



## Convention of the Week

3<sup>rd</sup> September, 2008

### STAYMAN WRINKLES – I

We all play Stayman, but it's a convention with numerous wrinkles. This month we'll look at some game and slam auctions, next month it will be various part-score and competitive situations.

#### Smolen

Holding 5-4 (either way) in the majors with game-going values (opposite a 1NT opening), the "standard" approach is to use Stayman and, if Opener rebids 2♦, to jump to 3-level in the 5-card major, as in 1NT 2♣, 2♦ 3♥, showing 4 Spades, 5 Hearts. But, playing Smolen, the 3♥ and 3♠ bids are reversed, so that the sequence above shows 5 Spades and 4 Hearts. Opener is still being offered the same choice between 3NT and 4 of a major, but this way, if Opener chooses 4 of the major he will end up declaring the hand and protecting the strong hand from the lead.

#### Quantitative 4NT

How about these auctions?

1NT 4NT

1NT 2♣, 2♦ 4NT

1NT 2♣, 2♥ 4NT

The first one is universally used as quantitative (and 4♣ is Gerber, asking for Aces). As no fit has been found in the second auction, it seems reasonable for 4NT (and 4♣) to have the same meaning. But wouldn't it be useful for 4NT to be Roman Key Card Blackwood in Hearts? Perhaps, but there is a better way. Use 4♣ for Roman Key Card, in which case 4NT remains as a quantitative bid.

#### Splinters

Try these:

1NT 2♣, 2♠ 4♥

1NT 2♣, 2♠ 4♦

1NT 2♣, 2♠ 4♣

These unusual jumps are treated by some as splinters, the message in this case being "We have a Spade fit, I have shortness in the last bid suit and am trying for slam" After receiving this information, Opener is expected to make a wise decision, one which will be greatly influenced by his holding in the splinter suit (the King and Queen are negatives, and xxx or Axx are positives).

Just a minute! As per the "Quantitative" note above, some players use 4♣ as Roman Key Card in this situation. One solution is simply to give up the Club splinter, but for the scientifically inclined here's a method which allows shortness to be shown in any of the 3 suits:

1NT 2♣, 2♥ 3♠

1NT 2♣, 2♠ 3♥

In both these sequences, Opener shows a 4-card major, and Responder bids 3 of the other major (one is a jump, the other is not). By partnership agreement, these sequences can be used to say "I have a fit in your major, slam interest, and shortness *somewhere*". This is termed by some as an "omnibus" splinter. Now, with a reprehensible hand, Opener signs off in game, otherwise he asks where is the singleton by making the cheapest bid:

1NT 2♣, 2♠ 3♥, 3♠ 3NT

1NT 2♣, 2♠ 3♥, 3♠ 4♣

1NT 2♣, 2♠ 3♥, 3♠ 4♦

In all three cases 3♥ says "Singleton somewhere, slam interest", and 3♠ asks "Where?" After that, the cheapest bid shows the lowest-ranking singleton, and so on "up-the-line", so it's 3NT for Club shortness, 4♣ for Diamonds, and 4♦ for Hearts. It's all highly artificial, but logical enough to be easily remembered.

Two more sequences to consider:

1NT 2♣, 2♥ 4♦

1NT 2♣, 2♠ 4♦

If we are playing the splinter method described above, these sequences are no longer needed as splinters, and the interpretation can be "I have a fit in your major and a slammish hand. If you like your hand then bid the slam" Yes, sometimes asking Partner's opinion is more useful than plunging into a Key Card sequence.

The approach described above (4♣ for Roman Key Card, 4♦ as a general try, and omnibus splinters) is sometimes known as "Baze", and can also be used after a Jacoby Transfer.

## Five-Card Majors

If your style is never, ever to open 1NT with a 5-card major, then you can skip this section. But, if you wisely realize that doing so can (a) make it harder for the opponents to get into the auction, and (b) solve potential rebid problems, then you may want to consider using 1NT 3♣ as Puppet Stayman, the benefit of which is that it allows Opener to show that 5-card major. For example:

- 1NT 3♣, 3♦            One or both majors
- 1NT 3♣, 3♥ (or 3♠)    5 Hearts (or 5 Spades)
- 1NT 3♣, 3NT            No 4- or 5-card major

For more on Puppet please visit the web-site.

