

“Puppet Stayman”

Background: The use of the standard **Stayman Convention** by Responder to Partner’s opening No-Trump call, results in the No-Trump Bidder disclosing his/her Major suit holdings, or lack thereof, in response to Partner’s “2C” over 1-NT, or “3C” over 2-NT, request, when Responder seeks a possible Major suit “**Golden Fit.**” The majority of times, however, in excess of **55%** of these instances, the Opener has the opposite Major suit from the specific one sought by the Responder, or no 4-card Major suit at all. Consequently, the Partnership returns to a final No-Trump contract, with Declarer having disclosed the presence or absence of his/her 4-card Major suit holdings. The result is that the Defenders have been afforded insight into the Declarer’s distribution, with specific reference to the Major suits, and, by deductive reasoning, the Minor suits as well. This information is often of great value in their defense of the hand, and generates a counter-productive and adverse effect for the Declarer.

The “**Puppet Stayman**” **Convention**, used in conjunction with “**Jacoby Transfers,**” has two distinct advantages over the use of the standard **Stayman Convention.**

(1) **With this Convention it is the Responder, *not* the Opener, who evidences his/her Major suit holdings during the inquiry.** Remember, statistically speaking, it is Responder’s hand, the weaker of the two, which is likely to be tabled as the eventual Dummy. Thus, with this Convention, the Opener, the likely stronger of the two Partners, whose hand remains concealed, never discloses his/her Major suit holdings unless a fit is found, and no disclosure is made by the Opener regarding the alternate Major suit about which Responder has no central interest at all.

(2) **It allows for disclosure of a possible hidden 5-card Major suit, should the No-Trump Opener have opened 1-NT or 2-NT with such a Major suit holding.** At times, opening with a No-Trump call, even when holding 5-Hearts or 5-Spades has the advantage that doing so eliminates what often leads to a situation where Opener’s re-bid possibilities are often unsatisfactory had Opener, alternatively, opened 1H or 1S, especially when the Opener holds 15 or a poor 16 high-card point count. **Example:** If Opener were to have opened 1S, as in Example (a), or 1H, as in Example (b), and assuming a possible 2C or 2D response by Partner, any potential re-bid by the Opener would, to a greater or lesser degree, be awkward and potentially misleading. Alternatively, an opening bid of 1-NT, under these conditions, avoids this potential pitfall.

(a) AQXXX AQX KXX XX (or) (b) XX AJXXX KQX AJX

General Concepts in Responding to Partner’s Opening 1-NT

A. Direct Game-Level Bids By the Responder After a 1-NT Opening

The following “*sign-off*” bids are used where Responder is *not* interested in Opener’s Major suit holdings. In these series of bids, as is always the case whenever Opener opens the bidding with 1-NT or 2-NT, the Responder is the undisputed “*Captain*” of the bidding process and Opener cannot overrule that which is dictated by the Responder. All bids in this category are used when the Responder makes the informed decision that Game is suitable, and that it is presumed best if he/she be the Declarer; i.e., that the opening lead will come towards, rather than through, his/her hand; not-withstanding that the stronger hand of the Opener will be revealed as the Dummy hand.

(Opener must “pass” all of the following bids in this category)

- (A) **1-NT/3-NT = To Play** (Responder has **no** interest in either Major suit, **even if** a 5-card Major suit were held by the Opener)
- (B) **1-NT/4H = To Play** (Used, without first transferring, when the Responder, holding 6 or more Hearts and Game values, opts to become the Declarer rather than to transfer, such as in the circumstance where one or more “*tenaces*” or unguarded Kings are present in the Responder’s hand)
- (C) **1-NT/4S = To Play** (Used, without first transferring, when the Responder, holding 6 or more Spades and Game values, opts to become the Declarer rather than to transfer, such as in the circumstance where one or more “*tenaces*” or unguarded Kings are present in the Responder’s hand)
- (D) **1-NT/5C = To Play** (An unlikely bidding scenario)
- (E) **1-NT/5D = To Play** (An unlikely bidding scenario)

B. Game-Forcing Transfers Bids By the Responder

All bids in this category are used when the Responder makes the informed decision that a Game-level contract is likely, and that it is best if the strong (Opener’s) hand be concealed, that Opener becomes the Declarer, and that the opening lead come towards and into the stronger hand, rather than through it.

