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Introduction to Stayman over 1NT

Stayman Basics V-Blue 2 issue 1 (SA)	Contract: 4H
Date: 12/08/2015	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 1
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North	
	♠ KJ4	
	♥ QT84	
	♦ 96	
	♣ KJ82	
West		East
♠ T83		♠ 9762
♥ A5		♥ 732
♦ KQJT3		♦ 8542
♣ 643		♣ AT
	South	
	♠ AQ5	
	♥ KJ96	
	♦ A7	
	♣ Q975	

Can't Live Without It!

I've heard rumors that there are people who live long and productive lives without the Stayman convention, but I've never met any. It's time for you to learn all about it, and who better than your pals at VuBridge to get you started.

Why Stayman? Stayman serves two main purposes: Firstly, it enables us to find 4-4 major fits over No-trump openings. Secondly, it arranges the bidding so that the No-trump bidder names the suit first, thusly keeping the "big" hand hidden and off the table, which may be worth something.

Like many conventions, Stayman begins with an artificial bid that asks partner a question. Over a 1NT opener, the responder bids 2♣, which says nothing about Clubs. It asks partner, "Do you have a four-card major?" In order to bid Stayman, the responder needs to have a four-card major of his own, and (usually) 8+ points. (If responder has a five-card or longer major suit, then Stayman is generally unnecessary).

There are only **three** permissible answers to Stayman. Do you hear me? ONLY THREE! They are:

West	North	East	South
-	P	P	1NT
P	2♣	P	2♥
P	4♥	P	P
P			

Lead: ♦ K

So, let's talk about the bidding, since we can now look at Pard's hand. The beauty of opening 1NT is that we have made a *limit bid*: We've shown both our shape and point-count. In essence, we've fulfilled our destiny, and now it's up to partner.

(This, by the way, is true anytime you have limited your hand. You rarely should bid again unless Pard **requires** or **requests** us to bid again.)

Partner knows we belong in game. He can do the math, and his 10-pointer added to ours is plenty. His main question, before he puts us in game, is "*can we play this in 4♥?*" He has a balanced hand, it is true, but his shortage in Diamonds leads him to suspect that 4♥ might prove to be superior to 3NT.

He uses Stayman, 2♣. "Pard, do you have a four-card major?" So simple. This requires us to bid again, answering his question. We respond 2♥ to show the four-card Heart suit and partner raises us to game. What is important to note with this deal is that 3NT goes down. The mutual weakness in Diamonds means that a Diamond lead (obvious from that West hand!) sets up six tricks for East-West in No-trumps.

In Hearts, though, the actual play is a snap. We take the ♦A at trick one and hasten to draw trumps. West takes his ♥A, cashes a Diamond and gets off play with a Spade. We can finish what we started (drawing trumps) and then knock out the ♣A. When Clubs prove to be 3-2 (a 4-1 break would have threatened the contract) we make our game for the loss of the ♥A, the ♣A and a Diamond.

2♦: No, partner, I have not got a four-card major. You can remember this by D-d-d-diamonds for D-d-d-denial.

2♥: Yes, partner, I have four Hearts, and **maybe** four Spades. We bid our four-card suits UP the line.

2♠: Yes, partner, I have four Spades, and do NOT have four Hearts.


Now, get ready to try this. You won't be able to see your partner's hand until after you've bid the hand, so we'll discuss the bidding more than usual in the postmortem. I'll hold your hand while you cross the street the first time. Let's go!



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Introduction to Stayman over 1NT

Stayman Basics V-Blue 2 issue 1 (SA)	Contract: 4H
Date: 12/08/2015	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 2
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: N / S

	North	
	♠ 64	
	♥ A863	
	♦ A765	
	♣ J52	
West		East
♠ KQT7		♠ J93
♥ JT2		♥ Q9
♦ 943		♦ QJT2
♣ QT7		♣ 9863
	South	
	♠ A852	
	♥ K754	
	♦ K8	
	♣ AK4	

What's A Girl (or Guy) to do?

In this deal we'll use Stayman again to find the best contract. The main rationale for Stayman is that it locates 4-4 major fits when four of a major is a better contract than 3NT.

