

## Two Over One

# Puppet Stayman

Don't lose 5-3 fits in a major

Take a look at this hand and consider your opening bid:

KQ4 AQ1084 K109 AQ

If you elect to open 1 heart, you might find your partner passing you with 4 or 5 points and 3 hearts, whereupon you may have missed bidding a cold game. But if you open 2 clubs instead, follow by a 2 heart rebid, you tend to overemphasize the heart suit at the expense of the entire hand, which is highly suited to notrump. You may end up in a heart contract when notrump would have been better. What's more, partner may be the first to bid notrump and your fine hand will be tabled with the opening lead going through it rather than up to it. For reasons such as these, we may prefer to open the hand 2NT.

This bid expresses the point count exactly, it describes the overall nature of the hand, and it ensures that the hand will be the eventual declarer.

But now the heart suit has been neglected and could be lost.

Puppet Stayman is a convention that allows us to open such a hand 2NT. Using Puppet Stayman, the responder can ask opener if he holds a 5-card major. So Puppet Stayman is played over opening bids of 2NT. Similar situations can arise when opener's hand is slightly stronger, in the range of 22 - 24 points. In this case, opener can first bid 2 clubs followed by 2NT, even with a 5-card major, because we can use Puppet Stayman to discover a 5-card major when opener has one.

**Use Puppet Stayman over**

- opening bids of 2NT, or over
- opening bids of 2 clubs followed by 2NT.

**Puppet Stayman lets us find a 5-card major**

Over opener's 2NT opening bid, or over his 2NT rebid when 2 clubs was bid first, responder activates Puppet Stayman by bidding 3 clubs:

opener	responder
2NT	3♣

This is Puppet Stayman. Opener will Alert! If asked, opener will state that 3 clubs asks if opener has either a 5-card major or a 4-card major.

opener	responder
2♣	2♦
2NT	3♣

This, too, is Puppet Stayman. It must be Alerted! The explanation is just the same, it asks opener to indicate any 5-card major or 4-card major.

## Responses to 3 Clubs

Over responder's Puppet Stayman bid of 3 clubs, opener will bid any 5-card major directly:

opener	responder
2NT	3♣
3♥	

Responder will alert opener's 3 heart call, and, if asked, will state that opener has a 5-card heart suit.

opener	responder
2NT	3♣
3♠	

Likewise, opener's alerted 3 spade call shows a 5-card spade suit.

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If opener does NOT have a 5-card major suit, but he DOES have a 4-card major suit, then he bids 3 diamonds:

opener	responder
2NT	3♣
3♦	

Responder will Alert! opener's 3 diamond call. If asked, he will explain that opener denies any 5-card major suit, but he does hold one or more 4-card major suits.

If opener does not have a 5-card major suit and if he also does not have a 4-card major suit, then he bids 3NT.

opener	responder
2NT	3♣
3NT	

Responder alerts because opener is making a very specific designation: opener denies that he holds a 5-card major and he denies he holds any 4-card major.

## Responder's Follow Up Bids

**Over opener's 3NT rebid.** When opener has responded 3NT over 3 clubs, he has denied both 5-card and 4-card majors. In this case, responder's most typical follow up is Pass. Lacking a major suit alternative, the best game destination is simply the 3NT that opener has just bid. If responder were to have ambitions beyond game, he can continue with 4 clubs, which would be RKC Gerber for aces only. Or, responder could bid 4NT, which would be a quantitative invitation to 6NT. Responder would have point count in the range of 11 or 12. In the same vein, a bid of 5NT over 3NT would compel 6NT and invite 7NT, while the direct jump to 6NT would be to play.

**When opener has shown a 5-card major.** If opener has a 5-card major, she has bid either 3 hearts or 3 spades. If responder has less than a 3-card fit, the final destination will be notrump, and responder's most likely follow up will be to bid 3NT. With slam values, responder can continue with RKC Gerber, to which the answers will be expressed in terms of opener's major, or else one of the quantitative raises of 4NT, 5NT, or 6NT.

