen over 2NT; follow the link:

<https://www.bridgewebs.com/ocala/Modified%20Smolen.pdf>

When opening 1NT=15-17HCP (Strong Hand), a more common practice today is to use the bid of 3♣\* as Puppet Stayman when opening 1NT since one may continue to use 2♣ as Stayman (no alert) and continue to employ Crawling Stayman and Garbage Stayman with hands that have the exact structure:4=4=4=1/3=4=4=2/4=3=4=2.

Puppet over 1NT is **NOT merely the same convention** as one used over 2NT for those who continue to agree to use 3♣ as Puppet over 2NT because it is normally a new/revised Puppet. Puppet over 1NT is never used if 4-4 in the majors (use Stayman), the response of 3NT is NOT USED. Puppet asks ONLY if you have a 5-card major and requires Average Strength or 10+HCP.

Responses to 1NT Using New/Revised Puppet Stayman:

Opener	Responder
1NT	3♣* - asks do you have a 5-card Major (requires an alert)
3♦*	No 5-card Major (but may or may not have a 4-card major). Responder next bids the major he does not have 3♥*=4-spades and 3♠*=4-hearts (like Smolen). A bid of 3NT denies a 4-card major.
3♥*	5-hearts
3♠*	5-spades
3NT	<b>Does Not Exist</b>

Reviewing ACBL Convention Card observe that one may choose to Use 2♣ as “Puppet” with NO ALERT. How might this work? I have called this Quasi-Puppet or check other if you are using the newer ACBL Convention cards.

Responses to 1NT Using 2♣ as Quasi-Puppet Stayman:

Opener	Responder
1NT	2♣

2♦*	No 5-card Major (may not pass). Responder may next bid 2♥ as Crawling Stayman if 4-4 in the majors which says to pick your best 4-card major which may result in a 4-major fit (must give up Garbage Stayman since 2♦* is forcing).
2♥	4-hearts may have 4-spades. Follow-up with Stayman responses.
2♠	4-spades and denies 4-hearts. Follow-up with Stayman responses.
2NT*	No 4-card or 5-card major. Responder may pass or bid 3NT.
3♦*	1/2 4-card majors. Responder next bids the major he does not have 3♥*=spades and 3♠*=hearts (like Smolen) or 4♣*=4-4 in the majors asks opener to pick a major. Opener may bid 4M or 3NT.
3♥	5-hearts. Responder may pass, bid 4♥ or 3NT.
3♠	5-spades. Responder may pass, bid 4♠ or 3NT.
3NT	<b>Does Not Exist</b>

To use Stayman with one 4-card major suit, the suit must be headed by an A/K/Q with 9HCP, DO NOT BID 2NT; instead, a better approach is to bid 3NT. Why? Do not give the opponents information about your hand. You have a total of 24HCP=15+9 with outside strength.

**Rule of 24 – Bid 3NT with ONE 4-card major not headed by an A/K//Q and a balanced hand with 9+HCP.**

<https://www.bridgewebs.com/ocala/Rethinking%20Stayman.pdf>

### Dan Baker Writes on Bridge Webs writes – Over 2♣

If 2♦ doesn't promise a major at all, responder has only three bids at 2NT or below to show an invite, and four things they want to show (hearts, spades, both, neither). I guess you can make it work with:

2♥: invite, no 4-card hearts, may have 4 spades (if opener bids 2♠ (declining) or 3♠ (accepting), responder can bid NT to say "no")

2♠: invite, 4 hearts, not 4 spades

2NT\*: invite, both 4-card majors

3♣\*: game forcing, 4-4 or more, asking for a 4-card major (can Smolen or delayed Texas after 3♦ response)

3♦\*: game forcing, 4 hearts

3♥\*: game forcing, 4 spades

3NT: to play

There is some information leakage about opener's spade holding when responder has an invite without 4 hearts.

I'm used to just doing regular Stayman at 2♣ (which can be any strength except for game forcing with only one 4-card major), Puppet at 3♣ (game forcing, does not include 4-4 majors hands; opener always responds 3♦ without a 5-card major).

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**Simplified Puppet Stayman over 1 Notrump:** An alternative treatment is the simplified Puppet Stayman convention, credited to Marty Bergen; responder promises game-going values found on BridgeHands.

<b>1N - 3C;</b>	Like its big brother, the <b>3C</b> Puppet Stayman asks opener to bid a 5-card major or bid <b>3D</b> holding a 4-card major.
<b>1N - 3C; 3D</b>	If the 1 Notrump Opener has 4 cards in a major, Opener begins by bidding <b>3D</b>
<b>1N - 3C; 3N</b>	If 1 Notrump opener does not have a 5 or 4 card major, Opener bids <b>3N</b> .
<b>1N - 3C; 3D - 3H/S</b>	If 1 NT opener has 4 cards in a major, opener begins by bidding <b>3D</b> . Next, responder bids 4 card major <i>not</i> held by the responder (Smolen); this allows the stronger opener to become declarer. Opener may now bid game in the <i>other</i> major with the appropriate fit; otherwise, opener bids <b>3N</b> .

Check out the Wikipedia link for a review of many Stayman Conventions, follow the link:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stayman\\_convention](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stayman_convention)

For a review of several conventions that are used over 2NT, follow the link:

<https://bridge-tips.co.il/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Bidding-Sequences-after-2NT.pdf>