- (A) **1-NT/“4D” = A transfer to 4H** (the so-called “*Texas Transfer*”)
- (B) **1-NT/“2C”/“2D”/ “4H” = A transfer to 4S** (the so-called “*New Mexico Transfer*”) replacing the direct bid of “**4H**” as a transfer to Spades, which, as shown above, is now used as a natural “*sign-off*,” when the Responder chooses to be Declarer in a final **4H** contract.
- (C) **1-NT/“3H”** = Responder’s holding of a **3-1-(5-4)** or **(4-5)** distribution is seeking either a **4S** or a **3-NT** final contract. Opener is authorized to bid **4S** if, by chance, he/she holds 5-Spades, else “*correct*” to **3-NT**.
- (D) **1-NT/“3S”** = Responder’s holding of a **1-3-(5-4)** or **(4-5)** distribution is seeking either a **4H** or **3-NT** final contract. Opener is authorized to bid **4H** if, by chance, he/she holds 5-Hearts, else “*correct*” to **3-NT**.

C. “Drop-Dead” (“Sign-off”) Bids By the Responder

- (A) **1-NT/“2C”** = A willingness to accept, and then “*pass*,” any response from the Opener (“*Garbage Stayman*”); i.e., “**2D**”, **2H** or **2S**. (Ideally done when the Responder has a **(3-3-5-2)**, **(3-3-7-0)**, or a **(3-3-6-1)** distributional holding) **Garbage Stayman** is invoked when the Responder wishes to exit into a preferred 2-level suit contract, rather than a No-Trump contract, when holding as few as 0-8 HCP’s, and the appropriate distribution as shown herein.
- (B) **1-NT/“2-NT”** = Forces “**3C**” (Responder is either desirous of playing in a final **3C** contract, and will “*pass*,” Opener’s “*puppet*” bid of **3C**, else will subsequently continue the bidding in order to seek the possibility of a Club Slam, preserving the Opener as the eventual Declarer in a final Club contract)

D. “Quantitative” No-Trump Bids Over a 1-NT Opening Bid

- (A) **1-NT/“4-NT”** = Demands that Opener “*passes*” when the Opener holds a minimum of 15 HCP’s, or to bid **6-NT** if the Opener holds a maximum of 16-17 HCP’s.
- (B) **1-NT/“5-NT”** = Demands that Opener bids **6-NT** if the Opener holds a minimum of 15 HCP’s, or to bid **7-NT** if the Opener holds a maximum of 16-17 HCP’s.

Using “Puppet Stayman”

“**Puppet Stayman**” uses the “**2C**” response to a **1-NT** opening, or a “**3C**” response to a **2-NT** opening, in order to initiate a series of subsequent bids en route to a search for a potential 8-card Major suit fit.

However, rather than asking Opener to bid a 4-card Major, as in the case of the standard **Stayman** practice, Opener is now asked to bid a Major suit, *only if it contains 5-pieces*. If the Opener responds either **2H** or **2S**, showing 5-Major suit pieces, the Responder can then proceed as if the Opener had opened **1H** or **1S**, but with the additional knowledge that the Opener has 5 pieces of the mentioned Major suit *and* 15-17 HCP’s. Alternatively, a response of “**2D**” by the Opener signifies the absence of any 5-card Major, but offers *no information* on Opener’s possibly having **none**, **one**, or even **two** 4-card Majors. Note that almost all the bids in the “Puppet Stayman” Convention need to be alerted, as most of the bids are artificial.

(All bids that are artificial, and, thus, alertable, are shown, hereafter, in quotes.)

