

WINNING BRIDGE CONVENTIONS

# CONVENTIONS AFTER A NOTRUMP OPENING

Patty Tucker



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## Introduction

There are several different conventions that you can play in response to a one notrump opening bid or overcall. Conventions that will allow you to show:

- Weaker hands;
- Stronger high card point hands;
- More distributional hands;
- Hands with a four-card major;
- Hands with a five-card or longer major; and
- Hands with a six-card or longer minor.

There are tools that allow you to force the notrump opening bidder to become declarer, thus allowing responder to more fully describe their hand and conceal the stronger hand. They allow the opening lead to be made by the opening notrump bidder's left-hand opponent, in and of itself, a valuable advantage.

Some of those conventions and tools are discussed fully in this book. As you might expect, they are the conventions and tools I have found most useful.

***Always remember that every time you add a convention you expect to lose some other bid AND that the additional conventions that you choose to adopt influence the rules of other conventions.*** You might ask, "Why would I do that? Why should I lose a

natural bid, to add an artificial bid?” The answer is simple...because it is valuable. As you work your way through this book you will find that the rules of the simplest and most common conventions – Stayman and Jacoby Transfers – will be adjusted as you add other conventions.

For example:

If you choose to adopt Smolen, then responder’s rebid after the initial Stayman bid, when he holds a five-card and a four-card major suit changes; or

If you choose to adopt Texas Transfers, then responder’s rebid after the initial Jacoby Transfer shows a different strength of hand; or

If you choose to adopt Four-Suit Transfers, then responder’s rebid after the initial Stayman bid will change on one specific type of hand.

As you add conventions to your toolbox, you and partner will need to decide which “tools” work best for you. What bids you are both willing to “lose” in order to better describe your hand when you decide to adopt different conventions.

I’ve included the conventions that I believe are worth the extra effort to learn and are worth the few bids that are lost.

**Stayman**

## Stayman

The Stayman convention was invented by George Rapee but first appeared in Bridge World in 1945 under Sam Stayman's byline and so the convention was named after him rather than Rapee.

As we all know, a four-four card fit in a major suit is one of the most sought after contracts in bridge. A major suit contract scores more points. A four-four card fit usually plays at least one trick better than a five-three card fit, six-two card fit or even (sometimes) a six-three card fit or better. Stayman is the convention that allows you to discover your four-four card fit after a notrump opening bid.

Over an opening bid of 1NT, a bid of 2♣ by responder is Stayman. Responder may not have any clubs, the bid is completely artificial. It simply asks a question - "Partner, do you have a four-card major suit?" It promises **at least 8 HCPs and at least one four card major suit**. Responder may also hold a five-card or even six-card major suit.

Opener has a choice of three bids:

- 2♦ which says, "No, I do not have a four-card, or longer, major suit."

- 2♥ which says, “Yes, I have four hearts. I may have four spades also.”

**(If you have four hearts and four spades, bid hearts); or**

- 2♠ which says, “Yes, I have four spades. I do not have four hearts.”

Responder’s second bid is determined by three factors:

- Whether or not opener bid the major suit in which responder had four cards or more;
- Whether responder has a five-card major suit as well as a four-card major suit; and
- The strength of responder’s hand.

If opener’s bid confirmed at least an eight-card suit fit (i.e. showed four cards in a major suit in which responder also had four or more cards), then responder will raise the major suit to:

- The three level with 8-9 points; or,
- The four level with 10-14 points; or,
- Delay raising the major suit immediately, to make a forcing bid with 15+ points to elicit more information to see if slam is possible.

If opener’s bid did not confirm at least an eight-card suit fit (i.e. did not show four cards in a major suit in

which responder also had four cards), then responder will:

- Bid 2NT with 8-9 points; or,
- Bid his five-card or longer major suit (if he has one) at the two-level with 8-9 points; or,
- Bid 3NT with 10-14 points; or,
- Bid his five-card major suit (if he has one) at the three-level with 10-14 points; or,
- Bid his six-card major suit (if he has one) at the four-level with 10-14 points; or,
- Bid 4NT (Quantitative) with 15+ points and a balanced hand; or,
- Bid 4♣ (Gerber) with 17+ points to investigate the possibility of slam; or
- Bid a minor suit at the three-level promising 5+ cards in the minor suit and confirming interest in exploring the possibility of slam.

