

Stayman in hope

A new series suggested by Brian Sheridan of Croydon

WHEN people first learn conventional bids, they find the idea of bidding a suit to indicate something else quite unusual. Stayman is often the first convention learnt, but once people get the hang of it the danger is not that they don't use it enough, but that *they use it too much* without thinking through the consequences.

Hand 1 would be a typical example:

Hand 1

♠ A Q 5 4
♥ K 10 7 6
♦ 3 2
♣ 8 7 6

Partner opens 1NT (12-14) and the next hand passes, what do you do?

The most sensible course of action is to pass. If you bid Stayman 2♣ and partner responds with a major suit, then all is well, but what if he responds 2♦? You can't now 'escape' into 2NT because (as with most bids of 2NT) this is invitational, asking partner to go to game if he is maximum. Even if partner enjoys playing the cards, 3NT with at most 23 points between the two hands and no long suit to play on will not be a thing of beauty.

The reason you got into trouble with the hand above is because you didn't consider your rebid.

Let's look at a few hands and think about your rebid.

Hand 2

♠ J 9 7 5 4
♥ K J 4 3
♦ 5 4
♣ 3 2

This is ideal to bid Stayman on, because if partner responds 2♦, then you can bid 2♠ showing a weak hand with five spades. If partner responds

2♥ or 2♠ initially, you will pass, of course, happy to have found a safe haven.

Hand 3

♠ A Q J 6
♥ 4
♦ J 9 7 6 5
♣ 9 3 2

odds-on favourite to bid 2♥ and then you are snookered.

Here the picture is not so rosy and you must pass, not bid Stayman. You would be fine if partner responded 2♠ or 2♦, of course, but what is he likely to do? He is

Hand 4

♠ A K J 3
♥ 5 4
♦ 2
♣ 9 8 6 5 3 2

be strong, but you are assured of a fit since partner has promised at least two cards in clubs by opening 1NT.

This time you can bid 2♣ Stayman with a clear conscience. If partner lets you down by bidding 2♦ or 2♥, then you can bid 3♣ as a weak take-out.

Your clubs may not

Hand 5

♠ A Q 9 7
♥ 8 7 5
♦ 5 4
♣ K Q J 3

provided you have 11+ points. If partner doesn't bid your major, you can rebid 2NT or 3NT depending on your point count.

This hand is also ideal for Stayman, with the hope of locating a 4-4 spade fit. You don't need to have both four-card majors to use Stayman – one will do –

Hand 6

♠ 3 2
♥ A Q J 6 5
♦ A Q J 3
♣ 4 3

you don't play transfers, is 3♥, showing a game-going hand with five cards in hearts, asking for support.

Stayman will not tell you what you want to know on this hand, which is: 'Does partner have three cards in hearts, giving us an eight-card fit?' The correct response, if



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TRAPS FOR THE UNWARY

Hand 7

♠ J 6 5
♥ J 8 7 5
♦ 9 8 7 6 3
♣ 3

Eek! You have a terrible hand and are favourite to go down in whatever contract you bid. However, a suit contract will be better than 1NT which no doubt will get doubled. You can bid Stayman, and then pass whatever response partner makes.

Let's finish by reviewing a few Dos and Don'ts of Stayman.

Do:

- Use Stayman when you have 5-4 in the majors, whatever the strength of your hand (0+!) as in Hand 2.
- Use Stayman when you have a weak take-out in clubs, whether or not you have a major suit, see Hand 4.
- Use Stayman when you have at least 11 points and one four-card major (not a *five-card* major, unless it is accompanied by four cards in the other major). Stayman is for finding 4-4 fits, see Hand 5.

Don't:

- Use Stayman on weak hands that have only one four-card major suit, see Hand 3.
- Use Stayman without thinking about your rebid if partner bids what you don't want him to (see Hand 1).
- Be afraid to bid Stayman when holding one major suit and 11+ points; you don't need both majors to bid Stayman, *provided you have a re-bid* (see Hand 5). □