



Convention of the Week

1st October, 2008

STAYMAN WRINKLES – II

Weak Hands

Your Partner opens a 15-17 1NT. What is your plan on the following hands?

- A. ♠ 7654, ♥ 8742, ♦ 98654, ♣ --
- B. ♠ Q643, ♥ T865, ♦ 9876, ♣ 5
- C. ♠ Q876, ♥ T643, ♦ 82, ♣ 764
- D. ♠ Q532, ♥ T8763, ♦ 73, ♣ 62
- E. ♠ 9532, ♥ QJT87, ♦ 82, ♣ 73

With Hand A, the best escape from the likely horrors of 1NT is to bid 2♣, planning to pass anything that Opener says, including 2♦. And we'd do the same with Hand B, though with less enthusiasm, as Opener might be 3=3=2=5, for example, and we'll find ourselves in a 4-2 fit. But more often, we'll find ourselves in a 4-4 major fit or a playable Diamond contract, all of which will surely be better than letting Partner labor in 1NT.

Hand C is a different story. Again we'd like to find a major suit fit, but we are not prepared to pass a 2♦ response. Garbage Stayman to the rescue! If that is part of your repertoire then the auction 1NT 2♣, 2♦ 2♥ tells Opener to pass or bid 2♠, allowing the contract to be played in Opener's better major. Even though it will be a 4-3 fit, it's likely to play better than 1NT. Did we say "4-3 fit"? Once in a while Opener will be 2=2=4=5 and it will be a character-forming 4-2 fit, but more often than not using Garbage Stayman will improve the contract.

You can also use Garbage Stayman with 5-4 or 4-5 in the majors, as in Hand D. How about Hand E? On this hand we would give up on the Spades and simply transfer to Hearts. Those Hearts are so chunky that they will be playable even opposite a small doubleton, and there is no need to risk playing

in a weak 4-3 fit on some hands where there is a good 5-3 fit available. In fact, a 5-2 Heart fit might even play as well as or better than a 4-4 Spade fit.

Invitational Hands

Are you and Partner on the same wavelength in these auctions?

- | | | |
|-----|-----|---|
| 1NT | 2♣ | |
| 2♣ | 2NT | Yes, invitational of course. |
| 1NT | 2♣ | |
| 2♥ | 2♣ | Also invitational, showing 4 Spades and not 4 Hearts. |
| 1NT | 2♣ | |
| 2♦ | 2♣ | Invitational, with 5 Spades and 4 Hearts |
| 1NT | 2♦ | |
| 2♥ | 2♣ | Invitational, with 5 Hearts and 4 Spades. |

In some partnerships Responder cannot use 1NT 2NT as the natural, game-invitational sequence without a 4-card major because it is used instead for an artificial purpose (most commonly as a Minor Suit Transfer). If that is the case, then Stayman must be used to invite 3NT:

- | | | |
|-----|-----|---|
| 1NT | 2♣ | |
| 2♦ | 2NT | Game-invitational, may or may not have 4-card major |
| 1NT | 2♣ | |
| 2♥ | 3NT | 4 Spades (otherwise the auction goes 1NT 3NT) |

Balancing 1NT Overcall

Direct 1NT overcalls are generally played in the 15-18 range but in the balancing seat that range is usually reduced somewhat, to 10-14, 11-15, or even, in some cases, to a range as wide as 10-16. Do you play Stayman and Transfers opposite the balancing 1NT? You certainly can, and if you are playing that wide 10-16 range you may want to add a wrinkle:

- | | | | |
|----|------|------|----|
| 1♦ | 1NT | Pass | 2♣ |
| | Pass | ?? | |

The 2♦, 2♥ and 2♠ responses have their standard meaning, *except* that they also show a hand in the bottom half of the range. With a better hand, the 1NT overcaller responds 2NT, after which 3♣ is now "re-Stayman". This useful device allows the bidding to stop at the two-level when the 1NT overcall is relatively weak.

Minor Suit Rebids

How do you play this auction?

1NT 2♣
2♠ 3♦

There was a time when this showed a weak minor one-suiter, but nowadays it's more common for it to show a strong hand, maybe something like:

♠ 6, ♥ A532, ♦ KQ9876, ♣ K7

Responder has a 4-card major and a 5- or 6-card minor suit, and is either looking for slam or trying to find out whether 3NT or 5 of the minor is the better spot. That being the case, how would you interpret the last bid in these auctions?

A. 1NT 2♣, 2♦ 3♣, 3♥

B. 1NT 2♣, 2♥ 3♣, 3♠

C. 1NT 2♣, 2♥ 3♣, 3NT

In Auction A, Opener has denied a major, so 3♥ simply shows some values in Hearts, and, as 3♦ was bypassed, presumably not much in Diamonds. Also, as Opener has declined to bid 3NT, he either has a slammish hand (probably with a Club fit) or else a hand which is nervous about 3NT (perhaps because of Diamonds).

In Auction B, Responder is known to have 4 Spades, and Opener's 3♠ agrees Spades.

In Auction C, Responder is known to have Spades and Clubs, and Opener's 3NT shows the red suits under control, and no interest in a Club slam.

Stayman Doubled

If they double our 2♣ bid, the most common method is for Opener to bid his 4-card major if he has one, to pass without one. Another possibility is to redouble with unusually good Clubs (5 of them or a really strong 4-card suit). But how often does the opportunity come up to play in 2♣ redoubled? Rarely is the answer, which is why some like to use the Redouble for an alternative purpose. And, as the purpose of the enemy Double was lead-directing, one counter-plan is to use the Redouble to "right-side" the contract. Here's how it works:

1NT Pass 2♣ Dbl
??

Now Opener does the following:

Pass No Club stopper
2♦/2♥/2♠ Normal meaning *plus*
a Club stopper.

If Opener passes then Responder redoubles to re-ask for a 4-card major, after which:

2♦ No 4-card major
2♥ 4 Spades
2♠ 4 Hearts
3♣ 4 Hearts and 4 Spades

The purpose of these devious responses is to put the Club doubler on lead when Opener has something in Clubs and the other guy on lead when Opener is weak in Clubs. In other words, they'll be leading through weakness and into strength. This gadget is known to some as Kansas City Stayman.

After a Double

Nowadays, if the opponents double 1NT, it may be natural (strength-showing) or artificial (as in the DONT Double which shows an unspecified one-suiter). Anyway, here are two ways to proceed after the Double:

- One approach is to carry on regardless, using the same Stayman/Jacoby methods as without the Double. The Redouble can be used to show a good hand, perhaps one that would enjoy playing 1NT redoubled or penalizing the opponents at the two-level.
- If the Double is strength-showing (and especially if you play a Weak No Trump), you may prefer a runout system. There are dozens of these, here's a simple one ... Redouble is a good hand, direct bids are DONT, and Pass asks Opener to Redouble so that you can bid your one-suiter.

After an Overcall

When the competition is 2♦ and above, additional methods are necessary. But not the dreaded "Stole my Bid", that one's a real clunker. If it's not already on your convention card, you would do better to invest some time in learning Lebensohl. Space does not permit a full description of this valuable convention, here is just a glimpse of how it works (after Partner opens 1NT and RHO bids 2♠):

- Direct bids at the 3-level are natural and game-forcing
- 2NT is a relay to 3♣, and are a way of merely competing to the 3-level
- A cue-bid is Stayman ... there is the direct or "fast" cue-bid which denies a Spade stopper, and the "slow" cue-bid (which goes via the 2NT relay) which shows a stopper.

Oops! We are out of space! For more on Lebensohl, please visit wednesdaygame.com.