If, on the other hand, responder has a 4-card fit for opener's major, then certainly she will want to play in the major suit. If game is the sufficient level, then responder will simply raise to 4 of the major. With greater strength, responder could follow-up with RKC Gerber. Opener will not know whether responder is aiming for a major suit slam or a notrump slam. If, instead of 4 clubs Gerber, responder were to bid a new suit, then he would be cuebidding controls, accepting opener's major suit as trump, and bidding controls up the line.

opener	responder
2NT	3♣
3♥	3♠

Responder accepts hearts as trump, has slam interest, and holds 1st or 2nd round control of spades.

Above we said responder holds 4 trump, but what if responder holds just 3-card trump support for opener's 5-card major? If responder wants to play in the major suit, she could make all of the same bids just mentioned. Typically, responders do elect to play in the known 8-card major suit fit.

But playing in a suit contract with a 5-3 fit need not be viewed as automatic. Sometimes notrump should be preferred. Notrump is preferred whenever the hands will make just as

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many tricks in notrump as it will in the major suit. That is, if the hand will make both 4 hearts and 4 notrump, the notrump contract will win more matchpoints. Many superior matchpoint scores result when the field plays in the major suit and you play in notrump. So what is the basis for deciding if notrump will be the proper destination?

The chief basis for deciding is the shape of responder's hand. Remember that ruffing in the short hand is one of declarer's strongest ways to gain extra tricks. Responder's hand, in cases like these, will be the "short hand." Is there a reasonable likelihood that declarer will be able to trump something in your hand? If yes, then bid 4 of the major. If, on the other hand, your shape is flat, then your trump have no apparent ruffing value. If partner cannot ruff in your hand, your trumps will not of themselves create extra tricks, so bidding 3NT would appear to be the superior choice.

Combined point count can also be a factor in your decision to play in the major suit or in notrump with a 5-3 fit. If, in addition to a flat hand, you also hold a few extra values, then notrump will almost certainly be the better choice. If your point count is minimal, your decision is less clear. On the one hand, it may be easier to take 9 tricks in notrump than 10 in the suit. But on the other hand, partner may have a soft stopper in one of the side suits, and with less HCP from you to help, he could perhaps benefit from the ability to use trump in his own hand. In such a case, if your values are outside of the major suit fit, then 3NT may still be a good choice. But with values in the trump suit, you should probably elect to play in the major suit, where, at the least, you will be taking the course followed by the greater

part of the field, and you will have a measure of protection by being in the majority.

**When opener has a 4-card major.** When opener lacks a 5-card major, but holds one or more 4-card majors, his response to Puppet Stayman will have been 3 diamonds. If responder has only one 4-card major himself, he now bids 3 of the other major:

opener	responder
2NT	3♣
3♦	3♥

Opener will alert responder's 3 heart call, and if asked, he will explain that responder has 4 spades but not 4 hearts. Now if opener also has a 4-card spade suit, he will bid 4 spades. Responder's tactic has allowed the strong hand to still be the declarer. If opener has 4 hearts but not 4 spades, then no 4-4 major suit fit exists, so opener will bid 3NT.

Sometimes responder has used Puppet Stayman holding two 4-card majors. Now when opener bids 3 diamonds, responder should bid 4 diamonds. This tactic also allows opener to declare in the 4-4 major suit fit.

opener	responder
2NT	3♣
3♦	4♦

Opener will alert responder's 4 diamond call because it shows two 4-card majors. Now opener will bid game in the suit he actually holds, or take his choice if he also holds two 4-card majors.

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1. AQJ84 AJ3 A10 A98
  - What do you open?
  - How do you respond to 3 clubs?
2. AQJ7 KQ8 AQ K1086
  - What do you open?
  - What do you respond to 3 clubs?
  - What if partner next bids 3 spades?
  - What if he had bid 3 hearts, not spades?
3. AJ9 KQ7 KJ842 AQ
  - What do you open?
  - What do you respond to 3 clubs?
4. AJ AKJ87 AQ8 KJ3
  - What do you open?
  - What do you bid over 2 diamonds?
  - What do you bid over 3 clubs?
5. QJ5 9753 J964 Q6
  - What do you bid over 2NT opening?
  - What do you bid over 3 diamonds?
6. K965 QJ84 854 J6
  - What do you bid over 2NT opening?
  - What do you bid over 3 diamonds?
7. 975 Q104 K853 843
  - What do you bid over 2NT opening?
  - What do you bid over 3 hearts?