In the play, we'll have to think carefully about how to generate the correct number of winners. Meanwhile, ask yourself how 3NT would have fared.

West	North	East	South
-	-	P	1NT
P	2♣	P	2♥
P	3♥	P	4♥
P	P	P	

Lead: ♠ K

First, the **bidding**. We open our hand 1NT with our maximum 17 points.

Our partner likes our 1NT opener, and with the four-card Heart suit, asks if we have a major of our own. Why? Because, with a 4.4.3.2 shape he appreciates that 4♥ might make a better contract than 3NT if we have a 4-4 trump fit.

There are two reasons why the major suit fit may prove to be superior. One is that 3NT may suffer from a mutual weakness in a suit (see Hand 1 for an obvious example) the other is where extra tricks can be made by ruffing. This, naturally enough to the argument, is the second of these.

Here, we are gifted with two majors, and we bid them up-the-line, naming our Hearts before the Spades. As an aside, some players are taught to respond 2NT (or something equally weird) if they have both majors in response to a 2♣ Stayman enquiry. This method is not recommended for children, adults or anyone else at it is cumbersome and unnecessary. Just make the cheapest bid (2♥) and listen to what partner has to say.

Partner's raise to 3♥ shows two things:

- 1) a Heart fit - hooray - and...
- 2) enough points to invite us to game if we are at the top of our range. With a maximum, we are pleased to go to game in Hearts.

When we do our **Count** and **Plan** we come up with one Spade loser (after ruffing two of the others), one Heart and one Club. However, when we count winners, we can only see nine: three Spades, two Hearts, two Diamonds and two Clubs. Where are we going to get the tenth trick?

If we can use our trumps separately, by making three Hearts in hand, and two Spade ruffs in dummy, that will give us what we need. So! We duck the ♠K at trick 1 and West, vaguely aware of our intentions, shifts to a trump. No problem. At tricks 2 and 3, we pull two rounds of trumps with our ♥A and ♥K. Then we ruff a Spade, cross to the ♦K and ruff the last Spade. Then we can actually claim the contract.

Alternatively, if we wanted to play on, we could cash our top two Club winners, the ♦A and concede the last two tricks to the ♣Q and the boss trump. A 4-1 trump break would have spelled defeat but a 3-2 break is well within the odds.


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Introduction to Stayman over 1NT

Stayman Basics V-Blue 2 issue 1 (SA)	Contract: 4S
Date: 12/08/2015	By: South
Dealer: South	Board #: 3
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

North ♠ JT93 ♥ J8 ♦ A753 ♣ A53		East ♠ 64 ♥ KQ94 ♦ Q862 ♣ K62
West ♠ 752 ♥ AT6 ♦ JT4 ♣ T987		South ♠ AKQ8 ♥ 7532 ♦ K9 ♣ QJ4

Ruffing values

On this deal you have to make sure you bid accurately as the 1NT opener. That's easy, you say? Leave everything to partner? Well, usually that's true. But not always.

West	North	East	South
-	-	-	1NT
P	2♣	P	2♥
P	3NT	P	4♠
P	P	P	

Lead: ♣ T

So, let's look first at the bidding. We open 1NT (what else, frankly?) and now it's up to partner. With 10 points and a 4.4.3.2 hand he could raise to 3NT and hope we could scrape nine tricks. That wouldn't be ridiculous. However, he now knows that a 4-4 major fit can often produce extra tricks so he invokes the Stayman convention by bidding 2♣.

Initially we disappoint him by responding 2♥. Please note this bid. Firstly, we bid suits up the line (so when we have both Hearts and Spades we bid Hearts first). Secondly, it is *length* that matters and not *strength* - partner has asked us if we have a four-card major, not if we have a good four-card major.

Now partner jumps to 3NT and many players would be tempted to Pass. "What does it have to do with me?", they will ask, plaintively. However, to use Stayman partner simply **must** have a four-card major. Why bother otherwise? If partner hasn't got four Hearts guess what suit he does have.. go on, it really isn't difficult. So, instead of Passing 3NT you must "correct" to 4♠.