Some examples follow. In each of the examples below, by bidding 2♣ South promised at least 8 points and at least four-cards in one of the major suits.

| <u>Hand 1</u> |       | <u>Hand 2</u> |       | <u>Hand 3</u> |       |
|---------------|-------|---------------|-------|---------------|-------|
| North         | South | North         | South | North         | South |
| 1NT           | 2♣    | 1NT           | 2♣    | 1NT           | 2♣    |
| 2♦            |       | 2♥            |       | 2♠            |       |

Hand 1 – **North's** 2♦ bid denied a four-card major suit.

Hand 2 – **North's** 2♥ bid promised four hearts and did not deny four spades.

Hand 3 – **North's** 2♠ bid promised four spades and denied four hearts.

Now let's look at responder's rebid:

| <u>Hand 4</u> |       | <u>Hand 5</u> |       | <u>Hand 6</u> |       |
|---------------|-------|---------------|-------|---------------|-------|
| North         | South | North         | South | North         | South |
| 1NT           | 2♣    | 1NT           | 2♣    | 1NT           | 2♣    |
| 2♦            | 2NT   | 2♥            | 3NT   | 2♠            | 3♠    |

Hand 4 – **North's** 2♦ bid denied a four-card major suit or longer minor.

**South's** 2NT bid showed 8-9 points, denied a five card major suit and invited game.

Hand 5 – **North's** 2♥ bid promised four hearts and did not deny four spades.

**South's** 3NT bid showed 10-14 points, denied five spades, promised four spades and denied four hearts.

Hand 6 – **North's** 2♠ bid promised four spades and denied four hearts.

**South's 3♠ bid** showed 8-9 points, promised four spades, neither promised, nor denied, four or more hearts and invited game.

Opener will listen to responder's second bid and decide, in most cases, where to place the contract. In the majority of hands, it will simply be a decision (based on responder's bid) to play either:

- NT or a major suit contract; and
- Game or part-score.

| <u>Hand 7</u> |       | <u>Hand 8</u> |       | <u>Hand 9</u> |       |
|---------------|-------|---------------|-------|---------------|-------|
| North         | South | North         | South | North         | South |
| 1NT           | 2♣    | 1NT           | 2♣    | 1NT           | 2♣    |
| 2♦            | 2NT   | 2♥            | 3NT   | 2♠            | 3♠    |
| 3NT           |       | 4♠            |       | 4♠            |       |

Hand 7 – **North's 2♦ bid** denied a four-card or longer major suit.

**South's 2NT bid** showed 8-9 points, denied a five-card major suit and invited game.

**North's 3NT bid** showed 16-17 points.

Hand 8 – **North's 2♥ bid** promised four hearts and did not deny four spades.

**South's 3NT bid** showed 10-14 points, promised four spades, denied five spades and denied four hearts.

**North's 4♠** bid confirmed that he also held four spades in addition to four hearts and that he would like to play game in spades.

Hand 9 – **North's 2♠** bid promised four spades and denied four hearts.

**South's 3♠** bid showed 8-9 points, promised four or more spades, neither denied, nor promised, five hearts and invited game.

**North's 4♠** bid showed 16-17 points.

In the hands that responder returns to 2NT, 3NT, or raises opener's major bid to the three or four level, the bidding will be very clear cut. Opener will know easily where the hand belongs.

When responder has a very good hand, a hand with either the high card point values (15+) and/or the shape and trick taking ability (5-4 or 6-4 hands) to consider slam, then opener and responder will have to work together to share more information and decide if slam is possible.

| <u>Hand 10</u> |       | <u>Hand 11</u> |       | <u>Hand 12</u> |       |
|----------------|-------|----------------|-------|----------------|-------|
| North          | South | North          | South | North          | South |
| 1NT            | 2♣    | 1NT            | 2♣    | 1NT            | 2♣    |
| 2♦             | 3♦    | 2♥             | 3♦    | 2♠             | 3♣    |

Hand 10 – **North's** 2♦ bid denied a four-card or longer major suit.

**South's** 3♦ bid showed a five-card or longer diamond suit, promised the values for game and showed slam interest.

South's hand might look something like this:

♠A942 ♥3 ♦AQJ942 ♣K2

Hand 11 – **North's** 2♥ bid promised four hearts and did not deny four spades.

**South's** 3♦ bid showed four spades (because of his initial Stayman bid), a five-card or longer diamond suit, promised the values for game and showed slam interest.

South's hand might look something like this:

♠A942 ♥3 ♦AKJ942 ♣92

Hand 12 – **North's** 2♠ bid promised four spades and denied four hearts.

**South's** 3♣ bid showed four hearts (because of his original Stayman bid), a five-card or longer club suit, promised the values for game and showed slam interest.

