

THE STAYMAN CONVENTION by Maritha Pottenger

A 4-4 fit in a major suit and 25-26 HCP generally will make 4 hearts or spades, but only 3 NT (and sometimes not even that). Thus, when your partner opens 1NT or 2NT, it is highly advisable to seek out a major fit, if possible. The **Stayman Convention** (named after Sam Stayman) allows you to do that.

When partner opens 1NT, 2C by you is an artificial bid (Stayman) which simply asks partner if s/he has a 4-card major. If your partner has a 4-card major, s/he bids the major. If your partner has both 4-card majors, s/he is to bid hearts first. If your partner has neither 4-card major, s/he will bid 2D.

Examples:

1NT-P-2C-P-2H: Opening Bidder has 4 hearts (Might—or might not—also have 4 spades)
1NT-P-2C-P-2D: Opening Bidder does not have 4 hearts nor does Opener have 4 spades
1NT-P-2C-P-2S: Opening Bidder has 4 spades (and does NOT have 4 hearts)

Generally, when you use the Stayman Convention after partner opens 1NT, you have 8 or more high card points. (There is one major exception.***) If your partner bids your major, and you have 8-9 HCP, raise your partner to 3 of the major. If your partner bids 2D & you have 8-9 HCP, bid 2NT (showing an invitational hand). With a maximum NT bid, your partner will go to 3NT. If your partner bids hearts & you have spades, bid 2S. (If your partner had both hearts and spades, s/he can now pass, or bid 3 or 4 spades.) Or, if your partner has a maximum hand, but no major fit with you, s/he can bid 3NT. If partner bids spades & you have hearts, bid 2NT.

Examples:

1NT-P-2C-P-2D-P-2NT-P-P-P Opener has no 4-card major. Responder has 8-9 HCP. Opener has a minimum hand
1NT-P-2C-P-2D-P-2NT-P-3NT Opener has no 4-card major, but has a maximum hand. Responder has 8-9 HCP.
1NT-P-2C-P-2H-P-2S-P-2NT-P Opener has hearts, but Responder has spades. Both have minimum hands.
1NT-P-2C-P-2H-P-2S-P-P-P Opener has hearts & spades, but minimum hand. Responder 8-9 HCP
1NT-P-2C-P-2H-P-2S-P-4S-P-P-P Opener has hearts & spades and maximum hand. Responder has spades
1NT-P-2C-P-2H-P-3H-P-P-P Opener & Responder both have hearts, but minimum hands.
1NT-P-2C-P-2H-P-3H-P-4H-P-P-P Opener & Responder have hearts. Opener has maximum hand.
1NT-P-2C-P-2S-P-2NT-P-P-P Opener has spades & Responder hearts. Both have minimum hands.
1NT-P-2C-P-2S-P-2NT-P-3NT-PPP Opener has spades & maximum hand. Responder has hearts.
1NT-P-2C-P-2S-P-3S-P-P-P Opener & Responder both have spades & minimum hands.
1NT-P-2C-P-2S-P-3S-P-4S-P-P-P Opener has spades & a maximum hand. Responder has spades.

If you use Stayman with 10-15 HCP and your partner bids your major, raise to game. If your partner bids 2D, bid 3NT. If your partner bids the wrong major, bid 3NT. (If your partner has both hearts and spades, s/he will correct your 3NT to 4S.)

Examples:

1NT-P-2C-P-2H-P-3NT-P-P-P Opener has hearts. Responder has spades and 10 or more HCP
1NT-P-2C-P-2S-P-3NT-P-P-P Opener has spades. Responder has hearts & 10 or more HCP
1NT-P-2C-P-2H-P-3NT-P-4S-P-P-P Opener has hearts & spades. Responder has spades & 10+ HCP
1NT-P-2C-P-2H-P-4H-P-P-P Opener & Responder have hearts. Responder has 10+ HCP
1NT-P-2C-P-2S-P-4S-P-P-P Opener & Responder have spades. Responder has 10+ HCP

***BIDDING STAYMAN WITH LESS THAN 8 HCP

With fewer than 8 HCP, but 4-4-5-0 distribution, [or 4-4-4-1 if you like], bid Stayman and pass whatever your partner bids. (You'll either have a 4-4 major fit or a reasonable fit in diamonds with partner. Any of these will usually play better than 1 NT will.)

WHEN RESPONDER IS 5-4 OR 4-5 IN THE MAJORS

If you are 5-4 or 4-5 in majors with fewer than 8 HCP, simply transfer to your 5-card major and pass.

If you are 4-5 with 8-9 HCP, transfer to hearts and then bid 2S to show the invitational hand with 4 spades and 5 hearts. If partner does not have a fit and has a minimum NT opening, can sign off in 2NT (bid 3NT with max).

If you are 5-4 with invitational values, bid Stayman. If partner bids 2D, bid 2S to show 5 spades, 4 hearts, and an invitational hand in HCP. (Again, NT opener can bid 2NT with minimum hand and no 8-card fit, and 3NT with a maximum NT opener or support your spades with 3 spades.)

If you are 4-5 or 5-4 with 10 or more HCP, you can play **Smolen** convention (which makes sure NT opener is always Declarer) or you can bid Stayman and raise to game when partner bids either major, OR jump to the 3 level (forcing) in your 5-card major if partner responded 2D to your Stayman inquiry. Partner will either raise your major (with 3-card support) or bid 3NT.

WHEN RESPONDER IS 5-5 IN MAJORS

With a very weak hand, transfer to better major and pass **OR** (with **partnership agreement**), bid Stayman and pass if partner bids 2 of either major. **If partner bids 2D, bid 2H which is “pass or correct” ONLY. [Rec.]**

With invitational values, transfer to spades and bid 3H.

With 10 or more HCP, transfer to spades and bid 4H. (Partner should have 3 cards in ONE of your majors.)

PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT: Some people play that 3H over 1NT shows 5-5 in majors, invitational values, and an immediate 3S shows 5-5 in majors with game-forcing values. [Recommended]

WHEN RESPONDER HAS A QUANTITATIVE RAISE (16 or 17 HCP) AND A 4-CARD MAJOR

Bid Stayman. If partner responds 2D, bid 4NT (quantitative).

If partner responds 2H and you have spades, bid 4NT (quantitative)

If partner responds 2S and you have hearts, bid 4NT (quantitative)

If partner responds 2H and you have hearts, bid 4C: Roman Key Card Gerber for hearts. (4D is 1 or 4; 4H is 0 or 3; 4S is 2 or 5 without the Queen and 4NT is 2 or 5 with the Queen of hearts.)

If partner responds 2S and you have spades, bid 4C: Roman Key Card Gerber for spades—same steps as above.

INTERFERENCE WITH STAYMAN AUCTIONS

If partner opens 1NT and next opponent bids, how do you use Stayman?

- 1) If opponent bids 2C (whether natural or to show a long suit), double by Responder is Stayman.
- 2) If opponent bids 2D (whether natural or to show diamonds and a higher suit), 3D is Stayman. If 2D shows the majors, you probably should be doubling for penalty rather than using Stayman if you have one or two 4-card majors. (After an initial double by you, all subsequent doubles are PENALTY.)
- 3) If opponent bids 2H, 3H is Stayman. If opponent bids 2S, 3S is Stayman (must have game forcing values).
- 4) If opponent jumps to 3 level immediately, double should be TAKE-OUT (negative double) although no trump Opener can always convert to penalty by passing if s/he thinks that is right. Promises 10 or more HCP by Responder and support for other 3 suits.