

Two Over One

Stayman

Don't have a fit finding your fit

The Stayman convention may have been the first bidding convention you ever learned. You probably employ it in nearly every session of bridge you play. You know it well. You have it down pat. Or do you?

Do you and your favorite partner have an agreement about the following auction?

you	pard
1NT	2♣
2♦	3♦

Or, how about this one?

you	pard
1NT	2♣
2♥	3♠

The Stayman convention supplies meanings to such bids, and to still others. Today is the day you learn a little bit more

Our lesson will cover briefly the standard agreements of Stayman, and then we will discuss the lesser known – but highly useful – agreements, such as the two shown above.

Basic Stayman

When opener has called 1NT, then responder's call of 2 clubs is Stayman. The purpose of Stayman is to find an 8-card major suit fit. The 2 club call is an artificial bid that asks opener to bid a 4-card major if she has one, or to bid 2 diamonds if she does not. If opener holds two 4-card majors, she bids hearts first, bidding major suits up the line. After opener has bid either 2 diamonds, or 2 hearts, or 2 spades, then responder will further clarify her hand.

In order to use Stayman, responder must hold at least one 4-card major. After all, responder is seeking an 8-card major suit fit by asking opener if she has a 4-card suit. It would make no sense to ask for opener's 4-card suit if responder did not have a potential match. Furthermore, responder must have a minimum of 8 HCP. In the event that no major suit fit can be found, responder will have to return to 2NT, and to support such a case, responder will need 8 points.

So, if opener's response to two clubs is 2 diamonds, denying a 4-card major, then responder will show her point count:

2NT shows 8 – 9

3NT shows 10 – 15

4NT shows 16 – 17 (invites 6 NT)

6NT shows 18 – 19

5NT shows 20 – 21 (compels 6 NT)
(invites 7 NT).

If responder happens to hold a good 5-card suit, or even a tolerable one, she should add a point to her hand. In other words, 9 HCP and a 5-card suit will give declarer a good try at 3NT. This adjustment can be made at any level.

If opener's response to 2 clubs is 2 hearts, and if responder also holds 4 hearts, responder raises to 3 with 8 or 9 points, and raises to 4 hearts with 10 to 15. To try for slam by asking for keycards, responder can employ 4 clubs Gerber. If, on the other hand, responder has spades, and not hearts, then with 8 or 9 points she bids 2 spades, allowing the partnership to play 2 spades if opener should so elect. If responder has 10 to 15 with spades, then she leaps to 3NT, announcing game values. Opener may pass, but will certainly elect to

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bid 4 spades if she should be holding a 4-card spade suit as well as her 4-card heart suit.

If opener's call over 2 clubs is 2 spades, then responder raises to 3 spades with 4 spades and 8 or 9 points, and jumps to 4 spades with 10 to 15 points. If responder lacks 4 spades, then she bids 2 NT with 8 or 9 points and leaps to 3 NT with game values.

This concludes the discussion of the basic Stayman agreements.

Stayman: Beyond the Basics

Max Hardy, in his text *Two Over One: Game Force*, details a variety of additional conventions that make it not quite possible to play basic Stayman. The present writer and his partners have played Hardy's recommendations extensively and have subsequently, and with some small regrets, abandoned or modified them. So you will encounter opponents using 2 over 1 who cannot bid 2NT naturally over 1NT, and who must end up using Stayman even when responder lacks a 4-card major and has no intention of finding any 8-card fit. This article does not follow that route. The system recommended herein retains Basic Stayman as described above and enhances it with the variations that follow. The following enhancements should all (except one) be considered standard variations of Stayman. If you are partnered with a strong partner, you would expect her to know the following bids.

Run-out Stayman Responder may hold a very weak hand that would likely play better in 2 of a major than in 1NT. Consider this one:

7432 J964 J8532 ———

Opener will not enjoy her 1NT experience. But if she holds a 4-card major, the contract will definitely be improved at 2 of that major. Responder will bid 2 clubs with the hand shown, even without the 8 HCPs usually required. When opener bids her major, responder will simply pass. If opener does not have a 4-card major, she will bid 2 diamonds, and responder will have to abandon her there. Given responder's 5-card diamond suit, this too should be considered an improvement upon 1NT.

Run-out Stayman can also be used if responder is 4-4-4-1, or even with shape such as 4-3-5-1 or 3-4-5-1. With the last two, opener could end up in a 4-3 major suit fit, but even this should work out okay since declarer may be able to gain tricks by ruffing clubs in dummy.

Garbage Stayman Garbage Stayman is similar to Run-out Stayman, except this time responder is 5-4 in the majors, with 7 points or less. Responder again plans to bid 2 clubs and then to pass whenever opener bids a major suit. But if opener can do no more than bid 2 diamonds, then responder will correct to her own 5-card major.