3-Way Jacoby Transfers Used By a Responder to a No-Trump Opening

- (A) **1-NT/“2D”/ or 2-NT/“3D”** = A Transfer to Hearts
- (B) **1-NT/“2H”/ or 2-NT/“3H”** = A Transfer to Spades
- (C) **1-NT/“2S”/ or 2-NT/“3S”** = “**Minor Suit Stayman**” - Seeking a Minor suit preference from the Opener. Opener then responds “**3C**” (“**4C**”), which shows an equal or longer Club suit, or “**2-NT**” (“**3-NT**”), which shows a longer Diamond suit. (Note the **3C**- (**4C**) level is never by-passed by Opener’s responses in case a final **3C** (**4C**) destination is desired by the Responder. This Minor suit inquiry serves two purposes: (1), to find a 5-3 or better Minor suit fit in hands where Responder, holding a 5-5 or better Minor suit holding, wishes to escape from a perceived doomed **1-NT** or **2-NT** contract, or (2), to explore for a Slam-Level contract with interest in one, or both, of the two Minor suits.

Investigating Whether Opener Has a Possible, Undisclosed, 5-Card Major Suit Before Settling on an Alternative, Final. 3-NT Contract

If Responder has Game-going values and a hand with a 3-card Heart suit, and/or a 3-card Spade suit, Responder can investigate for a possible hidden, as-yet-undisclosed, 5-card Major suit held by the Opener, and a possible preferred **4H** or **4S** contract, in lieu of an alternate, final, **3-NT** contract.

1-NT (2-NT) / “2C” (“3C”) / “2D” (“3D”) / 3-NT = To Play
(Opener, here, does not have a 5-card Major)

1-NT (2-NT) / “2C” (“3C”) / 2H (3H) / 4H = To Play (Opener, here, holds 5-Hearts)

1-NT (2-NT) / “2C” (“3C”) / 2S (3S) / 4S = To Play (Opener, here, holds 5-Spades)

Responder, holding Game values, above, first investigates for the possible presence of an as-yet, undisclosed, 5-card Major holding in Opener's hand. If Opener were to respond **2H** or **2S**, (**3H** or **3S**), evidencing a 5-card Major suit, in response to responder's "**2C**," or "**3C**" "**Puppet Stayman**" call, Responder can accept the Major suit if having 3-matching-pieces, bidding **4H** or **4S**, respectively, or, if Opener were to respond "**2D**," denoting the absence of the sought-after Major suit, or the presence of other undesired Major, the Responder can then proceed to a final game-level **3-NT**.

Bids Following a "2D" Response By the Opener

The following groups of bids are used when Responder *is* interested in whether Opener holds 4-cards in one of the Major suits. In these series of bids, the Opener and the Responder work together as a team with the Responder, acting as the ultimate "*Captain*" of the team, in so far as the final contract, dependent upon the responses by the Opener to the Responder's inquiry.

Game-Forcing Bids With Responder Holding 6-4 or 4-6 in the Majors

- (A) **1-NT/"2C"/"2D"/"4C" = 6-Hearts and 4-Spades, Game Forcing** (Opener bids **4S** with 4-Spades, or **4H** as the back-up, alternative, "**Golden Fit**.")
- (B) **1-NT/"2C"/"2D"/"4D" = 6-Spades and 4-Hearts, Game Forcing** (Opener bids **4H** with 4-Hearts, or **4S** as the back-up, alternative, "**Golden Fit**.")

In "**Puppet Stayman**" *all* "*Heart*" re-bids by the Responder have *two meanings*

Bids With Responder Holding One or Two 4-Card Majors

(A) **1-NT/"2C"/"2D"/"2H" = Either:**

(1) **Responder holds 4-Spades and Fewer than 4-Hearts:** (Opener responds **2S** with 4 Spades and a minimum of 15 HCP's, **3S** with 4 Spades and a maximum of 16-17 HCP's, **2-NT** with fewer than 4 Spades and a minimum of 15 HCP's, or **3-NT** with fewer than 4 Spades and a maximum of 16-17 HCP's.) (With greater than 9 HCP's, Responder can either continue to **4S** if the Opener bids **2S** or **3S** evidencing a holding of 4 Spades, or continue to **3-NT** if the Opener denies a 4-Spade holding and having evidenced 15 HCP's by bidding **2-NT**.), or:

(2) **Responder has an invitational 2-NT Holding:** (Responder, not having been interested in Spades in the first place, will correct to **2-NT** with 9-10 HCP's if the Opener responds **2S**, or will continue to **3-NT** if the Opener responds **3S** evidencing 16-17 HCP's.)

