



Bid Stayman with Many Weak Hands

STAYMAN IS a fabulous convention – especially at pairs. A 4-4 major fit is the Holy Grail of bidding, invariably playing a trick or more better than no-trumps.

Traditional wisdom has it that you should only bid Stayman with less than game-going values (fewer than 11 points facing a 12-14 no-trump) when you have five cards in one major and four in the other – so you can revert to the five-card major if partner replies 2♦ to your Staymanic enquiry (or a – rare – 4-4-5-0 shape where you can pass 2♦).

That is too restricting. Take these hands after partner opens 1NT (12-14) and the next hand passes:

Hand A ♠ J 10 3 2 ♥ Q J 5 2 ♦ 9 5 ♣ K 4 2	Hand B ♠ Q 9 5 3 ♥ J 8 5 2 ♦ 2 ♣ Q 8 4 2
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Hand C ♠ K 9 2 ♥ J 10 3 ♦ J 8 7 3 2 ♣ 4 2
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Hand A: bid 2♣. The chances of a 1NT opener holding a four-card major are greater than 50-50. If partner replies 2♥/2♠, you'll pass happily, knowing almost for sure that the contract will make more tricks than 1NT. If partner replies 2♦, you're less ecstatic, but you must now bid 2♥ (on no account, of course, should you bid 2NT, which invites game). It is good to have the agreement with partner that this does not necessarily show five hearts (and four spades), rather four-four, such that if partner holds three spades and two hearts, he must convert to 2♠. Players have a fear of the 4-3 fit, but wrongly so. These contracts can be delicate to handle, but by following sound principles of dislodging your losers early and not drawing too many

trumps (and thereby losing control), you'll be surprised just how many tricks you can garner: frequently more than no-trumps, particularly if the opponents have a suit to run.

Hand B: bid 2♣. Similar principle. You have a better than even money chance of finding a 4-4 major fit, and will remove 2♦ to 2♥ to play in a 4-3 major fit.

Hand C: bid 2♣. Yes – this time you have neither four-card major. But that fact enhances the chances of partner having a four-card major (well over 50%). The effect of your bidding Stayman will usually be to have partner declare a 4-3 2♥/2♠ contract. Your weak club holding suggests that this will probably play better than no-trumps. And if partner replies 2♦ – pass! This is in effect a clever way to make a weakness take-out into 2♦, something you cannot do assuming you are playing a 2♦ reply to 1NT as a transfer to hearts, as most of you will (and should!).

Now look at our featured deal:

E/W Game. Dealer South.			
♠ K 9 2		♠ 10 8 5	
♥ J 10 3		♥ Q 5 4 2	
♦ J 8 7 3 2		♦ A 9 4	
♣ 4 2		♣ A 9 3	
♠ A 7 4 3		♠ 10 8 5	
♥ A 7		♥ Q 5 4 2	
♦ 10 6		♦ A 9 4	
♣ Q J 10 8 6		♣ A 9 3	
	N W S E S		
	♠ Q J 6		
	♥ K 9 8 6		
	♦ K Q 5		
	♣ K 7 5		

West	North	East	South
Pass ¹	2♣	Pass	1NT
All Pass			2♥

¹ Playing 2♣ as Landy (both majors – a recommended defence) leaves West somewhat stymied.

South would have stood no chance in 1NT, losing four clubs and the three side-aces; 2♥ was different, because the opponents would not win as many clubs.

West led the queen of clubs, which East let run to the king (encouraging with the nine). At trick two declarer led the queen of spades, correctly starting to set up his tricks. West won the ace, then switched to the ten of diamonds. This ran to declarer's king, who now cashed his two promoted spades, then led a second club to void dummy. The defence won and played ace of diamonds and a third diamond, West ruffing and exiting with a third club, ruffed low in dummy.

We have reached this four-card ending, with declarer down to his four trumps (not so unusual for this to happen in a four-three fit: drawing trumps normally has to be delayed):

♠ —		♠ —
♥ J 10		♥ Q 5 4 2
♦ J 8		♦ —
♣ —		♣ —
♠ 4	N W S E S	♠ —
♥ A		♥ Q 5 4 2
♦ —		♦ —
♣ 10 8		♣ —
♠ —		♠ —
♥ K 9 8 6		♥ —
♦ —		♦ —
♣ —		♣ —

Declarer led dummy's jack of trumps and ran it to West's ace. West played a black card and declarer ruffed with dummy's ten. If East overruffed with the queen, declarer could overruff with the king and score the nine-eight. When East instead underruffed the ten, so did declarer! The lead was now in dummy, with declarer holding king-nine over East's queen-five, a perfect Trump Coup. Eight tricks and contract made – for an 80% board. □