## Square Hands

Suppose that you hold a 4=3=3=3 hand and, after Partner's 1NT opening, you have enough for game. Do you try for the 4-4 Spade fit? Or do you reason that, as your hand has no ruffing values, you might as well play in 3NT? The trouble with going to 3NT regardless is that *Opener* may have a useful ruffing value. But the flip side is that if you do find the 4-4 Spade fit and play in 4♠, Opener may find himself laboring in 4♠ with mirror distributions and no ruffing value in *either* hand. If you cannot remember the last time that your auction started 1NT 3♦, then you might want to consider using the sequence as yet another flavor of Stayman, to which the responses are:

- 3♥     4 Hearts (maybe also 4 Spades) and not 3=4=3=3
- 3♠     4 Spades, not 4=3=3=3
- 3NT    Either no 4-card major, or else 4=3=3=3 or 3=4=3=3.

This method ensures that you won't play in 4 of a major with mirror square distributions. Is that worth giving up the 3♦ response for? That's for you to decide.

## Quiz

Partner opens a 15-17 1NT, and you hold the following hands. In each case, formulate your plan.

- A. ♠ A875, ♥ K9754, ♦ A98, ♣ 6
- B. ♠ A87, ♥ K8, ♦ QJT2, ♣ AQT7
- C. ♠ K8, ♥ QJT2, ♦ A87, ♣ AQT7
- D. ♠ KQ65, ♥ AQ75, ♦ 6, ♣ KQT4
- E. ♠ KQ65, ♥ AQ75, ♦ 6, ♣ K654
- F. ♠ KQ6, ♥ AJ75, ♦ 65, ♣ 9432
- G. ♠ K63, ♥ A975, ♦ QT5, ♣ K53

### A. ♠ A875, ♥ K9754, ♦ A98, ♣ 6

This hand has game-going values, no more, so we use Stayman, and, if Partner bids 2♣, we'll make whatever our bid is to show 4-5 in the majors. That's 3♠ if we are playing Smolen, 3♥ otherwise.

### B. ♠ A87, ♥ K8, ♦ QJT2, ♣ AQT7

We have no 4-card major, but our good 16 HCP's is enough to invite slam, so it's a simple 4NT bid.

### C. ♠ K8, ♥ QJT2, ♦ A87, ♣ AQT7

The same hand as before, but with the suits rearranged. Now, with a 4-card major, we can try Stayman first. If Opener denies 4 Hearts we'll bid a quantitative 4NT. If Opener does have 4 Hearts, we can choose between 4♦ (if that is being played as a general slam try in Hearts and not a splinter), or 4♣ (Roman Key Card, in case we are missing two Key Cards). It's good enough for the latter, we'd say.

### D. ♠ KQ65, ♥ AQ75, ♦ 6, ♣ KQT4

If Stayman uncovers a 4-4 major suit fit, do we show shortness in Diamonds? We don't think so, the hand is good enough for slam regardless of Opener's Diamond holding, so we'd skip the splinter and check on Key Cards.

### E. ♠ KQ65, ♥ AQ75, ♦ 6, ♣ K654

This hand is a Queen weaker than the previous one, and now (if we find a major suit fit) we would splinter in Diamonds, as we need a suitable hand from Partner to make slam. Playing the omnibus splinters described earlier, the auction might start: 1NT 2♣, 2♣ 3♥, 3♣ 4♣. 3♥ said "Shortness somewhere", 3♣ asked "Where?", after which 3NT would be Clubs, 4♣ would be Diamonds, 4♦ would be Hearts (up-the-line responses).

### ♠ KQ6, ♥ AJ75, ♦ 65, ♣ 9432

No slam aspirations here. But if Partner is the kind of fellow who opens 1NT with a 5-card major then maybe 4♣ is the place to be, all the more so considering our Diamond holding. This would be a good time to be playing 3♣ as Puppet Stayman, bringing into play the possibility of a 5-3 Spade fit.

### ♠ K63, ♥ A975, ♦ QT5, ♣ K53

Here we'd like to avoid 4♥ if Partner is 3=4=3=3, for which we refer you back to the section on "Square Hands".