Q864	QJ863	3	974
opener		responder	
1NT		2♣	
2♦		2♥	
P			

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Strong hand with good minor Do you remember this auction from the beginning of the article?

you	pard
1NT	2♣
2♦	3♦

This auction announces that responder has 5 diamonds and a 4-card major, plus interest in slam. Of course, if responder had 5 clubs instead of 5 diamonds, then the 2nd bid would have been 3 Clubs. If responder's slam interest awakens opener's slam interest in turn, then opener will continue by cuebidding a control. If, on the other hand, opener still is not interested in slam, then she signs off at 3NT.

The exact same situation arises when opener's initial response has been 2 spades:

you	pard
1NT	2♣
2♠	3♦

If opener now wishes to pursue responder's slam interest, she can cuebid. 3NT would be declining slam exploration. On a strong auction of this sort, use a bid of 4 of the minor as Minorwood, even though you will not jump to it.

When opener's response to 2 clubs has been 2 hearts, the meaning of the bids is very similar, but with one wrinkle.

you	pard
1NT	2♣
2♥	3♦

Responder's meaning is still the same: responder has 5 diamonds and a 4-card major and is showing slam interest in the diamond suit. Responder's major must be spades, or she would be pursuing slam interest in hearts. Opener could, also, still have 4 spades, because opener

bids 4-card majors up the line. Therefore, if opener bids 3 spades over 3 diamonds, it shows 4 spades, not a spade control. If opener does not have 4 spades, but she wants to cue bid in support of diamonds, she cannot bid 3 spades.

I remind you once again that responder's diamond bids are just examples of auctions when responder's suit is diamonds. If responder's 5-card minor suit is clubs, then her call is, of course, 3 clubs, not 3 diamonds.

I also remind you that bids of 4 of responder's minor should be regarded as Minorwood.

Artificial 4 diamonds A particular sort of problem arises when responder has 15 or 16 points and a 4-card major. Consider the following hand:

AQ104 75 A84 KQ97

Based on point count, responder to partner's 1NT opener could bid 4NT to invite 6NT. But, wanting to explore for an eight-card fit, responder first bids 2 clubs Stayman. If opener bids 2 hearts, responder can still leap to 4NT. But what can responder bid if opener, in response to Stayman, bids 2 spades?

1. Jumping to 4 spades disregards the slam.
2. Jumping to 4 notrump disregards the spade fit.
3. Bidding 3 of a minor denies a spade fit and suggests a slam in the minor.
4. Bidding 4 clubs would indeed be RKC Gerber to check on key cards, but now responder is making a unilateral decision to go for slam without learning anything further about opener's relative strength.

Is there no bid that allows responder to affirm

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a spade fit and invite a slam, allowing partner a way out with a minimal hand? Yes, there is. It's the artificial 4 diamond bid. So here is the complete auction:

you	pard
1NT	2♣
2♠	4♦

Responder's 4 diamonds shows 4 spades and 15 to 16 points. Opener with no slam interest can still sign off at 4 spades. Opener with slam interest can cue bid a control or use 4NT RKC.

Concealed splinters When responder uses Stayman to find a major suit fit, she could have a side-suit shortness and slam interest.

KQ1083	AJ75	6	K93
opener	responder		
1NT	2♣		
2♥	3♠		

Responder's hand has definite slam potential once the major suit fit has been found, but partner once again needs to be consulted. Does opener hold more than a bare minimum? Will the diamond shortness be faced with wasted honors in opener's hand? As with other concealed splinters, this hand is shown by bidding 3 of the other major. In our example above, responder has bid 3 spades, not because she has great spades, but just to announce a concealed splinter.

If opener has no interest in slam, she can still just sign off at game and the defenders will not know the location of responder's shortness. But if opener does wish to know the location of responder's shortness, she asks by making the cheapest possible bid. Over 3 spades the cheapest bid is 3NT. Responder would then bid 4 clubs with a club shortness, 4 diamonds

with a diamond shortness, and 4 hearts with a spade shortness.

If the partner's have used Stayman to find a fit in spades, responder with the proper hand can show a concealed splinter by bidding 3 hearts. If opener wants to know the location of the shortness, she will bid 3 spades. Responder, in turn, will show a singleton by bidding the short suit at the 4-level. If responder's shortness is a void, she can first bid 3NT over opener's 3 spade bid. Opener continues by bidding 4 clubs, and responder will bid her void. If the void were clubs, responder will bid 4 spades over 4 clubs. The entire auction of this last sort would go like this:

A10965	K973	KQ73	———
opener	responder		
1NT	2♣		
2♠	3♥		
3♠	3NT		
4♣	4♠		
etc.			

The concealed splinter bid is not a standard Stayman bid. It is particularly a 2 over 1 innovation. This is not a bid to use without partnership discussion, even if your partner is a very strong player. It requires clear partnership understanding. Reserve it for use with your favorite partners with whom you have the made the agreement explicit.

Today you have added to your use of the Stayman convention the following agreements:

- **Run-out Stayman**
- **Garbage Stayman**
- **Strong hand with a good minor**
- **Artificial 4 diamonds**
- **Concealed splinters**