South's hand might look something like this:

♠2 ♥AQ53 ♦2 ♣KQJ9862

Opener (North) will concentrate on whether or not his hand fits well with the type of hand that South (responder) has described. In general, if opener thinks their hands are not fitting well, opener will bid 3NT. If opener thinks their hands are fitting well opener will either:

- Cuebid in support of responder's minor suit by bidding a new suit; or
- Bid 4NT, a Quantitative Bid.

Very occasionally you will have a major fit in the auction where responder's rebid was a minor suit. The only auction in which that occurs is when the bidding goes thusly:

| North | South |
|-------|-------|
| 1NT   | 2♣    |
| 2♥    | 3♦    |

It is possible that North could hold four spades. South has promised four spades (because of his initial Stayman bid). In this case, where opener has a fit for responder's spade suit, regardless of the strength of his hand, he will show that fit by bidding responder's known major (spades). The level at which he bids shows whether or not he has interest in going higher than game.

A bid of 3♠ would indicate that North has four spades and interest in possibly going higher than game; that, based on what South has shown, slam might be possible.

A bid of 4♠ would indicate that North has four spades and is *not interested* in going above than game; that, based on what South has shown, slam is unlikely.

## Additional Stayman Notes

There are a few other treatments of Stayman in general use.

- 1) You may bid Stayman with a hand that has 0-7 points whose distribution is 4-4-5-0 (**four spades, four hearts, five diamonds and no clubs**), 3-4-6-0 or 4-3-6-0 or 4-4-4-1 (this can be dangerous as you run the risk of playing a 4-2 diamond fit). The idea is that when you bid Stayman on this type of hand, you will pass any bid that opener makes: 2♦, 2♥, or 2♠. Hoping that, with a weak hand, a 4-3 fit may play better than 1NT. This is certainly playable, however you MUST pass opener's rebid.
- 2) Some play a bid commonly known as "Pass or Correct". They play that Stayman never promises 8+ HCPs and that they are allowed

to bid 2♥ or 2♠ after a 2♦ rebid by opener, which would show a weak hand with at least 4-4 in the major suits. Obviously, they now have no way to invite with a 5-4 major suited hand. A trade-off they feel is valuable. I do not. I prefer to reach my games and let the part-scores take care of themselves.

- 3) If you play that Stayman always promises at least 8 HCPs, then with less than eight points and a five-card and a four-card major, you may not bid Stayman. You will simply transfer to your five-card major. (See Jacoby Transfers.)
- 4) On those hands where responder bids a minor suit at the three-level showing an unbalanced hand with the values to consider slam, opener can choose to bid:
  - 3NT, denying a hand suited for slam; or,
  - Cuebid, choosing to cooperate for slam by bidding a new suit to show a control (Ace) in the suit bid and a fitting hand for responder's minor suit; or,

- 4NT, Blackwood. Very occasionally opener might have a hand suited to simply ask for aces.
- 5) If responder has a strong hand and would like to investigate slam after bidding Stayman, 4NT would be Quantitative and 4♣ would be Gerber.
  - 6) You could agree to play Splinter Bids after bidding Stayman and opener responding a major. That would be established by agreement with your partner and would require you and partner to change and/or refine your agreements concerning 4NT and 4♣.
  - 7) Stayman is also used when partner overcalls notrump. The overcall could be at the one or two level as long as the notrump bid is showing a natural notrump hand.
  - 8) Stayman is used after an opening 2NT bid, after a strong 2♣ bid followed by a 2NT rebid and can be used after a 3NT opening or overcalled bid by agreement with partner. Responder simply would bid 3♣ and must adjust the values required for the Stayman bid, to the values shown by partner's notrump bid.

- 9) Stayman is not used after the opponent's overcall of a suit.
- 10) Stayman can be used after the opponent's double of the NT opening bid.
- 11) If the opponents use an overcall of 2♣ to show an artificial bid, a double of 2♣ by responder should be played as Stayman.

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## Conventions after a Notrump Opening

Bridge students quickly discover that ‘basic bidding’ will only get them so far. To improve it is necessary to master a certain number of bidding conventions, and be prepared both to play them and to play against them. Each of the books in this series covers a number of useful conventions, explaining them carefully along with numerous examples and quizzes to help the reader understand what is being learned.

Included in this book: Stayman, Jacoby Transfers, Texas Transfers, Smolen, Four-Suit Transfers, Three-level Responses to a 1NT Opening Bid, Three Spades over 2NT and Lebensohl.



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