

Taking your bridge to...

The Next Level

2. Stayman

(i) Basic idea

The Holy Grail of bridge is the 4-4 major-suit fit. The only way to find a 4-4 major fit after partner opens 1NT is by using the Stayman convention.

After partner opens 1NT, 2♣ asks for a four-card major. Opener bids a four-card major if he has one (2♥ with 4♥-4♠) and 2♦ without.

The big question is *when* to bid Stayman. Normally, you'll have game-going values (that's 11 or more points facing a 12-14 1NT) with a precisely four-card major.

Exercise: Respond to partner's 1NT opener with these:

♠KJ82	♠AJ2	♠82
♥72	♥KJ862	♥A943
♦QJ2	♦KJ4	♦Q942
♣AJ32	♣96	♣K105

With the first, bid 2♣ Stayman. You'll raise a 2♠ response to 3♠; you'll bid 2NT over a 2♦ or 2♥ response. All those bids invite game.

The second is not a Stayman hand, because you have a five-card major not a four-card major. Playing Transfers (our next topic), you'll bid 2♦ (showing five hearts), then jump to 3NT to offer a choice of games.

The third is not a Stayman hand, because you do not have game values. The problem is you do not have a rejoinder if partner responds 2♠ (or 2♦) to the 2♣ Stayman (if you follow with 2NT, you are inviting game).

Many of my students ask why you would contract for one more trick (4♥/♠ v 3NT) when you have two balanced hands facing one another. This deal is one of many that illustrate the power of the 4-4 fit. 4♠ makes ten tricks. 3NT would lose the first five hearts and even after that, declarer cannot score the remaining eight tricks. 4-4 major fits often play two or three tricks better than notrumps.

Dealer: South ♠ A853
♥ 94

Vul: Neither ♦ A962
♣ KQ3

♠ J106	N	♠ Q9
♥ A10732	W	♥ KJ5
♦ J104	E	♦ Q873
♣ 95	S	♣ J1087
♠ K742		
♥ Q86		
♦ K5		
♣ A642		

S	W	N	E
1NT	Pass	2♣(1)	Pass
2♠	Pass	4♠	End

(1) Stayman, asking for four-card majors, because he has a game-going hand with a precisely four-card major.

Declarer won West's ♦J lead with ♦K and cashed ♠AK, both opponents following. Leaving ♠J out, declarer crossed to ♦A and ruffed ♦6. He crossed to ♣K and ruffed ♦9 with his last spade.

West elected to overruff with his ♠J (it didn't matter) and the defence had to come to their ♥AK (whether they took them right then or later). Ten tricks made — with no heavy breathing.

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