As the cards lie, 4♠ is tricky. Mind you, "tricky" is better than "impossible", which is what 3NT would have been. If you don't believe us, count the tricks in 3NT - four Spades, no Hearts, two Diamonds and two Clubs. That's it - period. One down.


In 4♠ you do, however, only have three losers. A Club (which you discover very early on) and two Hearts. Your winners come from two Clubs, two Diamonds and **six** Spades. You make six trump tricks by ruffing two Hearts in dummy and then taking four big trumps in hand. As usual in this type of deal you have to be patient - by not drawing trumps and by conceding your losers in a suit to set up ruffs.



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Introduction to Stayman over 1NT

Stayman Basics V-Blue 2 issue 1 (SA)	Contract: 2D
Date: 12/08/2015	By: South
Dealer: West	Board #: 4
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: All

	North	
	♠ 9842	
	♥ QT83	
	♦ T963	
	♣ 3	
West		East
♠ K65		♠ AQ73
♥ 752		♥ AJ9
♦ A2		♦ 874
♣ QJ842		♣ T95
	South	
	♠ JT	
	♥ K64	
	♦ KQJ5	
	♣ AK76	

Trash Stayman

We've learned that the responder usually has 8+ points to use Stayman. This hand is an exception. Be brave. Be strong. Breathe deeply.

West	North	East	South
P	P	P	1NT
P	2♣	P	2♦
P	P	P	

Lead: ♦ A

We have a maximum 1NT opening bid in fourth seat and confidently expect to play in game after partner responds with a 2♣ Stayman enquiry. However... We certainly get a surprise when partner passes our 2♦ bid after we deny holding a four-card major. We suspect a Senior Moment until he lays down the dummy. NOW we get it! This is called Trash Stayman by some, and Garbage Stayman by others. What ever we call it, it is a hand with no more than one (zero is better!) Club, and even distribution in the other suits.

The concept is this: With a hand that looks like our dummy, it is much better to be in a suit than No-trumps. Why? Because the declarer can do **exactly** what we did: use the trumps independently to make some desperately needed tricks. Even if the suit contract fails it is likely to be cheaper than going lots off in 1NT. Think of it as damage limitation.

What a disaster this would be in No-trumps after a Club lead. We *might* make six tricks, five would be more likely. At least in a suit, we have a fighting chance.

Partner doesn't care whether we bid Diamonds, Hearts or Spades. Whatever we say, he Passes.

(By the way, this is one of the reasons that 2NT is **NOT** a legitimate response to Stayman. Had we bid 2NT for denial - as I have seen some misguided people do - we would have been in an even deeper hole).

The loser count is not too depressing (two Spades, one or two Hearts, one Diamond) but to make sufficient winners we have to make our trumps independently. We will get two Club tricks, the ♥K and five Diamond tricks. We make it, by ruffing two Clubs on table.

The opening ♦A lead is a good one for the defense. They were paying attention to the bidding (what a novel concept!) and knew that our tricks were likely to come from ruffs. West smartly leads trumps, knocking out two rounds. After that, we are on our way, cashing our ♣A K and ruffing a Club.

We take our chances and get a nice break when we come back to hand with a Heart and find East with the ♥A. (That partly makes up for his partner's vicious trump lead). We then ruff the final Club; we don't have to worry about being overruffed at that point, because dummy's Diamonds are boss.

Then we're done. We have two more tricks in trumps and the rest belong to the opponents. We heave a sigh of relief, and thank our partner once more for putting us in a suit. His Karma is riding high today


So, isn't Stayman wonderful? See why I said at the beginning that you can't live without it?



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Introduction to Stayman over 1NT

Stayman Basics V-Blue 2 issue 1 (SA)	Contract: 3N
Date: 12/08/2015	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 5
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: N / S

	North	
	♠ KJ85	
	♥ T98	
	♦ T64	
	♣ AK5	
West		East
♠ 4		♠ Q732
♥ KJ643		♥ Q7
♦ KJ5		♦ Q932
♣ T872		♣ 964
	South	
	♠ AT96	
	♥ A52	
	♦ A87	
	♣ QJ3	

No Shortness, No Stayman

This hand provides a good contrast to the first three deals. In Hands 1-3, the 4-4 major fit provided a better spot than 3NT for two separate reasons. Is this always true? Well, by no means

This hand we are going to eschew an eight card major... you'll see why as we explore the hand.