(B) **1-NT/"2C"/"2D"/"2S" = Responder holds 4-Hearts and Fewer than 4-Spades.** (Opener then responds **3H** when holding 4-Hearts and a minimum 15 HCP's, **4H** when holding 4-Hearts and a maximum of 16-17 HCP's, **2-NT** holding fewer than 4-Hearts and a Minimum of 15 HCP's, or **3-NT** with fewer than 4-Hearts and 16-17 HCP's. Responder may then either "*pass*," any of the above responses by Opener, continue to **4H**, or correct to **3-NT** when holding Game values.)

(C) 1-NT/"2C"/"2D"/"2-NT" shows both 4-Hearts and 4-Spades, with Invitational Values. (Opener corrects to 3H or 3S with 4 of either Major and a minimum 15 HCP's, 4H or 4S with 4 of either Major and a maximum 16-17 HCP's, "passes" 2-NT with a minimum and neither 4-card Major, or re-bids 3-NT with a maximum 16-17 HCP's and neither 4-card Major.)

(D) 1-NT/"2C"/"2D"/"3H" = 5-Spades and 4-Hearts, or 4-Spades and 4-Hearts, with Game Values ("Smolen") Opener will respond:

- (a) 4H with 4 Hearts
- (b) 3S with 3 Spades (In case Responder has 5-Spades)
(Responder then continues to 4S if holding 5-Spades, or "corrects" to 3-NT if holding only 4-Spades.)
- (c) 4S with 4 Spades and fewer than 4-Hearts
- (d) 3-NT with specifically 2-Spades and 3-Hearts

(E) 1-NT/"2C"/"2D"/"3S" = 5-Hearts and 4-Spades, with Game Values ("Smolen") (Opener then bids 4S if holding 4-Spades, 4H if holding 3-Hearts, or 3-NT with specifically 2-Hearts and 3-Spades)

Using "Puppet Stayman" Over an Opening 2-NT

(A) 2-NT/"3D" is a transfer to Hearts, and "3H" is a transfer to Spades - Responder, the "Captain" then either "passes" with a "sign-off," bids 4 of the desired Major suit when holding 6 or more pieces and Game values, "checks-back" by bidding 3-NT when holding just 5-pieces of the sought-after Major suit, else proceed seeking a possible Slam-level contract, if appropriate. (An initial "3S," by Responder, is "Minor Suit Stayman," as described earlier)

(B) 2-NT/"3C" = seeks a 5-card Major, "3D" reply by Opener denies a 5-card Major. Responder then re-bids 3-NT with Game values if Opener's reply does not confirm the sought-after 5-card Major suit holding.

(C) 2-NT/"3-NT" shows 4-4 in the Majors with Game values Opener then either "passes" or "corrects" to 4H or 4S, if holding a "Golden-Fit" in either Major suit.

(D) 2-NT/"3C"/"3D"/"3H" shows 4-Spades and fewer than 4-Hearts, or 5-Spades and 4-Hearts Opener then either,

1. Bids 3-NT showing no interest in either scenario; (i.e., having specifically 2-Spades and 3-Hearts),
2. Bids 3S if holding 3-Spades and an absence of 4-Hearts
Opener then "corrects" to 3-NT if not holding 5-Spades.
3. Bids 4H, or 4S, if holding 4-pieces of either Major suit, with preference for the 4-4 Heart fit over a possible 5-4 Spade fit..

(D) 2-NT/"3D"/"3H"/"3S" shows 5-Hearts and 4-Spades. Opener then bids 4H, 4S, or 3-NT, depending on his/her Major suit distribution, with preference for a preferred 4-4 Spade fit, if present, rather than an accompanying 5-3 Heart fit, if also present.

(F) 2-NT/"3C"/"3D"/"3S" = 4-Hearts and fewer than 4-Spades. Opener then bids 4H if holding 4-Hearts, else 3-NT.

(G) 2-NT/"3C"/"3D"/3-NT = To Play, with no interest in Game in either Major suit.