

Stayman by Derrick Browne

In several columns over recent months, we have quoted the larryco.com website, following the invitation of top American player Larry Cohen. This week we consider his thoughts on Stayman.

Cohen prefers Simple Stayman, where a 2C response to 1NT asks opener to bid a 4-card major, or 2D to deny a major. Some of the follow-ups depend on how you choose to use transfers. The first issue is what it means to bid Stayman followed by a 2-level bid.

Cohen advocates transfers to all four suits (not just majors) in reply to a 1NT opening, with 2S being a transfer to clubs and 2NT being a transfer to diamonds. How then does responder bid a "real" 2NT to invite game? The answer is to go via 2C Stayman. Thus Stayman then 2NT does not promise a 4-card major as it would using traditional Simple Stayman.

Cohen likes 1NT : 2C, 2D : 2H as pass or correct, a weak hand with both majors; opener may correct to spades with three of those and a doubleton heart. He likes 1NT : 2C, 2D or 2H : 2S as some off-shape invitational hand, typically with five spades.

What does it mean if you Stayman, opener shows a major, and you bid 3-other-major (1NT : 2C, 2H : 3S or 1NT : 2C, 2S : 3H)? Many top players use this as an artificial slam try, setting opener's suit as trumps. They can then use 4NT as quantitative (a natural invitation to slam) in an auction like 1NT : 2C, 2S : 4NT.

Most Stayman auctions are straightforward so don't worry if this is all a bit fancy. Cover the East and South cards and consider your defence as West on the following deal:

Dealer South, both vul.

NORTH			
S 64			
H KQT9			
D T963			
C KT9			
WEST		EAST	
S AQT53		S 972	
H 873		H 542	
D K75		D 8	
C 83		C AQJ764	
SOUTH			
S KJ8			
H AJ6			
D AQJ42			
C 52			
WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
			1NT
Pass	2C	Pass	2D
Pass	2NT	Pass	3NT
All pass			

West makes a normal lead of fourth-best from the long suit, the S5. (In a notrump contract, it is acceptable to "lead away from an ace"). East plays the S9, losing to declarer's SJ. A heart is now led to dummy's HK, and the D10 is led, D8 from partner, D2 from declarer, won by you with the DK. What do you know about the layout of the spades? How do you proceed?

The exact layout of the spade suit is known. Given that third hand plays high, East's S9 on the first trick denies the king and jack of spades. What of the S8? Declarer must have that too, else East would have played it (third hand plays high, but the cheaper of equals). Given that South denied a 4-card major, the other spades (7-2) will be with East.

Declarer still has the K-8 of spades, so West must get partner in to lead spades through declarer. With declarer attacking the red suits, a club switch is called for. Lead the C8 and look what happens.

The C9 or C10 is played from dummy, and East wins the CJ before returning a spade. West cashes four spades before leading another club for East to cash six club tricks.

All up, the defence took 11 tricks, leaving declarer regretting not having cashed the hearts before trying the diamond finesse.

This time the defence had a happy outcome, but declarer would have made ten tricks if the diamond finesse had succeeded. Perhaps East should have doubled 2C. Double of an artificial bid normally asks partner to lead that suit, and on a club lead the defenders could take 11 tricks before declarer even gets in.