West	North	East	South
-	P	P	1NT
P	3NT	P	P
P			

Lead: ♥ 4

So, this series is all about Stayman, finding that precious eight card major fit. Look at North. He's got a *great* major, and yet he elected not to use Stayman. Why not?

Let's talk concept for a couple minutes. Why do we like to play in a trump suit rather than No-trumps if there's a major fit? Consider: How do we get rid of losers? We *trump* them in dummy or *dump* them on dummy's long suits.

Think back to Hands 2 & 3. Remember how we scrounged up extra tricks by trumping in the dummy?

Take a look at this dummy. It is as flat as my driveway. There ain't gonna be no trumpin' in *that* hand! No long suits to run. No short suits to allow ruffing.

So, with no shortness, a 4-3-3-3 hand, opposite a flat partner (remember, we opened 1NT, denying shape), it only makes sense to place the contract where the most money for the least number of tricks is: 3NT.

Remember that!

Also, North (poor, deluded fellow) thought that his intermediate cards (the ♥10 9 8 and the ♦10) would be useful backing cards to our honors in 3NT. In principle that was well-thought out. However, in practice, they proved as useful as the ♥4 3 2 and the ♦2. That's not partner's fault, of course - such thinking is usually well-rewarded.

Anyway, West leads the fourth-highest of his long suit and we study the dummy, realizing that it's a "find the lady" deal. Where is the ♠Q? If we can find her we can finesse her. To give some indication of just where she is we lurk in the bushes to see what we can see.

We duck two rounds of Hearts and win the third, discovering West has five and East two. We cash three top Clubs, just to see if that will tell us anything - and it does. We notice that East started with three Clubs and West with four. That makes East strong favorite to have length in Spades (he has eight cards in Spades and Diamonds, West has just four cards there).


So it becomes better than 50-50 to finesse through East for the ♠Q. When it works we have nine tricks. And 4♠? Hopeless. Quite hopeless.



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Introduction to Stayman over 1NT

Stayman Basics V-Blue 2 issue 1 (SA)	Contract: 4H
Date: 12/08/2015	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 6
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

	North	
	♠ 8	
	♥ KT73	
	♦ Q982	
	♣ T842	
West		East
♠ QJT92		♠ K764
♥ A4		♥ 852
♦ T3		♦ 7654
♣ K953		♣ J7
	South	
	♠ A53	
	♥ QJ96	
	♦ AKJ	
	♣ AQ6	

Stayman Over a 2NT Opener?

Yes indeed! Stayman can and should be used over a 2NT opening bid. After all, it's a perfectly logical extension.

West	North	East	South
-	-	P	2NT
P	3♠	P	3♥
P	4♥	P	P
P			

Lead: ♠ Q

We pick up the biggest hand we've had all week but at least it's easy to find the right bid - 2NT.

Take a look at partner's hand. He only has 5 points but that's enough to bid to game opposite a big hand like ours. However, it's clear with a 1.4.4.4 shape that 4♥ might well be a superior spot to 3NT if there is a 4-4 fit. If you look at the North-South hands you can see straight away that 3NT would fall foul of a Spade lead - defeated before it got going. 4♥, though, is much easier.

So, North enquires about our majors. Should we respond 3♠ he'd happily close the auction with 3NT. If we denied a major with 3♦ then North would shut his eyes and risk 3NT, hoping our Spades were strong enough to withstand an attack in that quarter. As it is, though, we bid 3♥ (music to North's ears) and that player happily raises to 4♥.

After the ♠Q lead we realize that we have to trump a couple of Spades on table so we take the first of those ruffs immediately, before playing a Heart (trumps have to be drawn sometime). West plays back a trump (what else?) but we can still ruff another Spade and draw the last trump. The providential fall of the ♦10 means that we can overtake the ♦J with the ♦Q and cash the ♦9. We can even try the Club finesse for the twelfth trick but that's a slice of luck too far. No matter, eleven tricks is very nice, thank-you. (And **much** better than playing in 3NT down one).

Good things happen to people who do things good, and our careful planning of the hand results in an overtrick.