

Further use of Stayman

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Last time I looked at Stayman and I really thought my students had understood the idea until this hand came up in a class I was giving on card play.

♠ 10 8 6	♠ J 9 7 4
♥ K 4	♥ Q J 7 5
♦ A Q 10 8	♦ 2
♣ K J 7 2	♣ A 9 6 3

West opened 1NT and East didn't want to pass with a singleton diamond and both majors, so tried to find a better contract by bidding a Stayman 2♣. This could have been a good move had West held either four hearts or four spades. However East didn't know what to do when West denied a

major by bidding 2♦. After gazing at the ceiling (no, I hadn't written the answer on it) East eventually bid 2NT and West, with 13 points and a couple of useful tens, raised to 3NT. Even after a helpful diamond lead West went two down in 3NT. East had forgotten the golden rule:

When you use Stayman you must be prepared for any response partner might make.
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Responder doesn't necessarily have to have enough points to make game or a game try, although most of the time that will be the case. Here is an example of Stayman with no points at all.

♠ A 6 3	♠ 9 7 4 2
♥ K Q 6	♥ 9 8 7 5
♦ A 9 6	♦ 8 7 5 3 2
♣ 10 9 8 3 2	♣ -

Joe Liz

1NT 2♣

2♦ pass

With both majors and diamonds, Liz could cope with any response Joe might make, since she planned to pass

whether it was 2♦, 2♥ or 2♠.

The East hand with no card higher than a nine is called a Yarborough, after Lord Yarborough who would offer a bet of £1000 to £1 against such a chance happening. As the odds against holding a Yarborough are 1,827 to one, so it was a poor bet to make! Here is another example of a Yarborough hand that is suitable for Stayman.

♠ Q 10 6	♠ 8 7 5 4
♥ K Q 10 2	♥ 7 6
♦ A 9 6	♦ 3
♣ J 10 2	♣ 9 8 7 6 5 3

Russell Sylvia

1NT 2♣

2♥ 3♣

pass

Sylvia could bid 2♣ over 1NT as she could cope with any reply. She planned to pass 2♠ but over anything else bid 3♣, which is the way to make a weakness takeout into clubs. Actually the auction didn't end there as South suddenly realised that North/South might have more points than East/West and bid 3♦, which North converted to 3NT, a contract which could not be beaten. Although E/W would have gone two down in 3♣, it would have been an excellent result as going two down and losing 100 is a much better score than losing 430 when N/S made 10 tricks in 3NT.

Here is another example of a weaker hand using Stayman.

♠ Q 10 6	♠ J 8 7 5 4
♥ A 9 2	♥ Q J 7 6
♦ A 9 6 2	♦ 3
♣ A 6 2	♣ 9 8 3

Barbara Elsa

1NT 2♣

2♦ 2♠

pass

Elsa could use Stayman because she was going to pass 2♥ if Barbara bid it, but she could make a weakness takeout into spades if Barbara bid 2♦. This is a better approach than just bidding 2♠ over 1NT as it offers the chance of finding the 4-4 heart fit.

East won't often have a weak hand for Stayman. More normal is to have a try or a game going hand like this one.

♠ 10 6 3	♠ K J 5 4	Jack	Pat
♥ K Q 10 2	♥ A 7	1NT	2♣
♦ A 9 6	♦ K 5	2♥	2NT
♣ K Q 2	♣ J 10 6 5 3	3NT	

Pat tried Stayman in case Jack had four spades. But when he responded 2♥, she just bid 2NT showing 11 or 12 points. Make the ♠K into the ♠A, so she has 13 points, and Pat would have said 3NT instead of 2NT.

Just sometimes, responder to the 1NT opening will have a really good hand, but it can still be right to start with Stayman, as Margaret and Peter showed on the next hand.

Here is another example of a Yarborough using Stayman.

♠ 9 6 2	♠ A K 8 4	Margaret	Peter
♥ Q J 8 2	♥ A K 10 6	1NT	2♣
♦ A K 6	♦ 4 3	2♥	6♥
♣ Q 7 2	♣ A K 5	pass	

With 22 points Peter knew that E/W had at least 33 points between the two hands and maybe as many as a combined 35 points, if Margaret held a maximum for 1NT. He could have bid 6NT over 1NT as others did, but instead he tried Stayman and when he found Margaret had a 4-card heart suit he chose 6♥ rather than 6NT. This proved to be a very good decision, as with South holding four cards in spades, 6NT could not be made. But playing in hearts, the diamond ruff in the East hand provided the twelfth trick.

Note that Peter did not need to ask for aces by using Blackwood before bidding the slam. With a combined 33 points it is impossible for the partnership to be missing two aces. An ace is four points, two aces are eight points and with only seven points missing you can't be off two aces!